

Christ's Redemptive Work Declared : In God's Action.

TEXT : Col 1:15 - 23

INTRODUCTION III – Story of grief

Ps 115 we are told that the nations look at these things and cry out . . . “Where is your God?” As we see calamity, pain, grief, injustice, oppression WHERE IS YOUR GOD?

Paul's rallying cry here, even in the face of such calamity, is **CHRIST IS PREEMINENT!**

Christ is preeminent over Creation (1:15 – 17)

Christ is preeminent over The Church (1:18 - 20)

Christ is “ ” over The Colossian's salvation (1:20 – 23)

A. **PREEMINENT OVER CREATION** : in 4 different ways Paul declares this – Christ is preeminent in creation because :

- Vs 15 He is the **Firstborn**
- Vs 16 He is the **Creator**
- Vs 16 He is the **Goal**
- Vs 17 He is the **Sustainer**

We sing the Hymn – “Crown Him With Many Crowns – The potentate of time.” We've never seen a King crowned with more than one crown, but in Rev 19:12 the Bible gives the vision of John when he looked into heaven and saw someone crowned with many crowns . . .

¹¹ *I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war.* ¹² *His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his*

head are many crowns. . . ¹⁶ *On his robe and on his thigh he has this name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS.*

The picture is one of Christ in his majesty and splendor. Christ deserves the many crowns! Revelations does not tell us what those crowns stand for, but let me suggest that one way to understand Paul's rallying cry in Colossians 1:15 is to see it as an enthronement. The Colossians seemed to be in doubt about Christ's rightful place and power, and so Paul reminds them of Christ's rightful place of honor – firstly we place the first Crown on Him for he is the **Creator**, and then place a second crown on top of the first because he is the **Sustainer of Creation**.. Then crown him with the 3rd crown of being “**Firstborn**”, and a fourth crown of being the very **goal of creation**. And if you go onto vs 18, there are yet MORE crowns to be placed on his head. Why so many crowns?

Well, look at the first – He is the Firstborn! – What does it mean to be first born? Does it mean that he was the first created thing in the universe? Of-course not, for in the next breath Paul says that Christ is infact the creator. Being the Firstborn is a term used in several parts of scripture to denote the treasured, the favorite one – the apple of God's eye. In Exodus 4:22 God says ²¹ *The LORD said to Moses, "When you return to Egypt, see that you perform before Pharaoh all the wonders I have given you the power to do. But I will harden his heart so that he will not let the people go.* ²² *Then say to Pharaoh, `This is what the LORD says: Israel is my firstborn son,*

And in Ps 89:27, one of what is called the Messianic Psalms – psalms that talk about the Coming Messiah, God calls the Messiah “My Firstborn”. So when Paul calls Christ the Firstborn over all creation he means that the highest honor belongs to him.

Why, because ALL things in creation were created by him, for him and are sustained thru him. What then can you compare him to? What things in our finite world make one “Preeminent”? It is Power, Authority, Rulers and Thrones. But Christ cannot be compared to these for he made them all! Anything that you compare him to has to be outside of creation, and the only thing that exists outside of creation, that was NOT created, is God himself. Will you compare Christ to God – you cannot for HE IS God.

How does he relate with creation? ¹⁶ *For by him All things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and all things were created for him.* ¹⁷ *He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.* There is **NOTHING** that is created that was not created **BY** him, **FOR** him and **THRU** him.

Boy, these thots in vs 15 – 17 makes one stop and ask ALL? And the answer is yes!

- All things
- All creation
- All wisdom
- All majesty
- All life
- All that you have
- All your belongings,
- All your Valuable things
- All your loved ones
- All your strength . . .
- The question then is – how big is your God? How big is the Christ in You?
-

For some of us he is not very big – we don’t trust him – we don’t believe he has very much **wisdom**, let alone this talk about him

creating all wisdom? We’re suspicious of his plans and we certainly are not about to abandon ourselves to him unreservedly.

