

The Core: Living with Jesus at the Center

“Jesus Hymn: Sovereign, Source, Savior”

Colossians 1:17-18

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17 And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 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 (Col 1:17-18).

Life falls apart without Jesus. I would guess that all of us know that to be true. We've seen it play out in our lives—in our character, our marriages, our homes, our careers, our relationships, and in our finances. Most of us know that this is the case, and we've seen it happen. However, the real problem is not denying that this is true; it is living with the truth—life falls apart without Jesus--at the core of everything.

Last week we learned that Colossians 1:15-20 is some kind of hymn or creed, and it begins with a powerful declaration of Jesus' supremacy over everything. Jesus is the full disclosure of God to man, first in honor and rank, creator over everything, and therefore nothing exists outside of his realm of authority, dominion, or power. Further, everything was made for Christ and his glory. Every human being was made to glorify Christ. We will glorify Christ by confessing him as our Savior and Lord when we repent of our sin and receive Him, or we glorify Him as we receive the due punishment for our sins in Hell.

The issue is not if we glorify Christ. The issue is how we glorify Christ—either in salvation or in judgment. And that is just another way to capture the clear message in Colossians that strikes at the independent, self-reliant streak in all of us: You don't make Jesus the Center; He is the center.

Our text this morning builds upon the supremacy of Christ that is established in verses 15 and 16 by identifying that Jesus holds everything together which should lead us to realize that Jesus not only needs to be first in rank but also first in influence or very simply: life falls apart without Jesus.

You see the premise of this book is not complicated (at least to understand). Paul simply identifies who Jesus is and then helps us to understand what should happen in light of that truth. So if it is true that life falls apart without Jesus then what should we do, think, or say to help us live with that truth in our hearts and our daily lives?

I want to give you three confessional statements (summaries of what we believe) that flow out of the truths that we learn about Jesus in verses 17-18.

1. "I'm dependent on you" (v 17)

The first confession that we need to make is that we are dependent upon Jesus for everything. Life falls apart when we forget that we cannot make it—really, do anything—apart from Christ. Unfortunately, I don't learn this lesson very easily. I usually learn it after things fall apart or after I've been trying to do it on my own. I think that is a sign of immaturity when we are more apt to say "I'm dependent on you" only after we realize it because of hard circumstances as opposed to saying "I'm dependent on you" because of our deep understanding of who Jesus is. I want to get to the point in my life that saying "I'm dependent on you" is a forward looking statement, not an evaluation of what I missed again or what God had to teach me the hard way.

Verse 17 identifies that Jesus is "before all things." The word means that Jesus is in front of or prior to everything that exists. Therefore, the idea simply means that Jesus is preexistent of everything that is, and, therefore, everything exists by him, through him, and to him. So to be "before" all things is not just a statement of time. It is a declaration of source. In other words there was never a time when he wasn't, and nothing exist outside or prior to him.

So Christ's preexistence implies power and authority. It makes everything else dependent upon him, even the Father of the Jewish people—Abraham. The religious leaders knew what Jesus was saying when he asserted his preexistence. In fact, they wanted to kill him for it.¹

To be before all things means that you are God and everything depends on you.

The second thing that we learn in verse 17 is that "in him all things hold together." This is dependency of a different kind. Jesus is not only the source, but he is also the sustainer and preserver of the universe. Jesus is great unifier of the universe. Everything is held together by him. As Hebrews 1:3 says, "he upholds the universe by the word of his power." So you could think of Jesus as the living link or the vital bond that holds things together.

Now for the last three weeks, I have received more emails and phone calls for a particular illustration than I have ever received. I probably received 15 emails saying things like, "Mark, you've got to show this." So under great pressure, but also because it is really helpful, here is Louis Giglio talking about a protein called Laminin

¹ Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad." 57 So the Jews said to him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham?" 58 Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am." 59 So they picked up stones to throw at him, but Jesus hid himself and went out of the temple (John 8:56-59).

