

It's All About Him 18: In Him All Things Hold Together

Colossians 1:17

August 23 & 24, 2014
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The glory and majesty of Jesus Christ is magnificent from any and every angle. On this 18th annual *All About Him* message at Bethel Church, you may think we must be running out of material. Actually, we have not even begun. All eternity will not be sufficient for us to see and savor his glory in all its fullness. As the famous hymn stanza says, *When we've been there 10,000 years bright shining as the sun, we've no less days to sing his praise than when we'd first begun.* (*Amazing Grace*) Do we realize why 10,000 years will not be enough? It is not because we shall suddenly not have time. It is because we will forever be seeing and learning new and greater dimensions of his being. Ten thousand or 100,000 years will simply not suffice. Yes, Jesus is that infinitely glorious.

So no, we are not running out of material. On the 18th *All About Him* Sunday, we've no less ways to sing his praise than when we'd first begun.

Scientists and philosophers down through the ages have searched in vain for what some call, *The Theory of Everything*: one mathematical formula or uniting principle that explains all reality. In our modern day, physicist and author Stephen Hawking has sought to discover this and has written extensively on related subjects; so much so that this November a movie about Hawking's life is coming out. The title? *The Theory of Everything*. Philosophers look for it and I suppose every one of us do too. We veil it in comments like, *I'm just looking for answers. What's life all about? I have to go find myself*, which is code for *I have to find a reason to live that is beyond me*.

Philosophers, physicists, and the rest of us, we are all the same. We need a point of reference. A glue. A gravitational center of purpose that pulls all these fragments of life into a cohesive whole. Talk like that and your friends will think you need religion.

In some ways religion is man's attempt to make sense of things. We live in a world of disorder and chaos. It is very hard to look at the world we live in and make sense of things, isn't it? Think of the news of this week: beheadings, violence, and riots. We wonder, is there anything to make sense of all this? That's just the news of the day. What do we think when we gaze at the galaxies? Oceans? Mountains? Human life? Love? Meaning and destiny? Is there anything that can make sense of it all? Anything or anyone that unifies everything into one thing?

We turn to Colossians 1 for God's answer to our question. Here in verse 15 and following, God answers the *Theory of Everything* by pointing us toward a person.

"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent."
(Colossians 1:15-18 ESV)

Before us is one of the richest Christocentric passages in Scripture. Many commentators think it was a poem or even a first century worship song. It's easy for a Christian's heart to

sing through the lyric as they celebrate various facets of the person and work of Jesus. There is too much here for one sermon. This *All About Him* message focuses on verse 17: "And he is before all things and in him all things hold together." The last phrase has our attention but it is part of a sentence. Notice the first clause: "He is before all things." This comes following a catalog of physical and spiritual dimensions: the created world; the spiritual world; the angelic world. All of it was created by Christ. "Before all things" means chronologically, Jesus was prior to all that was not God. *In the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.* (John 1:1) The Word is a title for the second person of the Trinity, the Son of God, the Christ, whose given human name is Jesus. Jesus Christ. Scripture says Jesus made everything but was chronologically before it. This keeps Christianity from collapsing into pantheism. God is separate from creation and time. Jesus is eternal.

The ancients were fascinated with the question of where everything came from. We should be too. I recently walked over the grave of Charles Darwin in Westminster Abby. I had a little inward delight in putting my foot squarely on his grave because he would not have agreed with Colossians 1:17—a supernatural explanation for the origin of species. We believe precisely that. All that is not God was made by God through the agency and creative power of the Son of God.

It is the last phrase that we want to focus on, "In him all things hold together." It's just four words in the Greek. Literally, *all in him holds together*. The verb is the key to the meaning: *holds together*. Its tense means a past action that is continuing or ongoing. Its definition is: *to take separate parts and unite them; to band them together; hold them together*. For example, the earth holds the moon. The sun holds the planets in our solar system. The Milky Way holds the solar systems in our galaxy. There is a gravitational power that unites these apparently separate entities into one.

Whenever there are separate entities united, there is always something that unites. After describing every dimension of reality and making Jesus the causal creative agent behind it, Scripture takes it to another level. Not only is he the creative genius and power behind the existence of everything, he is the ongoing sustainer and center of all that is.