For some of us we don’t trust his **strength**, and we know the Christ in us needs help from time-to-time. After all look at what a mess he created in my life when I tried to follow his Word; and in his days he didn’t know anything about bribery and how the economy works, so sometimes I just have to do things different.

For some of us we don’t trust his **promise** that he has our best interest at heart, and so we are more committed to pursuing our goals for our lives that his goals for our life.

How big is the Christ in you – he is certainly NOT the Christ that Paul talks about here but is a faint shadow, a fake of the real Christ – the real Christ is **TRUSTWORTHY** – for all **WISDOM** belongs to him; he is **ABLE** for all **POWER** belongs to him; he is **AWESOME** for all **CREATION** belongs to him to govern and use as he so determines; he is **WORTHY OF WORSHIP** for it is he who **SUSTAINS** the universe, this world and you and me. Your Christ has to ask you permission to do anything in your life, he has to plead with you and sweet-talk you; and coax you with promises of blessings to get you to act – **HE IS NOT THE CHRIST THAT PAUL IS TALKING ABOUT HERE!**

You know, in some way we are no different from these false teachers in Colossae – for when the world observes the Christ we serve, or rather, who serves us they see how we command him around, how we don’t really trust him, how we are ashamed to speak about him – he is like an untrustworthy messenger – at our beck and call. We too teach the world that Christ is insufficient, Christ is weak, Christ cannot accomplish without our wisdom and help.

The Christ that Paul is talking about here is **PREEMINENT**

- Preeminent in our **families**
- Preeminent in our **marriages**
- Preeminent in our **professions**
- Preeminent in our **time**
- Preeminent in our **love**
- Preeminent in our **conversations**
- Preeminent in our **pleasures**
- Preeminent in **what we watch**
- Preeminent in our **music**

And so the question is “*How big is YOUR God?*” Look at the current struggles in your life. Are they not struggles BECAUSE you have not enthroned Christ as PREEMINENT? The need of the hour is for you to enthrone him in prayer and say Christ I Know that you are able; I can trust you WITHOUT anxiety! For you are the creator, the sustainer, the firstborn. YOU ARE ABLE.

Ill -

B. PREEMINENT OVER THE CHURCH : In Vs. 18 – 20, Paul put a few more crowns on Christ’s head. This is now

- Crown No 5 – He is the **HEAD** of the Church.
- Crown No 6 – He is the **FIRSTBORN** from among the dead
- Crown No 7 – He is the supreme **REDEEMER**.

Crown No 5 : Why does Christ have the 5th Crown? Why is he head of the church, when and how did he earn that crown? There are many passages in scripture that answer that question – lets look at a couple

Phil 2: 5 Christ Jesus was in very nature God, but did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, ⁷ but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human

likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death -- even death on a cross! ⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,

Rev 5:3 . . . no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. ⁴ I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside. ⁵ Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals."

⁶ Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders; and they fell down before the Lamb. ⁹ And they sang a new song:

"You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. ¹⁰ You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."

Col 1: 19 – 20 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, 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.

Has deserves this 5th crown? YES, because he entered his own creation and he himself birthed the church.

Crown No 6 : What about that 6th crown, surely Christ was not the first to be resurrected from the dead, after all what about all the resurrections from the dead that we see in the old testament, Elijah and Elisha, and what about all the people Christ resurrected himself – the little girl, the widows son, Lazarus? How does he

get the title “First born from among the dead”? It’s a good question, but there are 4 things that make Christ’s death unique

- (i) He knew that he was going to die and be resurrected – none of the others did.
- (ii) All the others were resurrected by someone else, not so with Christ, he resurrected himself
- (iii) His resurrection had been prophesied over and over in scripture by a long line of prophets and prophetic utterance. This is not true for the others, theirs was a simple fact of death.
- (iv) All the others were resurrected so as to die again, not so with Christ, because his resurrection was unique.

Crown No 7 he is the supreme reconciler?

