

**April 13, 2008**

*Colossians 1:17-18*

Alright good morning again. I'm glad you are back today. I hope you are as well. I'm still excited about verses we began looking at last Sunday so grab your Bibles and let's go back to Colossians chapter 1. We read verses 15-18 last week but focused on verses 15 & 16. Let's go back and look at the full text again.

"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 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 for Him. 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, and the firstborn from among the dead so that in everything He might have the supremacy."

Since we are picking up in the middle of the text today, let me remind us of what we saw last week. Remember that this whole passage is talking about Jesus. The "he" Paul is writing about refers back to verse 13 when Paul explains that God has brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves. That "Son" is Jesus Christ and that is who this passage is all about.

And the reason that Paul is writing this incredible thesis on Jesus is because of the heresy – the false teachings – that are causing problems and questions for the Colossian believers. We talked about them last week, but basically in a nutshell, they are being told that Jesus is not God – instead he is one of a number of emanations – lesser beings – that God created. Basically, Jesus is a good angel and knowing Him is not enough for salvation.

So in these verses Paul hammers the truth home. Jesus is the image of the invisible God – the person of Jesus is the perfect representation of the God the Father. He is the firstborn over all creation. Remember – that was not about timing – that was about position. That Jesus is the highest – the ranking one – He is the one who inherits all of creation. Not only that, Paul explains that by Him all things were created – not just the stuff around us – but everything on earth and in the heavens. And we took a moment last week to broaden our scope on creation with a glimpse into the vastness and the bigness of the universe, all that Jesus simply spoke into being - not only what we can see – but also what we can't see – including the thrones, rulers, powers, authorities that we understood to be talking about the different kinds or ranks of angels. Even the angels were created by and are in submission to Jesus. And then possibly the most important part – all of that – all that He made was created for Him. The meaning of life – the purpose of the universe – the point of our lives – is to be for the glory of Jesus Christ. Jesus is God. And Jesus is Creator. Awesome. But Paul isn't finished yet. Look back at verse 17 with me. He says, "He – Jesus – is before all things."

Now where the word "firstborn" in verse 15 was not about timing, this in verse 17 is about timing. Jesus is **before** all things. Jesus did not come into being at Christmas. **Jesus existed as GOD before He was ever known as Jesus. He lived in eternity past before he ever put FLESH on in Bethlehem.** And that truth is one of the main things the enemy and this world try to undermine by saying Jesus was a good man, a good teacher, a prophet. No – Jesus was God as man.

In **John 17** Jesus is talking to God the Father in prayer and He says in **verses 4-5**:

"I have brought you glory on earth by completing the work you gave me to do. And now, Father, glorify me in your presence with the glory I had with you before the world began."

Wow – what a statement: "The glory I had with you before the world began." Remember we've talked before about the conversation in

**John 8** between Jesus and the Jews when in verse 58 Jesus says, “I tell you the truth, Jesus answered, before Abraham was born, I am!” And the Jews knew right then he was claiming to be God – to have existed before creation – because they were so mad at the claim Jesus was making that they tried to pick up rocks and stone him to death.

Think back a couple of years ago to our study of **Philippians** where Paul explains in **chapter 2 (5-8)** that Jesus did not consider equality with God as something to be grasped – to be held on to – but instead chose to become a servant and humbled himself to be born like us. Jesus is the pre-existing one – He is before all things. Which makes sense when you look at last week. In order for Jesus to create everything, He would have to be around before it, right? He is before all things. He made all things. All things are for Him. And He is the heir of all things.

And then look at what Paul says. He says “He is before all things and **in Him all things hold together.**” Now this is another one of those statements like we saw last week when we looked at the truth that “by Him all things were created, things in heaven and on earth.” Easy to read – easy to nod your head and agree with – but also easy not to really grasp in a way that glorifies the power and majesty of Jesus.

In Him all things hold together. Hebrews 1:3 says the same thing when it says “He sustains all things by the word of His power.” Present tense – sustains – holds – now.

