

Colossians 1:15-20

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[0:00] I hope you have a Bible with you this morning and that you'll join me in it in Colossians chapter 1. I don't like being a false advertiser. You may note on the bulletin it says we're in Hebrews chapter 11.

The original plan for this morning was to continue our verse-by-verse exposition of the book of Hebrews. We've been in chapter 11 and looking at the type of faith that God requires of us. We will press on and continue in faithfulness. The original text was verses 8 through 15 of Hebrews 11.

However, we're about to take a month-long break from our exposition of Hebrews for the Advent season, as we do every year. It's where we carefully contemplate the incarnation of Jesus Christ. And dividing the first portion of the Hebrews text concerning the faith of Abraham from the second portion of Hebrews 11 concerning the faith of Abraham, I just felt all week really clunky and unhelpful.

[1:09] I was feeling like when we came back in January to Hebrews 11, I was going to essentially have to re-explain verses 8 through 15 in order for us to continue on in our study of Abraham's faith.

And so, today, we're going to look at a familiar text to our congregation to show you why our church exists. And quite providentially, I had not informed Daryl or Gary that I was doing this this morning. Daryl drew our attention to the vision statement of our church, and Gary prayed the very text we're going to look at this morning. So, our text this morning is Colossians chapter 1, verse 15 through 20.

And my prayer for this morning is that our time will be informative for you if you are new to our fellowship. It's our great desire to connect you to Christ and to His church.

And if you are not new to our fellowship, that you will be reminded why the church gathers and why the church goes. So, our church's vision statement, which I hope is growing in increasing recognition for you, is Christ's family church exists to glorify God by experiencing, proclaiming, and displaying the supremacy of Jesus Christ in all things to all peoples.

[2:37] And this vision statement is based largely from Colossians chapter 1, verses 15 through 20, which we'll read together now.

Before we read, beloved, I want to remind you that this is God's word to us. That it was written for His glory and for our good. Because of this, we would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and obey its commands.

Jesus Christ 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.

[3:41] And through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross.

Now, I hope for you this is a familiar text, whether you are familiar with our congregation or not. That this is a text that you have looked at and have considered.

If you are familiar to our congregation, you have likely heard a sermon on this text before. I think probably this past March-ish. At least I'm feeling that way.

And as I was thinking about this this week, I was reminded of an anecdote from Martin Luther's life. Where he, for a period of time, preached the exact same sermon in consecutive Sundays.

He just continued to preach the exact same sermon. And one of his congregants came up and asked him, Luther, why do you keep preaching to us the same sermon?

[4:39] And he said, well, when you start showing up living like you believe it, I'll move on to something else. For quite some time, I think a period of about two months, he preached the same text again and again.

And so such significant texts can be helpful to us, I think, to come back to them, retouch on them, be reminded of them. Now, every part of God's Word gives testimony about Jesus Christ.

In Luke chapter 24 and verse 27, you can read the account of Jesus' appearance to two of the disciples after his resurrection. Which reads, And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself.

All roads in the Bible lead to Golgotha. In John chapter 5 and verse 39, Jesus says of the scriptures, It is they that bear witness about me.

But of all the Bible's teaching concerning Jesus, perhaps none is more significant and beautiful and precious than the text before us today.

[5:49] You see, beloved, the reality of who Jesus is demands our affections and our obedience. Because if we say that we are disciples of Jesus Christ, we are not saying that we are following a mere man, but God himself.

And we have a great confidence in claiming Christ as our teacher, because the reality of who Jesus is makes sure the promises of God.

2 Corinthians 1 and verse 20, for all the promises of God find their yes in Jesus Christ. Now, it is important as we're looking at this text to know that verses 15 through 18 are thought to be a cosmic Christological hymn.

Your phrase for the day, cosmic Christological hymn. Many scholars believe that Paul is citing a modern hymn or confession of the church of his day.

And those are interesting arguments. I will spare you from them. They're mostly about grammar and sentence structure. Wonderfully, beautifully, likely repetitive hymn that was already being used in the church.

