

The Supremacy of Christ

Colossians 1:18

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Good morning, church. Greetings to all of you in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord and Savior, who was conceived by the Holy Spirit, was born of the virgin Mary, suffered under Pontus Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried. The third day he rose again from the dead. He ascended to heaven and is seated at the right hand of God the Father Almighty, from thence he shall come to judge the living and the dead.

I am going to talk to you today about Jesus. I'm doing so for a number of reasons. One is that Jesus is who the church should be talking about all the time. This also fits well with an opportunity God has brought to me and our church to show hospitality to an organization whose annual conference was wiped out by COVID-19. They needed a place to stream an online conference and asked if we would help. We are, and with that I'm preaching three times over Monday and Tuesday at their conference. This is one of the messages I'm delivering.

This message is incredibly timely to the days we are living in. The world is in an uproar. The pandemic alone would be the biggest disruption of our lifetime. Stacked on top of that are deeply challenging tensions. Racial tensions. Political tensions. At the root of humanity's anguish is the spiritual emptiness of life and society without God and without Jesus who is both King of kings and the Prince of Peace. All the screaming and all the tensions and all the enmity are the unintended consequences of Adam and Eve taking the forbidden fruit and eating.

Have you wondered, why is this all happening? Where is all this going? We so easily lose sight of God's purpose in everything. He's told us why all this is happening and where all this is going. Deriving hope and confidence in God's big picture purposes is what this message is about.

"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. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross" (Colossians 1:15–20 ESV).

Most scholars believe Paul is quoting the lyrics to a first-century worship song. There is a kind of poetry and rhythm here that celebrates who Christ is and what he has done. Our focus is on verse 18 and "that in everything he might be preeminent" or "so that in everything he might have the supremacy" (NIV).

The Greek word for *preeminence* or *supremacy* comes from the basic root word "first; to come to be first." We see that there are two kinds of *firsts* described in this passage. In verse 17, he is described as being "before all things." This would be first in chronology. Jesus preexisted time and space and creation. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1 ESV). You recall him saying to the

Jews, "Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58). Christ preexisted as the eternal Son of God and is therefore before all that is not God chronologically.

However, that is not the sense of *supremacy*. *First in supremacy* means "first in honor; most worthy, treasured, esteemed, admired, adored." It is a position of worth and dignity. So that in everything Christ might be treasured, worshiped, seen as number one.

And what is plain here is that there is a divine plan at work to make the Son supreme. That little phrase is introduced with a purpose statement. So that, in order that, done for the purpose of. What things are being done for this purpose? This extraordinary list beginning in verse 13 describes all the actions of the Father and Son in redemption. In other words, all of these acts of God the Father in and through the Son were done with a very specific purpose in mind which we see in verse 18, "so that in everything he might have the supremacy" (NIV)

Who is at the Center?

This creates a whole dilemma for us. The first dilemma is that suddenly we see that we are not at the center of the universe nor are we at the center of what God is doing through creation and human history. This truth alone is very troubling.

It's like when you are a kid and you see your teacher at the store. It's bewildering. There she is with her family. You've only ever seen her at school as your teacher. But she has a family and her own kids she must love more than you. It's a shock because we've assumed we were the center of her life and teaching was the most important thing.

And that is how it is for many Christians who run across this truth. It troubles them to discover that while God loves us perfectly and wholly, he has deeper reasons for what he does and why he does it. And at the deepest level of what God has done and is doing through human history and through the church is to glorify the Son and to display his supremacy.

So, one reason this is so critical is that to approach life or church ministry or pastoral leadership with the purpose *it's all about me or anything else but Christ* is to fight directly against the will of the Father. We are not at the center of God the Father's purposes. Christ is at the center.

Why Was This Necessary?

