

SO THAT IN EVERYTHING HE MIGHT HAVE THE SUPREMACY

Colossians 1:15-20

Key Verse: 1:18

“And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.”

The Colossian Church seems to have been a group of sincere believers. Right off the bat, Paul thanked God for their faith in Christ Jesus and love for all the saints. Paul talked about their early days, how they truly understood God’s grace, and how the gospel was bearing fruit and growing among them.

Now, this group of sincere believers lived in the pressure cooker of the 1st Century Hellenistic culture. Paul saw that the ideas and philosophies of that surrounding culture threatened to seep into the church. There was the influence of gnostic philosophies; there was the influence of Judaism and its legalistic practices and traditions; there were other jumbled up ideas of the supernatural world as well, like angelic levels and the worship of angels, along with other pagan influences. None of these things were in line with the truth of the gospel and had no place in the church. How were the Colossians doing with all this?

When we read Colossians, we sense Paul was concerned because these believers were spiritually vulnerable to these influences. What made these influences insidious was the underlying message that came with them. The message was that these Colossian Christians were missing out on some mysterious, next level spiritual stuff. The people who taught these things posed as holders of some secret and hidden knowledge, making the Colossian Christians feel inadequate and lacking in their faith in Jesus.

It reminds me of how TV commercials work these days. Before watching these commercials, you may have been completely fine. But then companies employ all kinds of psychology to convince people that they are missing out. By the time you’re done watching these commercials, you may feel like your life will never be good unless you get in your car right now and go buy the things you just saw on the commercials.

Paul wanted to help the Colossians grow strong and mature so that they weren’t swayed by these outside influences - no matter how good their commercials were. And how would he do this? He does this by giving them this most beautiful and stunning praise of Jesus in verses 15-20. Paul’s point was that when the Colossians saw Jesus - really saw Jesus for all that he was - they had no reason to feel like they were missing out on anything. Jesus, in every respect, in every imaginable way, was preeminent and supreme. Paul writes in verse 18, “so that in *everything* he might have the *supremacy*.” There just was nothing beyond Jesus, nothing higher than Jesus, nothing outside of Jesus. Jesus was everything, and everything was in Jesus. Paul saw all these other ideas as pretensions trying to set themselves up against Christ (2 Cor 10:5). But there was no competition. In everything, Jesus had the supremacy. And because Jesus had

the supremacy, the Colossians Christians, who were in him, were extremely blessed and rich and adequate in every way.

As we live and minister in North America, we are aware that there are no shortage of ideas that set themselves up against Christ. It makes all the difference to see that Jesus is far above them all, that he reigns supreme in every way. This morning, let's think about all the ways in which Jesus has the supremacy, and how it applies to the Colossians and to us.

FIRST, JESUS HAS THE SUPREMACY OVER ALL CREATION (15-17)

Look at verse 15. "The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation."

Jesus has the supremacy because he is the image of the invisible God. Image here doesn't mean that Jesus is a cheap copy, but rather that he is the exact representation of who God is. Or as one theologian (Hermann Kleinknecht) put it, "the illumination of [God's] inner core and essence." While we human beings are made *in* the image of God, Jesus *is* the image of God.

The words "invisible God" reminds us of how in the Old Testament, no one could see God and live. God's glory is too great for human beings; God lives in unapproachable light (1 Tim 6:16). So how can the Colossians come to God and know him? The false teachers had all kinds of answers for this. But the answer is Jesus, who is the image of the invisible God. The Colossians needed to look no further than Jesus because to know Jesus was to know God (Jn 14:9).

Look at the second part of verse 15. Jesus has the supremacy because he is the firstborn over all creation. Firstborn here doesn't mean that Jesus was the first to be created. A lot of heresies have come from misunderstanding this term. Firstborn means Jesus is the most important and preeminent and sovereign over all created things.

We live in a relativistic society today where the societal expectation is that one's faith is kept completely private. The world wants Christians to see Jesus as just one of many ways to God, alongside other world religions and worldviews. This has been the trajectory for decades in North America. Living in this kind of environment, we not only feel the pressure to keep our faith private, we are also vulnerable to letting this relativistic worldview seep in. We must remember that Jesus is the firstborn over all creation. Jesus is the ultimate reality that all things fit into. Jesus has supremacy over all the fallen human thoughts, false religions, broken worldviews and empty philosophies.

Look at verse 16: "For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him."

Jesus has the supremacy because all things were created in him. Jesus was God's agent in creation. It means there was nothing that was created that was not created in Jesus. This

includes not just the visible world but the invisible spiritual world as well, including angelic beings.