[7:04] Even more important to know about this text is the focus of this cosmic Christological hymn. The preeminence or supremacy of Jesus Christ.

Last part of verse 18. That in everything he might be. Preeminent. Supreme. First in all things. Most highly praised. Paul also states this reality in Philippians chapter 2, 9 through 11. Where he writes, God has highly exalted him, Jesus, and bestowed on him the name that is above every name.

So that the name of Jesus. Every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth. And every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. So according to Paul, Christ is first in all things.

He is preeminent. But how should we consider the truth contained within this text the preeminence of Christ? How should we do such a work?

[8:13] The Puritan John Owen wrote in his book entitled, The Glory of Christ, the following, and I quote, The revelation made of Christ in the blessed gospel is far more excellent, more glorious, more filled with rays of divine wisdom and goodness than the whole creation and the just comprehension of it, if attainable, cannot contain or afford.

Without this knowledge, the mind of man priding itself in other inventions and discoveries is wrapped up in darkness and confusion. This therefore deserves the severest of our thoughts, the best of our meditations and our utmost diligence in them.

For if our future blessedness shall consist in living where he is and beholding his glory, what better preparation can there be for it than a constant previous contemplation of that glory as revealed in the gospel, that by a view of it, we may be gradually transformed into the same glory.

End quote. Owen says, if we're to live in a state where we are constantly being amazed by our Christ, what better way to consider that, to be prepared for that, than to be about this constant previous contemplation?

The Christian eternity will be filled with the wonderment of Christ. So we should seek to know him now that he may be exalted in our minds and in our lives. You could say that we need to rightly

understand the supremacy of Jesus Christ so that we would experience, proclaim, and display his excellencies in all things to all peoples.

[9:55] Isn't this what Christmas is really about? I think too often we simply reduce Christmas to a baby in a manger. This is the God of the universe beginning to reveal himself in the person of Jesus Christ.

So let me encourage a constant previous contemplation. And to help us do so, let's consider the text together in the following structure.

Number one, Jesus Christ is preeminent because he is God. We'll see this in verse 15 and verse 19. Number two, Jesus Christ is preeminent because he is the Lord of the universe.

Verse 16 and 17. Number three, Jesus Christ is preeminent because he is the head of the church. Verse 18. And number four, Jesus Christ is preeminent because of his redemptive work.

Verse 20. So first, Jesus Christ is preeminent because he is God. Verse 15 says he is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

[11:03] Paul says Jesus is the icon, the image or likeness of God. The scripture refers to man as the icon of God, but you are not perfectly so.

Much like a shattered piece of glass returns a poor reflection, so it is with us. Jesus is both the perfect representation and the perfect manifestation of God.

Hebrews chapter 1 and verse 3, the beginning of it, tells us Jesus is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature.

Christ shines forth God's attributes as the sun gives light and heat to the earth. He is the image of God. Further, Jesus is God.

John 1 and verse 1 tells us, in the beginning was the word here there, Christ. And the word was with God and the word was God.

[12:05] Paul proceeds to describe Jesus as the firstborn, the prototokos, firstborn. And while this phrase certainly can mean chronologically first in a family, it refers primarily to position or to rank.

From the Arians of the early church to the Jehovah's Witnesses of our day, those who seek to repudiate the deity of Jesus Christ refer to this phrase. So prepare yourself.

You'll have these kinds of conversations in the world and they will go to this place. But they fail completely to note its context. They fail to note the following two verses in which Paul presents Jesus as the Lord of the universe.

Specifically at the beginning of verse 17, which says, And he is before all things. Jesus was not created.

Jesus is the creator. He is God. Verse 19 says, For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.

[13:17] Jesus is where all that can be known or experienced of God is to be found. This is why Jesus was able to say in John 14, verse 9, Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.

Beloved, we have such a blessed gift in knowing Christ our Lord. He is God and he is preeminent because he is God.

Secondly, Jesus Christ is preeminent because he is the Lord of the universe. Verse 16 says, Jesus Christ is preeminent, supreme, more excellent as the creator of all things.