Video: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e4zgJXPpI4>

But do you know that image that Jesus used? He put it this way: "I am the vine; you are the branches...apart from me you can do nothing" (John 14:5). And I think that there are few things more critical for us to deeply understand than the fact that we are dependent on Him for everything. We are dependent on Christ, and it is simply a matter of whether or not we acknowledge that fact and live like it.

Dependency upon Jesus begins with trusting Him as Savior and Lord for the forgiveness of our sins. We are dependent upon him for a right relationship with God. But that is only the beginning of our need for Him. Colossians 1:17 calls us to live dependent lives all of the time, relying on the very life of Christ in us. Jesus gives us the Spirit as the agent to accomplish dependency.

Remember, it is "Christ in you, the hope of glory." So we need to see dependency through a new lens:

- That Jesus, by definition, is the source of everything
- He holds everything together
- Salvation come by dependency on Christ
- Christlikeness equals growing in dependency
- It is the Spirit's role to help you be more dependent
- You can do nothing apart from dependency
- God loves dependency

Therefore – we need to embrace anything that causes dependency and get on board with it.

2. "I need your power" (v 18a)

The second confession that comes out of this text is a statement of what we need from Jesus: power. The first confession directed our hearts to Jesus, and this statement indicates what we need from him. It is an acknowledgement of dependency, but even more – it is a statement of inadequacy.

Admitting inadequacy is different than admitting you are dependent. Inadequacy is acknowledging that you are powerless to change the circumstances that made you realize you are dependent. For those husband who hate to ask for directions this will help you understand the difference. Knowing that you need to stop and ask directions reflects a level of dependency. But saying, "I'm lost...can you help me?" reflects your inadequacy to figure out where to go on your own.

This is why many people refuse to come to Christ in the first place. They are simply unwilling to admit that they are absolutely powerless to do fix the problems of their life. And tragically, Hell will be filled with self-reliant people.

Verse 18 has two important phrases in it: “head of the body, the church” and “he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead.” Both of these reflect the power of Christ. Paul uses illustration of a body in order to communicate what Christ is to the church. He identifies Christ as the head which means the following:

- He is the ultimate authority
- He is the true leader
- He is the source of life

Hebrews 12:2 describes him as the “founder and perfecter” of our faith. He establishes the church, and he is the one who empowers the church. Jesus one time asked Peter who he (Peter) thought Jesus really was. Peter replied, “You are the Christ, the son of the Living God” (Matt. 16:16). And then Jesus said, “On rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it” (Matt. 16:18).

One of my favorite books on revival is entitled “God at Work?” by Jonathan Edwards.² He identifies, from 1 John 4, five marks of genuine revival. The first one he lists is “When esteem for the true Jesus is raised.” In other words, a sign of true revival is when people come to realize in fresh and new ways their need for Jesus. They know that they are powerless without him.

“So, if people are being convinced of their need of Christ and led to him; if their belief that Christ appeared in history is strengthened; if they are more convinced than ever that he is the Son of God sent to save sinners; if they acknowledge that he is the only Savior and they need him desperately; if they appreciate him more than they did, and love him too—we may be quite sure that it is the Holy Spirit who is at work.”³

Jesus is the head of the church, he is the source of all power and authority. But there is more here.

He is also described as the firstborn from the dead. This means that Jesus was the first one who God raised from the dead (Galatians 1:1), and he was the first-fruits of a coming resurrection for all who know him as Savior (1 Cor. 15:20). In other words, Jesus’ resurrection was a clear statement to the Devil that sin and death were defeated. Through Jesus’ victory, his followers received the power to defeat sin and death as well. So his status as firstborn from the dead means something very powerful for those who know him as Savior.

² The actual title is “The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God.”

³ Gary Benfold, ed. Jonathan Edwards. God at Work? London, England: Grace Publication Trust, 1995. p. 35.

Here is how Romans 6:3-4 connects the dots for us:

“3 Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? 4 We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life.”

