

# Colossians 1:15-20

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[ 0 : 00 ] My original plan for this morning was to preach Matthew chapter 6 and verse 1.! That's not a typo on your bulletin.! It felt really just really horrible.

I'm improving now and I'm certainly glad to be with you. I wasn't actually sure I was going to be here. That's why Mr. Jeff led this morning.

I gave up talking about Calvin because I just wasn't sure if I was going to get to be here. As a small addition, I know that some of you hearing the name John Calvin in church, the hairs on the back of your neck might have bristled.

A little bit. Sadly, in a lot of circles, John Calvin gets a bad rap. Some would say, because of his theology, that he would have been anti-mission. But in fact, the school that he led in Geneva became known as Calvin's School of Death because young men who came to train there were so compelled by the teaching of the gospel of Jesus Christ, they went home to the places that they were from.

And most of them were martyred within a year. There's a great deal of missionary zeal that came out of Calvin's work and teaching amongst those men.

[ 1 : 39 ] So I didn't think I was going to get to be here. I wasn't sure. Very glad to be with you. But I didn't really believe myself nearly prepared enough to begin Matthew chapter 6.

So today I've dusted off some old notes, made some revisions to them, because I want to give you a clear picture of why Christ Family Church exists.

And I'll have you know that I had no idea that Jordan was going to lead us in that song before selecting this text for this morning. My prayer for this morning is that our time will be informative for you if you are new to our fellowship.

It is 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.

Now the vision statement for Christ Family Church is as follows. I hope it's become familiar to you. Christ Family Church exists to glorify God by experiencing, proclaiming, and displaying the supremacy of Jesus Christ in all things to all peoples.

[ 2 : 57 ] Now, when we talk about vision statement, we're simply saying this is the purpose for which our church, and I would contend that all churches exist.

I don't mean by this that I fell asleep one night and woke up with this statement in my mind. I don't think this is a unique thing to our fellowship, but it's a way to speak about why it is that we are called together as a people for God's praise.

And it is based largely from Colossians chapter 1, verses 15 through 20, which we're going to read together now.

Before I read the text, beloved, let me remind you that this is God's word to us. It was written for His glory and our good. And as such, we would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and obey its commands.

In Colossians chapter 1, beginning in verse 15. Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

[ 4 : 03 ] 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.

Now, every part of God's word gives testimony about Jesus Christ. In Luke chapter 24 and verse 27, we can read the account of Jesus' appearance to two of the disciples after His resurrection, where Luke records for us, and beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He, Jesus, interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself.

In John chapter 5, 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 than the text before us today.

[ 5 : 36 ] 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.

Paul writes in 2 Corinthians chapter 1 and verse 20, For all the promises of God find their yes in Jesus Christ. That is why it is through Him that we utter our amen to God for His glory.

It is important to know that verses 15 through 18 of this morning's text are thought to be a cosmic, Christological hymn.

Many scholars believe that Paul is citing a modern hymn of his day or a modern confession of his day. There are many interesting arguments to this point, but I will not bore you with my explanation of them.

[ 6 : 46 ] They consist primarily of sentence structure comparison. But the case is made that what he is doing is citing something that was common in their day.

Even more important to know is the focus of this cosmic, Christological hymn. And that focus is the preeminence, or we could say, the supremacy of Jesus Christ.

Last half of verse 18. That in everything He might be preeminent. Which means to be supreme or to be first in all things.

Above all else. That's what it means to be preeminent. Paul also states this reality in Philippians chapter 2 verses 9 through 11 where he wrote, God has highly exalted Jesus and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name.

So that at 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.

[ 7 : 59 ] So according to Paul, Christ is first in all things. He is preeminent or supreme. But how should we consider the truths contained within this text concerning the preeminence of Christ?

You may already be going, okay, great. Of what importance is that to me today? The Puritan John Owen wrote in his book entitled, The Glory of Christ the Following.

The revelation made of Christ in the blessed gospel is far more excellent, more glorious, more filled with rays of divine wisdom and goodness that the whole creation and the just comprehension of it, if attainable, can 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.

[ 9 : 38 ] The Christian eternity will be filled with the wonderment of Christ. So we should seek to know him now, that he might 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.

What we think about Jesus Christ is going to influence everything else that we do. Let me then encourage a constant previous contemplation.

And to help you do so, let us consider the text together in the following structure. So number one, this is the outline for our text, and I'll go back through it with great care. Number one, Jesus Christ is preeminent because he is God.

We see this in verses 15 and verse 19. Secondly, Jesus Christ is preeminent because he is the Lord of the universe. Verses 16 and 17.