That is, everything that we can see and everything that we cannot see were created by Christ and they were created for Christ. This is a magnificent thought.

This is a thought that should captivate our minds to contemplate everything created by Christ for Christ. John confirms this in John chapter 1, verse 3.

[14:46] Speaking of Christ, all things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made. The entire universe was created by him and for him.

In 2012, a picture was released that the Hubble Space Telescope had captured, which was the farthest ever view into the universe. A photo that reveals thousands of galaxies, billions of light years away.

The picture, called Extreme Deep Field, or if you care, XDF, combines 10 years of Hubble telescope views of one patch of sky.

This compilation of all of these photos that have been taken. It is absolutely astounding to look at. It's incredible. I encourage you to look it up. In order to have your affections turned to the one who created the universe.

This expanse. I mean, we have just begun to understand how massive the universe is. How complex the universe is.

[15:47] And we don't have to wonder if there's life somewhere else. This is not the purpose of its creation. Psalm 19, verse 1 says, The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.

This universe was made by Christ, and it was made for him. It was meant so that we would look up at the night sky, and we would say of Jesus, right?

Awesome, supreme, more excellent. Abraham Kuyper once said, There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence, over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry, Mine.

It all exists for his glory. Jesus Christ is preeminent, as he was before all things.

Jesus says to the Jews in John chapter 8, verse 58, something scathing. He says, Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.

[16:56] And this doesn't make our jaws drop, but it would have made theirs. They would have been astounded by such a claim. Because he's referencing Exodus chapter 3, verse 14, where God says to Moses, Moses says, Who will I say has sent me?

And God says to Moses, Tell them, I am who I am. Say this to the people of Israel, I am has sent me to you.

This God, this self-existent, self-perpetuating God, I am. Jesus is that God. He has no beginning, and he has no end.

He has no origin, but he is the originator of all things. Jesus plugs into nothing. Everything else plugs in to Jesus. Right?

Gets its existence and its sustaining power from him. Jesus is preeminent because he's the sustainer of all things.

[17:57] Verse 17 tells us, In him all things hold together. In Hebrews chapter 1 and verse 3, again, says he upholds the universe by the word of his power.

Not only were all things created by him and set into motion by him, but all things are also sustained by him. Everything in the universe is made of atoms.

Remember science? Some of the science, protons, electrons, neutrons. We're homeschooling our kids. I'm getting reminded of so many things that I have long since forgotten. Scientists have labored over the past century to explain away the existence of God, but they have failed to explain how it is that the atom remains in its orbital state.

This is an incredible thing that's happening on this microscopic level. There has been some incredible advancements in this in recent years, but yet they still don't quite understand it.

Carl K. Darrow, a physicist, is cited in a book entitled The Atom Speaks in reference to what scientists are currently calling the strong nuclear force.

[19:09] And he said this, Do you grasp what this implies? It implies that all the nuclei have no right to be alive at all. Indeed, they never should have been created, and if created, they should have been blown up instantly.

Yet here they all are. Some inflexible inhibition is holding them relentlessly together. The nature of the inhibition is also a secret, one thus far reserved by nature.

Her self. Science has not answered this question, but the Bible has. The strong nuclear force is Jesus Christ and the word of his power.

It is because of him that these things exist, and we have our very being. Jesus stopped to speak by his powerful word.

This would all stop to exist. He is holding it together. Third, Jesus Christ is preeminent because he is the head of the church.

[20:13] Verse 18, He is the head of the body, the church. He's the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be

preeminent. He is the head of the body.

There are many metaphors in the New Testament used to describe the church, image after image after image. In our study on Sunday evenings on the church going on right now, I think we have discovered, if I'm remembering correctly, some 97 images of the church in the Bible.

It is called a family, a kingdom, a vineyard, a flock, a building, and a bride. But none is more helpful in our understanding of its form and function than that of a body made of many parts with Jesus Christ as the head.

This metaphor helps us to see the church as a living organism, inseparably tied together with life and mission by the living Christ. He controls every part of it.