There is a second dilemma here. If supremacy is not chronological and Christ has always been the supremely and infinitely valuable Son of God, why go to all this trouble of creation and redemption? Why create? Why not just stay happy and content in the pre-creation bliss of the Trinity? Was all this creation and Fall and cross really necessary? Another way to ask this is, *If Christ was already supreme in eternity past, what did his actions for us do to magnify his supremacy?*

Whenever we talk about the Trinity, many people check out and say, *I can't understand it all so I don't want to think about it*. Yet we don't do that with other things. We don't look at the ocean and say, *because I can't see all of it, I won't enjoy any of it*. Or *if I can't see all the sky I won't enjoy the sunset*. Can we understand all the mysteries of the Trinity or trinitarian purposes? No. But there is so much that we can see and it is beautiful. Here is one dimension God allows us to see and understand.

What was pre-incarnation like for Christ? Glory. Infinite glory emanating from him. His character was absolutely perfect in every way. However, Christ had glories or attributes to his character that were known only to the Father and had never had an opportunity to be expressed or worshiped.

- *The depth of his love had never been displayed as there had never been enemies to love*
- *The extent of his obedience had never been known because there was no context where he chose to suffer in his obedience.*
- *His power and creative imagination had not had an opportunity to be seen like a master painter without a canvas or brush*
- *His mercy – there were never people who deserved one thing and got another*
- *His compassion for the pain and suffering of others*
- *His wisdom and teaching*
- *His capacity for friendship and relationship even with those infinitely less than he*

"So that in everything he might have the supremacy" (v. 18 NIV) So why was all of this necessary? Why all of creation and all of salvation and the saga of the billions of people who have ever lived and all the triumphs and tragedies of human history? Why was all this done? So that the Son would be glorified in all of his perfections and for all his glorious beauty.

So, God the Father (verse 9), acting according to the mystery of his will, purposed in Christ to display the "firstness" of Christ, his preeminence. His supremacy.

This means Christ isn't worth more on the other side of his resurrection or even after his second coming; he had always been the infinitely valuable Son of God. But his worth and glory was now *displayed* in a new and beautiful way for which he can be praised.

It's like The Antique Road Show. You've seen this. People bring something that's been laying around in their attic. They dust it off and clean it up. They shine the spotlights on it and they get the experts there and they examine the detail of the painting or embroidery and they declare, "This piece is worth \$30,000!" Everybody oohs and aahs and heads for their attic to see what might be up there.

Was that antique worth more after the appraisal? No. It was already valuable in the attic. For years that thing had sat in their attic and been valuable. It wasn't suddenly more valuable when the appraiser declares its worth than it was a few hours before in the attic. It's just that now it is on display before the world as being a treasure.

The incarnation was God bringing the Son out of the attic. His miracles and teaching and life were the Father fixing his lights on the Son. And the cross was God dusting off the Son and showing him to the world for how beautiful he had always been. To be admired and seen in all of his glory. And now we ooh *and ahh* at him. And all of it was done for the praise of his glory, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

How is Christ Displayed as Supreme?

Supremely worthy

Verses 15-18 roll through a list of "ooh" and "aah" characteristics.

- *"He is the image of the invisible God"* (v. 15 ESV) – We can't see God, but through the Scriptures we see a living and breathing expression of who God is. *Supreme as expression of God.*
- By him all things were created and are held together (v. 16-17). *Supreme as the Creator.*
- *"He is before all things."* (v. 17) He is *supreme as the eternal one.*
- God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him (v. 19). *Supreme in his deity.*
- *"And through him to reconcile to himself all things"* (v. 20). *Supreme as the Savior.*

Every one of these is incredible. Just think that all of these and more are found in the Son! These are amazing, but we don't know what we don't know...

Our supreme focus

"And he is the head of the body, the church" (verse 18).

This little poem moves from his general worthiness to his particular glorious relationship to the church. He is simply *the head*. What is your head responsible for? It gives direction. It's in charge. Headship is leadership. Headship is rulership. The head is the focus of the body. Christ is the head and therefore must be the focus of the body of Christ.

Is it possible for a local church to lose this focus? It happens all the time. There is always a focus: this church is about this; that church is about that. Often, it's not Jesus. This drift happens over time, which effectively severs the head from the body. Every church in the history of the church has eventually lost focus. Mission drift. Headless ecclesiology.