Please note the word "all." It's the same word in our phrase, *It's all about him*. All means all. It is we who want to categorize our religion and put it in a separate category, typically somewhere that doesn't interfere with the rest of our lives. Our society wants the same. They don't mind us saying whatever we want in our church buildings, but when what we believe in here is uttered out there, now it's a firestorm. What lies behind the desire to separate absolutely church and state? Or ridiculous examples like the girl this week suspended from school for saying "God bless you" at school when her friend sneezed. "People loved the darkness rather than the light." (John 3:19) Sinners want separation and categories where truth claims don't cross over, where truth doesn't interfere with our hobbies, money, sins of preference. Sin breaks. Sin fragments.

Then you have a statement like this, "In him all things hold together." Jesus unites all realities. All categories. All dimensions. All people. All philosophies. All ideologies. All kingdoms. All thrones. All rulers. All presidents. All kings. All time. All the living. All the dead. Heaven. Hell. And everything else. He holds all these together by the blazing glory of his person and the infinite power of his mighty hand. He is the defining reality of everything. He is the reference point of everything. He is the plumb line of truth. He is the middle C of all that is beautiful and good in this world. **Everything that is, is what it is in relation to who he is.** He defines everything. This isn't to say he sanctions everything, for he is the Judge of all men. Rather, everything that is, is defined in relation to who he is.

His beauty defines what is ugly. His truthfulness defines what is false. His holiness defines what sin is. His wisdom defines what folly is. His love defines hate. His judgments are the final word and say on everything. *"In him all things hold together"* means everything and everyone, including you and me.

In Him All Things Hold Together

The Cosmos

This is the main focus of the text. Christ's power is the power that holds the universe together. Other passages say the same thing. *"He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power."* (Hebrews 1:3) To think that the expanse of the universe and all galaxies and all solar systems and every living creature, every molecule, every atom, is sustained and supplied by power sourced in Christ is simply mind-boggling.

Consider the expanse of the universe. As an example, in 2003, the Hubble Telescope set itself for the longest and deepest look into the universe. From September 24 through January 16, 2004, it performed nearly one million seconds of exposure. In that one frame, one little fragment of the sky, researchers counted ten thousand galaxies. Doing the math for the observable sky and as deep as we can see at this point, the whole area of the sky totaled 200 hundred billion galaxies. Our Milky Way is just one of them. The average galaxy contains 200 hundred billion stars meaning the observable universe contains 40-50 billion trillion stars or solar systems. That's just what we can see. Maybe this will help: if every star was a dime, the dimes would be as tall as the Willis Tower and cover the entire North American continent. Each dime represents a star with its own solar system and planets and moons. That one planet in one solar system of one star in one galaxy of 200 billion is where the Son of God incarnated and died for the inhabitants of that one planet is why the psalmist wrote, *"What is man that you are mindful of him?"* (Psalm 8:4)

Scripture

In him all things hold together—not just through natural revelation, but he is the uniting reality of God's written revelation, the Bible. How do we know this? Jesus said so. *"You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me."* (John 5:39)

One of the keys to understanding the Bible is to understand the central thread or melody line that is seen and heard in both testaments. The Old Testament is lengthy and has many divergent literary genres, eras, and authors. Yet through all of these there is a central theme. At times it's in the background. At times it is in the foreground; Isaiah 53 is an example. Jesus says in John 5, *"You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life."* (Verse 39) You study the Scriptures diligently, but what you are missing is the central theme. Me. The Scriptures bear witness about me.

Two disciples heard the most magnificent expositional sermon ever given. It was resurrection Sunday. The first one. Two disciples were walking along a road we call the Emmaus Road. They were in intense discussion about the news of sightings of Jesus alive. They couldn't make sense of it. It seemed unnatural. Death is natural. Resurrection is supernatural. They didn't know what to think.

Hiding his identity from them, Jesus joins them walking and asks what they are debating. They tell him, Jesus of Nazareth. He was crucified but reports were coming in of eyewitness accounts of him being alive. We don't understand! Listen to what Jesus said,

"And he said to them, "O foolish ones, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary that the Christ should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself." (Luke 24:25-27)

Oh to have heard that sermon as Jesus literally exegetes himself out of Scripture!

Remember when God told Satan, he will crush your head? That was me. Remember the rainbow promise to Noah? That was really about me. Remember the ram in the bushes Abraham sacrificed instead of Isaac? That was a picture of me. Remember Moses the prophet of the people? A picture of me. Remember the command to sacrifice the lamb on the Day of Atonement? That was me. Remember when Joshua ran into the Lord of hosts at Jericho? That was me. Remember Boaz who redeemed Ruth? That was really about me. Remember the promise to David that his son would sit on an eternal throne? I'm the Son of David. Remember in Psalms when it says, he will not let his body see decay? This body is that body. Remember the saviors God sent to his people in Judges? All of them were pictures of me. Remember this? Remember that? All of Scripture is all about me.