[ 10 : 55 ] Third, Jesus Christ is preeminent because he is the head of the church. Verse 18. And fourth, Jesus Christ is preeminent because of his redemptive work.

Verse 20. So firstly, Jesus Christ is preeminent because he is God. Verse 15, Paul writes, He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

Paul says that by looking at Jesus, we see an image of God. The Greek word here is icon. Image or likeness.

We're familiar with this term in our day. Something that represents something else. The scriptures refer to man as the icon of God.

But we are not perfectly so. Much like a shattered piece of glass returns a poor reflection, so it is with us.

[ 11 : 59 ] Jesus, however, is both the perfect representation and the perfect manifestation of God. The man without sin.

Created in God's likeness. Hebrews chapter 1, the first half of verse 3 tells us that Jesus is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint, or the Greek word we get facsimile from, the exact facsimile of his nature.

Christ shines forth God's attributes as the sun gives light and heat to the earth. Jesus is himself God.

John chapter 1 and verse 1, in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. So as we behold Jesus Christ, we behold God the Father.

Paul proceeds to describe Jesus as the firstborn. And the Greek word here can mean simply firstborn. It can have a chronological in the family meaning to it.

[ 13 : 19 ] But it is most commonly used to refer to someone's position or their 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 in Colossians chapter 1.

But they fail completely to note its context. They fail to note the following two verses in which Paul represents Jesus as the Lord of the universe, specifically verse 17, and he is before all things. He was not created. Jesus himself is the creator. And verse 19, for in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.

So Jesus Christ is preeminent before all things created, and in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. Jesus is where all that could be known or experienced of God is to be found.

This is why Jesus was able to say in John chapter 14 and verse 9, whoever has seen me has seen the Father. So, Jesus Christ is preeminent because he is God.

[ 14 : 46 ] Secondly, Jesus Christ is preeminent because he is the Lord of the universe. Verses 16 and 17 speak to this.

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. Jesus Christ is supreme as the creator of all things.

That is everything that we can see and everything that we cannot see. They were all created by Christ and for Christ. By him and in service to him.

This is an absolutely magnificent thought which should capture our minds. John confirms this in John 1, verse 3. Speaking of Christ, all things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made.

[ 15 : 55 ] 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, which is called Extreme Deep Field or XDF if you're googling it, combines ten years of Hubble telescope views of one patch of sky.

It is absolutely astounding. It is incredible to look at and to behold and to imagine the vastness of the universe.

I really encourage you to look it up and have your affections turned to the one who created the universe. Psalmist writes in Psalm 19, 1, the heavens declare the glory of God and the skies above proclaim his handiwork.

We can now see that with technology louder than ever before. There is a greater proclamation of Jesus' supremacy as we look up to the universe that he created.

[ 17 : 19 ] It was created by him and it was created for him. Jesus Christ is preeminent as he was before all things.

The beginning of verse 17. Jesus says to the Jews in John 8, verse 58, Truly, truly, I say to you before Abraham was, I am.

And he's there referencing Exodus chapter 3, verse 14, where God said to Moses, I am who I am. Jesus had no beginning and he has no end.

He has no origin, but he is the originator of all things. So he is preeminent as he was before all things.

And he is preeminent as the sustainer of all things. Not only creator, but also the sustainer of all things. The last part of verse 17, Paul writes, and in him all things hold together.

[ 18 : 26 ] The writer of Hebrews says in chapter 1, verse 3, 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 stays in its sway by the mighty word of Jesus Christ. Everything in the universe, as far as we know, at least, is made of atoms, protons, electrons, neutrons, protons and neutrons packed into a nucleus, electrons whirling about the outer edge.

I've told you everything I now know about atoms. 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.

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

He writes, do you grasp what this implies? It implies that all the nuclei have no right to be alive at all. Instead, they should never have been created and if created, they should have blown up instantly.

[ 19 : 54 ] 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 herself.

Science hasn't answered this question of what the strong nuclear force is. Here this physicist says, it's impossible.

It's impossible that the world exists that is bound together in this way. It's nature that holds the secret and we're working to figure it out.

Science has yet to answer this question, but the Bible has. Paul, under the inspiration of the Spirit, tells us exactly how this happens.

He tells us that the strong nuclear force is Jesus Christ and the word of his power. This is incredible. The very thing holding us all together right now and flying off into pieces all over the place is the mighty power of Jesus Christ's word.

[ 21 : 09 ] Jesus has said, be this way, orbit in this fashion, bond in these pairs, and it will not cease happening in that way until he says, stop.