The reason we can send men out in space in little tin cans and make sure they come back and plop back in the right spot is because God has rules that don’t change. Do you realize that if the earth’s rotation slowed down just a little bit, we would alternately freeze and burn? So it has to rotate at the same speed constantly. The temperature of the sun is 12,000 degrees Fahrenheit. If we were any further or closer to it or if it changed temperatures, the same thing would happen. The earth is tilted on an imaginary axis at 23 degrees that enables us to have 4 seasons. If it doesn’t stay just like that, then huge ice continents would pile up at the north and south. If the moon doesn’t stay at the exact distance that it is from earth, the ocean tides would drown us. If the ocean slipped just a few feet deeper than it is, carbon dioxide and oxygen in the earth’s atmosphere would be completely absorbed and no vegetable life could exist. Who holds all that together – who sustains all that has been made? Chance? No, Jesus. And you may have known all that, but while I was studying for this sermon, John MacArthur pointed me to something I didn’t really know. Let me digress for a minute.

Nuclear science tells us that everything in the universe is constructed by three fundamental particles – protons, neutrons, and electrons – the parts of the atom. You know this, that in the middle you have a nucleus that has protons and neutrons in it and then electrons shooting around the outside. You can’t see them, but those are the building blocks of all matter. Now let’s just talk about the nucleus.

Scientists know that each proton carries a positive charge of electricity. Neutrons are neutral, science doesn’t know why – they just are. But the strange part is that for decades, science has had an unbreakable law that says like charges of electricity and magnetism repel each other. Every kid out there knows this – that when you try and force the two positive ends of two strong magnets together you can’t do it. And yet here we have this tiny nucleus full of protons and neutrons and yet the neutrons aren’t being shot out and the protons aren’t blasting away from each other. Coulomb’s law they came up with in the 1930s says that in the nucleus of every atom is this mutual repulsion trying its best to shatter the atom.

But strangely enough – and this is something we can’t understand – there is a second force in a nucleus that fights against the force that wants to split it up and instead holds it together. Science calls it “nuclear glue.” They haven’t the faintest idea what it is. So here’s the atom – two conflicting laws at work – when science gets down to the most basic reality, it comes up with an unanswerable question. The laws of science say this baby is going to blow up. In fact, Carl Darrol, a physicist with

Bell Labs in NY City said that these nuclei “never should have been created, and if they were created, they should have blown up instantly. Yet there they are.”

Science calls it nuclear glue. You know what it is? Colossians 1:17. “In Him all things hold together.” See – **all that we see and all that we can’t, all we know and all we don’t CONTINUES because of Jesus.** And let me just suggest a possibility to you. Listen to **2 Peter 3:10 and 11:**

“But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be?”

The word destroyed there is the word literally to be dissolved. It is the word *luo* in Greek that means to loose – to loose that which is bound. You know what this passage describes? The end of nuclear glue.

Some day, when it gets to be God’s time, Jesus is going to unstick the atoms, the universe will explode, the heavens will disappear with a roar, the elements will melt by fire, and the earth and everything else will be burned up. Nuclear glue is gone, Coloumb’s Law of repulsion takes over, and everything comes to an end. Until then, Paul simply says right here in Colossians, He is before all things and in Him all things hold together. Last week we saw **in verses 15 & 16 that Jesus is God and Jesus is creator. Now Paul shows us in verse 17 that Jesus is still GOD** (He is before all things) **and Jesus is SUSTAINER** (in Him all things hold together). Praise His Name.

As Paul continues in verse 18 he transitions from talking about the large scale of all of creation – big and small to a smaller scale of just the church. Look at it with me.

“And He – Jesus – is **the head of the body, the church**, He is the beginning, and the firstborn from among the dead.”

The church is called a lot of things in the Bible: a family, a kingdom, a vineyard, a flock, a building, a bride, but one of the most common and expanded metaphors is that we are the body of Christ. And as such, Christ is the head and we are the limbs, the organs, the parts that function in response to the domination of the brain – the head. 1 Corinthians 12 really unpacks that imagery but I don’t want to spend too much time on that because the point Paul is making here is about the head. Jesus is the head of the church. What does that mean? Well he isn’t speaking here so much organizationally as organically. I mean – what does your head do for you?