May I ask a probing question, *what is the big focus in your family? Our church? What are we emphasizing here? Are people in our church or who are around our church members getting the sense that with a thousand noble things to focus on, the one thing that matters most is Jesus, his name, his fame, his gospel, his glory?*

Isn't this the challenge? Right now, some people expect me to be a pastor and an epidemiologist. A pastor and a sociologist. A pastor and a prophet. I receive emails from people requiring me to accurately predict our church's ministry in the fall. Am I Dr. Fauci? Am I Elijah? Am I God?

Like most of you, I'm trying to get through this week in the evolving realities of a global pandemic. I'm trying to keep my family viable. Pastor people through a mask. And see what next week brings.

A couple weeks ago, we got a call from the Indiana State Health Department. And they said, "Jennifer, you've been exposed to COVID-19. You have to get tested and you have to be quarantined." Well, it turned out that it had already been 10 days since we had been exposed, but we still had to go get tested. They won't tell you who, they won't tell you where, so we were kind of in the dark. So, we're driving to get the test and we're trying to figure out what we're going to do if one of us has it. *Okay, well, if you've got it then I guess you're going to live in this part of the house for the next two weeks and we're going to figure it out. What if the kids get it?* Thankfully, we both tested negative and life went on. These are the days we're living in. I'm living the same life that you're living.

I don't know where this is going, but then I kind of do. What do I know? I know the coronavirus is part of everything unveiling Jesus as preeminent. I know the turmoil in our country is unveiling in very difficult ways that there is only one Prince of Peace. I know the

death of Joe and Donna Heuer from COVID-19, members of Bethel Church, somehow flows in the plans of a sovereign God. I know that no matter what happens in the presidential election, it fulfills the purpose of God to show Jesus as King of kings and Lord of lords. There is so much I don't know, but I do know that the stuff I don't know will be a part of the grand story of a loving heavenly father displaying the glorious perfections of his Son, who is the head of the church and Savior of all who trust in him.

Make sure what you don't know fits in to what you do know and then what you don't know isn't as scary.

"Remember, sinner, it is not YOUR HOLD of Christ that saves you—it is Christ; it is not YOUR JOY in Christ that saves you—it is Christ. It is NOT EVEN FAITH in Christ, though that is the instrument—it is Christ's blood and merits; therefore, look not to your hope, but to Christ the source of your hope; look not to your faith, but to Christ, the author and finisher of your faith; and if you do that, ten thousand devils cannot throw you down.... It is NOT prayer, it is NOT faith, it is NOT our doings, it is NOT our feelings upon which we must trust—BUT UPON CHRIST, AND ON CHRIST ALONE!.... Let me beseech you, LOOK ONLY TO CHRIST; never expect deliverance from yourself, from ministers, or from any means of any kind apart from Christ. Keep your eye simply on Him; let His death...His merits, His glories, His intercession, be fresh upon your mind; when you wake in the morning, look to Him; when you lie down at night look for Him." (C. H. Spurgeon)¹

He must be our supreme focus.

Our supreme affection

Why does the Father have the deeper purpose of showing the Supremacy of Christ? The answer is simple, *because he loves the Son* and he wants to see him glorified before all of Creation. That is his purpose. To generate in all creation a kind of admiration and joy in his worth.

I took a flight once from Dallas to Atlanta and the plane was filled with Mary Kay representatives. They had a convention. It was something to see. They were singing Mary Kay songs. The lady next to me was so excited about Mary Kay, she wanted to sign me up. They were taking pictures and videos and cheering. I should have gotten a flight rebate of some sort. But there was no denying how they felt about Mary Kay. They loved it. It was all about Mary Kay.

Would anybody that spent time with us get the idea that we really are all about Christ? That we think Jesus Christ is pretty special? That we aren't faking it but are truly excited about the difference Christ has made in our lives?

He is supremely worthy of our affection as our Lord and Savior. So let's dust him off, turn the spotlights on him, and join the Father in admiration of the Son because this whole thing is all about Him.

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¹ Charles Haddon Spurgeon as quoted by Ernest Bacon, *Spurgeon: Heir of the Puritans* (Arlington Heights, Illinois: Christian Liberty Press, 1967), 86.

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