He coordinates together the diversity of gifting and ministry for the sake of his name. Without him, the church ceases to have life. Jesus does not merely save the church, but is the head of the church also, also giving it life and giving it direction.

[21:29] The amazing declaration of Jesus when Peter says, you are the Christ, he says to him, yes, and this truth that you've declared, on this rock, I will build my church.

He has not ceased giving it life and direction. He is its life and he is its direction. He is the head of the body. He is the beginning.

He is the originator of the church. The word here for beginning has a two-fold sense of both source and primacy.

In Ephesians 1, in verse 4, Paul states that God chose us in him before the foundation of the world. Before any of this came to be, God had a plan that he would put together a church and place Christ as its head.

Not only that, but Jesus is also the firstborn from the dead. Here we have that word, prototokos, firstborn. Of all who have ever been raised or will ever be raised from the dead, he is of the highest rank.

[22:44] He rules over all. So Jesus Christ is preeminent because he is the Lord of the universe. He is the head of the church. He is God.

Fourthly, he is preeminent because of his redemptive work. Verse 20 says, and through him to reconcile to himself all things whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

Reconcile to himself. There are many ways that our salvation is explained in the scripture. We are justified. We once stood before God guilty and condemned, but in Jesus Christ we are declared righteous.

We are forgiven. We once stood before God as a debtor, but the debt has been paid by Jesus Christ and forgotten. We are adopted. We once stood before God as a stranger, but in Jesus Christ we are made children of the Most High.

Reconciliation is one of my favorites of these explanations. We are reconciled. We once stood before God as his enemies, but in Jesus Christ we are made his friend.

[24:03] The Greek word for reconcile means to change in relationship. Not in degree, but in kind.

We were once enemy, we are now friend. Romans chapter 5 and verse 10 Paul says, For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more now that we are reconciled shall we be saved by his life.

And he is working to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven. In Genesis chapter 1 verse 3 we see after the world was created by and for Christ that it was very good.

All of this goodness was marred by man's sin. All of that will one day be restored. The reconciliation of mankind is just one aspect, although the central aspect of Christ's restorative work.

He is making all things new. He will one day set it all right. This is the blessed future hope of the Christian. And he did all of this by the peace, by making peace, by the blood of his cross.

[25:23] Jesus' death on the cross was the means by which our reconciliation is made possible. On the cross Jesus Christ became the enemy of God and God justly punished him as such so that we might be reconciled to God, declared friends.

So Jesus is preeminent because he is God, because he is the Lord of the universe, because he is the head of the church and because of his redemptive work.

So what does all this have to do with the existence of Christ's family church? Well, for all of the aforementioned reasons, Jesus Christ is of highest ranking and should be worshipped as such. And this is why the church gathers and this is why the church goes. Whether or not you are part of this church or ever will be, you exist to glorify God by experiencing, proclaiming, and displaying the supremacy of Jesus Christ in all things to all peoples.

peoples. This vision statement is not some special gift to us. It's not revelatory. I don't stand up here as a man with a vision. This is just who the church is.

[26:39] This should be true of each and every church and it should be true of each and every individual who is found in Christ. Those who have been reconciled by his death on the cross rightly should experience, proclaim, and display his supremacy in all things to all peoples.

Right? And this is not a burdensome task because Jesus Christ is preeminent because he reigns. We can cast all of our anxieties and fears, our doubts, our troubles, our exhaustion, and our depression on him.

There is no situation that escapes his attention or his power. There is no circumstance that surprises him or evades his providential control. Everything in this world is very carefully ordered by Christ.

He is our confidence in life and death. He is the reason we can boldly share the good news of his kingdom because we have a future hope.

The reality of who Jesus is demands our affections and our obedience. The reality of who Jesus is makes sure the promises of God to us. so let us be a people who set ourselves to a constant previous contemplation of who Jesus is as we await our future blessedness.

[28:05] In closing, let me remind you of the words of John Owen, this therefore deserves the severest of our thoughts, the best of our meditations, and our utmost diligence in them.

Please join me in prayer.