Which I guess that really varies a lot. I’m sure there are several of you parents out there who wonder if your kid’s head is doing anything for them – so I guess things are relative – but generally speaking, let’s take it from the simplest standpoint. Your head does two basic functions: growth & guidance.

At the base of your skull you have a gland known as the pituitary gland and the function of that gland, among other things, is to produce hormones that create growth. Your head is responsible for your growth.

Secondly, your brain is also responsible for controlling your body. The cerebrum controls the parts of the body – it is the harmonizer of muscle action. This is what controls the direction of the body – it gives everything else guidance about what to do when, where, and for how long.

In a real literal way, that is exactly what Jesus does. **Jesus provides the GROWTH of the church by pumping His life into us.** Jesus says in Matthew 16 “I will build my Church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.” And **he provides the GUIDANCE for the Church through the Word.** Through the Word He tells us what to do, when to do it, where to do it, and how long to do it. There is no higher authority in the church than Jesus. There aren’t any equals, there aren’t any competitors, there is no power struggle here any more than my kidneys could fight my brain for control over my growth and function. He is the head of the body, the church.

And then still talking in the context of the church, Paul says he is the **beginning**. The word in Greek is **arche** and it can have two meanings to it. It can have the sense of originating power – **the sense**

**of source. That Jesus is the source – the creator not just of the heavens and the earth, but of the CHURCH.** He is the one who brought it and us to life.

But it can also be understood **in terms of rank. That Jesus is the SUPREME one in his church.**

And when you put all that together, Paul is saying that **not only is he generating growth and giving guidance, but Jesus alone is worthy of GLORY.**

And that thought is echoed in the final phrase we'll look at today. Paul says that Jesus is **“the firstborn from among the dead.”** We know the word firstborn from last week – that it is **not indicating time, but POSITION.** Jesus was not the first one to come back from the dead. There are several mentions of people coming back to life through the ministry and power of God throughout the Bible's story. But this word firstborn – **prototokos – means the highest one, the GREATEST one, the ranking one, the one in authority, even the inheriting one.**

And if we think about it, we can see how this ties into what Paul just said about Jesus being the beginning – being worthy of glory. Going back to **Philippians 2**, Paul tells us that because Jesus was willing to become a man, to humble himself, to die on the cross, and then to come back to life – verses 9-11

“Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 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.”

**Of all those who have been raised from among the dead, and of all those who will be given life after death – us – Christians – the church – Jesus is the firstborn – the prototokos – the greatest – the EXALTED – the highest – the one worthy of honor.**

As a church we exist for a specific purpose. We are not just another organization, we are not just another club. We belong to Christ – he rules over us – like our vision statement says, we are striving to do life in Christ day after day after day for His glory. I always hate hearing about these places that claim to be churches but have no concern for what Jesus wants, they ignore His Word, they make up their own rules and definitions, basically they do whatever they want to do and are not devoted to the honor of Christ. I wish they would stop confusing people by calling themselves a church and just call themselves a club, because that's what they are. Jesus is our head. We exist for Him.

Wow. What an amazing picture of Jesus.

15 *Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.*

16 *For by Jesus 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 for him.*

17 *Jesus is before all things, and in Jesus all things hold together.*

18 *And Jesus is the head of the body, the church; Jesus is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead,*

And why does Paul cram all this amazing truth about Jesus into this thesis on Jesus?

So that the Colossians and you and I might have a right view of Jesus. That He is God. He is Creator. He is Sustainer. He is the head of the church. He is the source of our growth. He is the source of our guidance. He is our hope of life after death. We don't need anyone else or to know anything else for salvation. He alone is worthy of our lives, our worship, and all we are – for all we are and all we have comes from Him.

**See the question we have to ask ourselves in response to Colossians 1:15-18 is “is this MY VIEW of Jesus” or has something or someone or my own pride somehow minimized or eclipsed Jesus in my life?**

Folks today as last week, I pray that Jesus might be great in your eyes. And that you and I might love Him moment by moment – that we might live our lives in reverent awe of this Jesus whose name we claim and whose name we bear.

**Jesus show us YOUR glory, and help it change our lives today.**