It's astounding. So, number one, Jesus Christ is preeminent because he is God. Number two, Jesus Christ is preeminent because he is the Lord of the universe. He made it and it exists for him and his praise.

Third, Jesus Christ is preeminent because he is the head of the church. And we see this in verse 18. Paul writes, and he is the head of the body, the church.

He is the beginning, the first born from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. So, he is the head of the body. There are many metaphors in the New Testament used to describe the church.

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

[ 22 : 22 ] This metaphor helps us to see the church as a living organism, inseparably tied together with life and mission by the living Christ.

This thing does not exist apart from Jesus as its head. He gives it its life and he gives it its mission. He controls every part of it.

He coordinates together the diversity of gifting and ministry for the sake of his name. Jesus does not merely save the church, but he is the head of the church also, giving it life and giving it direction. He's the head of the body. He is the beginning. Jesus is the originator of the church.

He is the beginning. The Greek word here has a two-fold sense of both source and primacy. In Ephesians 1, verse 4, Paul states that God chose us in him before the foundation of the world. [ 23 : 33 ] He is its source and without him it does not exist. Paul goes on to say that he is the firstborn from the dead.

And here we see that same Greek word for firstborn that speaks of order, order of progression. And what he's saying here is not that, because there were certainly those who were raised before Jesus, Lazarus as an example.

But what Paul is saying is of all those who have ever been raised or will ever be raised from the dead, he is of the highest rank.

He is the most important, right, as the source and the head of the church. He is preeminent. So he's preeminent because he is God, because he is the Lord of the universe, because he is the head of the church.

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

[ 24 : 52 ] There are many ways in which our salvation is explained in the scripture, and they are all wonderful in their own right. We are justified.

We once stood before God guilty and condemned, but in Jesus Christ we are declared righteous. Not just innocent, but we're given perfection in Christ.

We are referred to as forgiven. We once stood before God as great debtors, but the debt has been paid by Jesus Christ and now forgotten.

Our sins have been cast as far as the east is to the west. We are described as adopted. We once stood before God as strangers, but in Jesus Christ we are made children of the Most High.

We're called His own and made part of His family with all of the rights and rewards that come with that. All those things are wonderful, beautiful pictures of our salvation, but reconciliation is one of my favorites of these explanations.

[ 26 : 07 ] Reconciliation. We once stood before God as His enemies, angrily shaking our fist at Him and His ways, wanting to rule the world for ourselves, thinking we even know how to do such a thing.

But in Jesus Christ we are made God's friend. The Greek word for reconcile means to change in relationship.

So we receive in salvation this idea of reconciliation, a change of status. We go from enemies to friends.

It's a state of being. It's who we are. And this is not conditioned on what we do, but it's who we are because God has done it.

Jesus has reconciled us to God. And so now those who have been reconciled, because we have new identities, we live different.

[ 27 : 15 ] But it's that identity that changes the way we live and not the other way around. Beloved, we are not different in degree.

Every other religion in the world is teaching this. Different in degree. A striving for, a hoping to be better than, that we would be accepted.

We are different in type. That's a wonderful, wonderful reality. Paul wrote in Romans chapter 5 verse 10, And Paul says that Jesus is reconciling all things, whether on earth or in heaven.

In Genesis chapter 1 verse 3, we see that after the world was created by and for Christ, that it was very good. All of this goodness was marred by man's sin.

My wife weeded our yard quite a bit yesterday. That's a result of the corruption of creation. That's part of sinfulness. Things don't grow where they're supposed to grow any longer.

[ 28 : 38 ] My not feeling well at the end of this week was part of this cursedness that exists in the world. But all of that will one day be restored.

The reconciliation of mankind, although primary, most importantly, is just one aspect of Christ's restorative work.

And so we're going to live one day as those who have been reconciled to God in Christ in a world that will be reconciled to God, that will be set straight all together. what a thing to think about and look forward to.

And Paul tells us that Jesus did this by making peace by the blood of his cross. Jesus' death on the cross was the means by which our reconciliation is made possible.

The wrath of God poured out on Christ in that place. 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.

[ 29 : 50 ] Jesus Christ 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.

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. And this is not a burdensome task because Jesus Christ is preeminent.

We can cast all of our anxieties and fears, our doubts, our troubles, our depressions on him.

because he is preeminent there is no situation that escapes his attention or his power.

[ 31 : 14 ] Because he is preeminent there is no circumstance that surprises him or evades his providential control. Because he is preeminent he is our confidence in life and death.

And because he is preeminent he is the reason we can boldly share the good news of his kingdom.

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.

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.

Let's pray together.