The divine revelation of Scripture is not a moral guide to improved living or principles for our best life now. It is a book about Jesus and the unveiling of the glory of the Son of God through his incarnation, cross, resurrection, return, and eternal reign. This is not a book about us, although it does define who we are. It is a book about Jesus. He is its center. Its sun. Its hero. Its theme. Its song and melody. The Bible is all about him and he is the theme that holds the Scriptures together.

Salvation

There continues to be the insidious teaching that the incarnation, the cross, even eternal life is all about us. It says God did all this first and foremost because of our value, goodness, or worth in God's sight. Of course, this appeals to us because it exalts us. It makes us feel important.

But this is like the rooster thinking the sun rises for him, so he can show off his crowing. Roosters naturally like doctrines that make them important. The problem is that it simply isn't true. In fact, what does the next verse say about WHY God has done all this? Why has Christ created, sustained, incarnated, died, and accomplished this salvation? *So that in everything he might be preeminent.* (Colossians 1:18) He, not we. Christ, not us. It's not all about us. *It is all about him.* It most certainly was about our sin and his love for us and him bearing our guilt in atoning for our sins. All of that is true and all marvelous and all wonderful. But these things accomplish a greater purpose. They were done for a more glorious reason. *So that in everything he might be preeminent.*

Let's take a look at Ephesians 1:3-14:

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him. In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according

to the purpose of his will, to the praise of his glorious grace, with which he has blessed us in the Beloved. In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace, which he lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will, according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth.

"In him we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to the purpose of him who works all things according to the counsel of his will, so that we who were the first to hope in Christ might be to the praise of his glory. In him you also, when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation, and believed in him, were sealed with the promised Holy Spirit, who is the guarantee of our inheritance until we acquire possession of it, to the praise of his glory."

This passage lists the saving activities of God through Christ on our behalf. Yet what is repeated as the purpose? For *the praise of his glorious grace*. (Ephesians 1:6)

We have the incredible and eternal privilege of being the canvas upon which God the Father painted the glory of his Son. We bear his image. He is conforming us to Christ's likeness. This is a wonderful privilege and all eternity we will marvel that God chose to endow us with the likeness of his Son. But portraits aren't about the canvas or the paint. They are valued because of whose image they bear. The greater the person, the greater the value of his likeness. Christ is the uniting purpose behind all that God has done, is doing, and will do on our behalf to save us, for the praise of his glorious grace.

The Church/Christians

"He is the head of the body, the church." (Colossians 1:18)

This is another example of Jesus as the answer to *the Theory of Everything*. It only stands to reason that the *Savior* of the church would be the *Head* of the church. This is a metaphor for his leadership, value, and focus. Think medically of how the nervous system of the body meets in the spinal cord and the brain. Everything flows to there and from there. When Christ is the head of a local church, everything flows to him in terms of worship, service, sacrifice, and love. And everything flows from him in terms of life, energy, passion, direction, hope, and love—through the Holy Spirit.

If there is one reason that Bethel Church must hold Christ preeminent in our hearts is that now, more than ever, we need the unity that passion for him provides.

I do not believe my leadership or preaching will unite a church with four campuses across two counties. We have great elders, but their shepherding will not unite this church. We have wonderful staff and a volunteer army here but even these will not sustain a unified church. If we put our hope in any of these, we will fracture and divide quickly. What must we do?

We must hold Jesus high in our hearts and see him through the eyes of faith as the one whom this church is all about. We must let him do what he is really good at—holding things together. If we hold him high, he will hold us together. If he can do it for the galaxies, he can do it for us.

And he can do it for you, my dear friend. Sin brings chaos to a life. It fragments. Shatters. We see and feel the rubble all around us. It is especially devastating within the human heart

to live with no reference point. No center. Nothing that makes sense of everything. No Theory of Everything and no hope.

The whole testimony of natural and divine revelation is crying out to all who will hear, *It's All about Jesus*. If you will turn from the darkness and chaos of sin and by faith step into the light of belief in Jesus as Savior and Lord, he will be a kind of sun in your heart and put all the planetary chaos of your life in its proper orbit. He said, "*Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.*" (Matthew 11:28)

"He is before all things, and in him all things hold together." (Colossians 1:17) And that is *All About Him 18*.

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