III - The Titanic. - *On April 15, 1912, the Liner **Titanic** raised her stern high above the frigid waters of the North Atlantic and began her slow, seemingly calibrated descent towards the bottom of the sea. That famous night saw the extremes of human behavior – from sheer cowardice to the terrible beauty of sacrificial love. But with the Titanic gone and with her lifeboats spread upon the icy waters among the crying, drowning swimmers, the story was almost totally devoted to self-serving cowardice, for of the 1,600 people who were not able to get into the lifeboats, only 13 were picked up by the 18 half empty boats that hovered nearby.*

In boat no 5, when the 3rd Officer Pitman heard the anguished cries, he turned the boat around and shouted, “Now, men, we will pull towards the wreck!” But the passengers protested, “Why should we lose all our lives in a useless attempt to save others from the ship?” Pitman gave in. And for the next hour No. 5, with 40 people on board and a capacity for 65, heaved gently on the calm Atlantic, while the 40 listened to the fading cries of swimmers 300 yards away. The story was much the same with the other boats. In No. 2, Forth Officer Boxhall asked the ladies, “Shall we go back?”

They said no, so Boat No. 2, about 60 % full, likewise drifted while her people callously listened. Boat No 6, the situation was reversed as the women begged Quartermaster Hitchens to return, but he refused, painting a vivid picture of the drowning overturning the boat. The women pleaded as the cries grew fewer and fewer. Of the 18 boats, only 1 boat, Boat No. 4, returned to help – and that was 1 hr after the Titanic’s sinking, when the threshing crowd had “thinned out”.¹

Is mankind in need of redemption – most certainly YES!

But mankind is not the only one in need of redemption. In recent days we have heard of Earthquakes in Turkey, Tornadoses in America, and Tidal Waves in Papua New Guinea, floods in Bangladesh. Nature itself is in need of reconciliation.

Recently while I was in Southern Tanzania, there was a pack of lions in the area we were in which was praying on human settlements. The day before I got there one had carried a little girl off into the bush, but the father gave chase, and eventually it dropped the child and run off into the bush, but not before it had mullered and torn open her belly, and she was in critical condition at the hospital. The Animal kingdom is in need of reconciliation.

But in Christ - God has redeemed all creation to himself. We may not see the full fruits of that because we live in the age of the now, and the not yet – in other words the war has been won, but there are still pockets of resistance where the victory is not clearly visible, and will only become truly visible when Jesus comes back.

¹ Walter Lord, *A Night To Remember*, pp 70/71.

B. PREEMINENT OVER THE COLOSSIAN'S :

III – My own life.

The Focus of Vs 15 – 20 is all about Christ, but in Vs 21 – 23, Paul now brings it all home and talks about the Colossians personal experience of Christ “Once you . . .” And here he gives Christ one more crown

Crown No 8 – He has RECONCILED YOU

And this he did while you were an enemy of his. But God has done this for a purpose : vs 22 *But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.*

The picture here is the same as that in Eph 5; imagine the wedding day, and Jesus is escorting his bride down the aisle. This is the wedding that the whole of creation has been waiting for, longing for, looking forward to; and as the bride appears at the door, the heavens break out into a cheer – Finally!

But hang on a minute, the bride is limping, my goodness, it's not limping, its that one of her shoes doesn't have a heel, and her dress is soiled and torn, AND oh! My Goodness! She has a BLACKEYE! The bride has been fighting, she looks scruffy, tired and ugly! This is the bride Christ has waited 2000 yrs to present to his Father? A dismal picture this paints, but isn't this the sort of bride Christ will have to present if the church goes on the way it does, with so much internal politics and squabbling?

Now Paul in this section is speaking, not to the church in general, but to the Colossian Church and it's members specifically. Allow me therefore to apply this passage to us specifically.

In studying the passage, I was struck by the reason of his redeeming us, and particularly by the words in vs 22 – he wants to present me to his father

- Holy in His sight
- Without blemish
- Free from accusation.