The false teachers claimed Jesus was just Spirituality 101. They talked about a world of angelic beings as if there was some mysterious, hidden secret in them beyond what Jesus can offer. It was completely backwards. In Jesus all things were created. Whatever power or authority these beings supposedly had, it was Jesus who created them all and assigned each their place. Just as characters in a book have much less to offer than the author who created them, so there is nothing created - visible or invisible - that can offer more than Jesus, the Author of all life.

Look at the next part of verse 16. Jesus has the supremacy because “all things have been created through him and for him.” Not only are all things created in him, all things are created through him and for him. Jesus is the purpose of creation. All things exist for Jesus’ honor, to point to Jesus. All creation - everything in nature, every human being, everything in the heavenly realms, including the angels - was created for Jesus’ glory. So how could anything created offer something that is beyond Christ, for whom everything was created?

While in Colossae, Christians were told to look to some angelic beings out there for higher knowledge, these days, people are told to look in at themselves. One phrase I often hear is, “Speak your truth.” Have you heard that before? It assumes each person gets to determine his or her own truth. It assumes there’s no God whom we must obey and to whose truth we must conform. It says that you determine your own truth, your own reality. It may sound like freedom, but it is actually slavery. We can never undo our most fundamental constitution: We are created through Jesus and for Jesus. Our culture teaches us to live through ourselves and for ourselves. But that is sinking sand. Only in living through Jesus and for Jesus can we be truly free and fulfilled.

Let’s look at verse 17: “He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”

Jesus has the supremacy because he is before all things. Jesus is God the Son who existed eternally with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit before the beginning of time. Everything else was created, including angelic beings, but Jesus is the un-created One, who always existed. As the Nicene Creed says, “there never was a time when he was not.”

Jesus has the supremacy because in him all things hold together. Jesus is the great sustainer. He is the great preserver. All things visible and invisible are held together because Jesus sustains them. The universe would collapse without Jesus’ ongoing sustaining work. There are some people these days who see the great order in our universe and just chalk it up to Mother Nature or some outlandish multiverse theory. They insist that this world is here by accident, and that life has no meaning. There are some people who talk about the power of positive thinking in our world (there’s actually a new agey thing out there called “The Secret” that is all about the power of positive thinking). It’s popular these days for people to say they’re “sending good vibes” instead of praying for each other. All these are founded on false ideas about the universe, which all crumble and fall before Jesus, who is the reality. It is not Mother Nature or positive

energy but Jesus who powerfully holds all things together. All things are created in Jesus, through Jesus, for Jesus, and sustained by Jesus.

SECOND, JESUS HAS THE SUPREMACY IN THE CHURCH (18-20)

Look at verse 18. Here, Paul zooms in on the church. “And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.”

Jesus has the supremacy because he is the head of the body, the church. The church is Jesus’ new creation, a new humanity (Eph 2:15). Just as Jesus has supremacy over all creation so Jesus has supremacy in the church.

Jesus being the head of the body means he is the leader of the church. Jesus is also the creator, the purpose, and the sustainer of the church. The church belongs to Jesus. The church exists for his glory and his purpose. Jesus is our chief shepherd, who leads us, disciplines us, cares for us, feeding us with his word (Ps 23, 1 Pet 5:4, Eph 5:25-30).

The best and utmost thing we can do as members of Jesus’ body is to worship Jesus and serve him. And if the Colossian Christians were doing this, they should not have let anyone make them feel spiritually inferior with their fine sounding arguments. In John 10:27, Jesus said, “My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.” The most spiritual and knowledgeable thing we can do is to listen to Jesus’ voice and follow him.

These COVID times have been a humbling and revealing one for many of us. Statistics show that alcohol sales and TV watching and divorce rates are up. We are seeing what we truly rely on as a society, and these trying times have shown the cracks and weaknesses in us and in our relationships. We can say these days that in some sense, everything has changed; but in some sense, nothing has changed. Jesus is still the King of the universe, who sustains all things. And Jesus is still the head of the church; he is still leading and caring for his body. For Christians, this is not a time of panic but a time to look to Jesus all the more as our head, our shepherd, and experience his grace newly as he continues to sustain us and use us.

Personally, I realized how weak my relationship was - as a member of the body - to Jesus the head. I always made the excuse that my demanding job is what kept me from devoting myself to prayer and Bible study as I should. At the beginning of the shutdown, I found myself with a lot more time; but now without any excuse, I was praying and studying the Bible even less than before. I got more restless and grouchy at home. I realized I had a heart problem, not a time problem. I’m thankful for these times that have revealed my lack of reliance on Jesus and devotion to him, and for the opportunity it afforded me to repent and restore early morning time with Jesus.

Even though the world does not recognize Jesus’ supremacy, the church must. We are his body, he is our head. But sometimes, we don’t look so different from the rest of the world. We

credit supremacy to the rich and powerful, to the celebrities, the athletes, not to Jesus. Instead of living with Jesus as our #1, we want to be seen as the #1. It's so easy for Jesus' headship and supremacy to just be theoretical. Jesus' supremacy in the church means we live with Jesus as our greatest need, our greatest desire, our greatest treasure, our life's main goal, our best friend.