It is very clear: we share in Jesus' resurrected power. If he is the firstborn from dead and the source of power, then it is imperative that we recognize our need to have him empower our lives. And this is the conclusion that Paul comes to in Romans 6:12-13

“Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal bodies, to make you obey their passions. 13 Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.”

Therefore, the second cry of our hearts needs to be “Lord, I need your power!” It sounds like this in Philippians 4:10—“...that I may know him and the power of his resurrection...” The question then is rather simple: where do you need Christ's power in your life? Just think of your life right now and evaluate where things seem to be falling apart. Jesus can help turn things around! He conquered sin and death; there is nothing too hard for him.

- He can take a sinful desire that is so strong, and he can make it unappetizing
- He can break the enemy's power in your life, giving you new desires that you would never have had without him
- Jesus can give you love for a spouse, a child, or friend who seems unlovable
- He can give you strength to face uncertain days, fears, or complex problems with no clear solutions
- He can give your words and actions power that they wouldn't have on their own
- He can change the one thing that no one else can change—the heart

Jesus is full of infinite power. Our problem is not that he is insufficient; our problem is that we are too self-sufficient! And the sooner we realize that we need his help, the better.

When we were preparing our house in Fennville to be put on the market, I had a bonus room over the garage that needed to be finished. I had already hung the drywall, and I just needed to finish the taping and topcoat. I had a man from my church come and show me how to do it, and it looked simple enough, especially as I watched him.

I took a day off work, started in the closet which I figured would take me about an hour. Well, four hours later and, honestly, much sinful grumbling later—I am sitting on top of the ladder with dry wall mud all over me, my clothes, and a really bad looking closet. And it was on top of the ladder that I had this amazing thought: “I can't do this.” So I grabbed my phone and

called a friend. "Dave, I need your help. I'm stuck. I cannot do this. Please come and help me."

Ninety percent of the battle was acknowledging that I needed someone else's help. Our problem, friends, is not that we believe that Jesus is insufficient; our problem is our self-sufficiency. Life falls apart when we fail to realize that we need Jesus' help.

3. "I need you more than anything" (v 18b)

All of this leads us to the final statement or confession that I want to spring from your heart in fresh and new ways: "I need you more than anything!" The end goal is for to realize that depending, abiding, and trusting in Jesus is more valuable than anything else.

In Colossians 1:18, Paul ends with the simple statement "that in everything he might be preeminent." The word preeminent means to be first in rank, but it also means first in influence. The idea being that everything previously said makes Jesus worthy to have such a staggering influence. It means that Jesus takes precedence over everything else.

He was first in time. He was before everything that is created. He was the first one to conquer death. And the result of that is the fact that there is no one more important, more central, more essential, more worthy, or more glorious than Jesus.

Last week I was so moved by the interpretative reading and Don Walker's emotional ending as he struggled to say, "And when I come to die, give me Jesus." Do you know why that resonates with us? Because the heart of every disciple of Christ knows that only Jesus alone is worthy like that.

Do you know what we need today? We need people who are captivated by the preeminence of Christ. We need some people whose lives are so filled with love for Jesus that people look at them and say, "You're a Jesus freak!" We need people who know Jesus so well that when anything else comes across their path that might look attractive or appealing, they can see it in light of who Jesus is.

We need people who will celebrate communion today and turn it into a platform to say, "This is my story. This is my song, praising my savior all the day long."

And so to those trapped in the sin of your own sufficiency, I have to tell you—life falls apart without Jesus. To those who are trying to fix the problems in your life on your own—life falls apart without Jesus. To those whose marriages or homes are starting to drift—life falls apart without Jesus. To those whose problems seem so huge, complex, and overwhelming that you are consumed with worry and fear—life falls apart without Jesus.

Today I'm inviting you to preach something new to your soul:

- "I'm dependent on you"
- "I need your power"
- "I need you more than anything"

Because let me tell you, you cannot do this on your own. Your life is going to fall apart without Jesus.

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