Because of what Christ has done, I am now Holy in God's sight; I am now without blemish; and I am now free from any condemnation and accusation. In Col 3:3, Paul says that our lives are now hidden with Christ – when God looks at me, he sees what his Son has done for me thru the cross; he sees his son's holiness shining thru me; his son's perfection, shining thru me; and the fact that his son cannot be accused.

This is what Paul means! But I think he means more than that also for he never-the-less instructs the Colossians that these things are only so if you continue in your faith, holding onto the Gospel that was given you by Epaphras. I'll tell you what struck me most powerfully about that thot . . .

Because we live in the victory of Christ – the NOW – I know that I am free from all accusations. Christ's completed work on the cross is sufficient for me. God does not accuse me, because his son has redeemed me.

But we also live in the “not-yet” – the fact that we are still at battle, and we have a responsibility and obligation to live in such a way that no accusation brought against me can stick. You see, even while I am Christ, I have 2 accusers! The first is the Father of lies – Satan; and the second is those that hate the Lord. And together they accuse me before my God, they accuse me before my Christ; and they accuse me before mankind. God knows their accusations are wrong, Christ knows their accusations are false BUT the WORLD does not. Therefore God calls us to live “free

from accusations”. I Pet 2:12 tells us “*Live such good lives among the unbelievers that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us.*”

Live ” . . . *free from accusation . . .*” – do you do that? What does it mean to live free from accusation?

Ill - Witnessing In Elgeyo-marakwet

In other words, live above reproach, live above compromising situations.

CONCLUSION : Christ is preeminent, but have you truly enthroned him as preeminent in your life? In your trials? In your struggles?

Christ has redeemed you with his blood, are you living above reproach? Are you free of accusations? Are there some that can stick to you because your life is not above reproach?

Take this moment of quiet to examine your heart, maybe God has spoken to you about a specific area of your life that needs to be set right, a specific area you need to enthrone him in and allow him to take charge, an area that is not above reproach . . .

Christ's Sufficiency Declared

By God's Action:

A. Preeminent Over Creation (1:15 – 17)

- Crown No 1 - He is the **FIRSTBORN** of creation
- Crown No 2 - He is the **CREATOR** of creation
- Crown No 3 - He is the **GOAL** of creation
- Crown No 4 - He is the **SUSTAINER** of creation

B. Preeminent Over The Church (18 - 20)

- Crown No 5 – He is the **HEAD** of the Church.
- Crown No 6 – He is the **FIRSTBORN**
- Crown No 7 – He is the **RECONCILER**.

C. Preeminent Over The Colossian's Redemption (21– 23)

- Crown No 8 – He has **RECONCILED YOU**

Warren Wiersby in his commentary of Colossians gives the following story that well illustrates the essence of our text for today.

“Almost a 100 yrs ago – in 1893, the famous World’s Colombian Exposition was held in Chicago, and an astronomical number of people, especially in those pre-automobile days, some 21 million people, visited the exhibits. America, and particularly Chicago, which had risen Phoenix-like from the great fire of 1873, was showing off to the rest of the world. And the show was good. Among the features of the Colombian Expositions was the “World parliament of Religions”, in which representatives of the world’s religions met to share their best points and perhaps come up with a new world religion.

D.L. Moody saw this as a great chance for evangelism. Moody commissioned evangelists and assigned them to “preaching posts” throughout the city. He used churches and rented theaters. He even rented a circus tent to preach the Word. Moody’s friends wanted him to attack the “Parliament of Religions”, but he refused, saying, “I am going to make Jesus Christ so attractive that men will turn to him.” D. L. Moody knew that preaching Christ preeminent – the peerless, supreme, all sufficient Christ, clearly presented – would do the job. And indeed it did. The “Chicago Campaign” of 1893 is considered to be the greatest evangelistic work of Moody’s celebrated life, and thousands came to Christ.²

And so History equally proves, that no-one and nothing compares to Christ.

² Warren Wiersby, Be Complete, pp 52, 53.