Look again at verse 18. Jesus has the supremacy because he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead. Ultimately, it was Jesus' resurrection that declared him to be the Son of God and Lord (Ro 1:4). Jesus is the firstborn from among the dead because his resurrection is the source of all of our resurrection, we who put our faith in him (1 Cor 15:20).

With the pandemic, we have been made acutely aware of human frailty and the reality of death. C.S. Lewis once said, "What does war do to death? It certainly does not make it more frequent: 100 percent of us die, and the percentage cannot be increased." In the same way, this pandemic does not increase death. The real problem in the world is not how soon one dies but that we die at all. We all die. But Jesus solved the problem of death for us all when he rose from the dead. Jesus is the firstborn from among the dead; he gives us the hope of resurrection unto eternal life. Through the ups and downs of life, through the ups and downs of ministry, our anchor and living hope is Jesus, who proved his supremacy through his resurrection.

Verse 19 says, "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,"

Jesus has the supremacy because God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him. This can be said of no one else. Jesus became flesh and dwelled among us. So he became fully human. But he was fully God because God's fullness dwelled in him.

Because God's fullness dwelled in Jesus, Jesus' death was not just a good man dying, but the death of God for the sin of man. It took away the sin of the world (Jn 1:29). Because God's fullness dwelled in Jesus, Jesus' resurrection meant the defeat of death and the resurrection of all who believe in him. Because God's fullness dwelled in Jesus, Jesus is able to bring us to fullness in him (Ben will talk more about this in his message). And because God's fullness dwelled in Jesus, he alone could be the centerpiece of reconciliation.

Verse 20 says, "and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross."

Jesus has the supremacy because God reconciled all things to himself through Jesus. The world is in disarray because of sin. All creation, including visible and invisible things, longs for the day of reconciliation. Reconciliation is only possible through Jesus, who makes peace through his blood, shed on the cross. This is the climax of Paul's beautiful praise of Jesus' supremacy. Peter said of Jesus in Acts 4:12, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved." No one else can solve our sin problem. No one else can make peace between God and man. Only Jesus, who has the supremacy in everything and in whom God's fullness dwells, can take those who were once

God's enemies and make them God's dear children (21-22). Jesus who is above all became the lowest of all, shedding his blood on the cross so that we may be reconciled to God.

The truth is, in Jesus, the Colossians had everything. They had all the reason to be beaming with pride and joy everyday because they were in Jesus, who in everything, in every aspect, in every way had the supremacy. Yes, the Colossians still had much to grow. There was so much more to know. But they didn't need to roam here and there for some secret knowledge. Everything they needed was in Jesus. They only needed to pursue Jesus all the more, to grow deeper in him, to know his love more and more. They needed to continue in their faith in Jesus, established and firm, and not move from the hope held out in the gospel (23).

As I look back at the last seven and a half years in Texas, I'm thankful to God who sustained us and provided for us and trained us in many ways. To be honest, I have recently been feeling at the end of my rope, feeling the pressure of life from many sides. Many questions were swarming around in my head. I don't even know if I'm raising my children well to be disciples of Jesus; am I really supposed to be pastoring a church? Are we really bearing fruit here? People don't seem to be interested in growing as Jesus' disciples. Is it really worth it, living so far from our families? When I talked to my father in law about his thoughts on how long one should keep his pastoral calling, he said he likes to keep it simple: just focus on Jesus and continue to serve him. I was disappointed because I hoped he would commiserate with me a little more. But he was right. When I looked at myself, my situation, people coming and going, people's hard hearts towards the gospel, I felt spiritually vulnerable and discouraged. While meditating on these verses from Colossians, I realized how it makes all the difference to look at Jesus - specifically to see him in his supremacy over all things. When I see the supremacy of Jesus whom I serve, my doubts and insecurities dissipate. I know I'm in his strong, sovereign grip, and he can use my five loaves and two fish for his glory.

Our family recently adopted a puppy. She was a stray dog that was found caught in a coyote trap. We've had other dogs before, but this one is different. Even after a month of having been with us, she wakes up each morning in a frenzy of excitement. It's as if she still can't believe that all this is real: she gets to wake up in a warm home, to a loving family that will feed her and take care of her. She yelps in excitement every morning as if she's saying, "This is amazing! This is amazing! This is amazing!" I'm learning a valuable lesson from her. I have to live daily in the amazing reality of all that Jesus is, and live in him with such excitement and joy: "This is amazing! I get to serve Jesus and belong to him and be led by him!"

Let's read verse 18 together again: "And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy."