

“Standing on Holy Ground”

Colossians 1:15-18

Sunday, March 5th, 2023

In 1893, the famous World's Columbian Exposition observed the 400th anniversary of Christopher Columbus' voyage to America at the Chicago World's Fair. An astronomical number of people visited the exhibits, those were pre-automobile days remember,, some 27 million people attended between May 1st and October 31st.

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 Columbian Exposition was the “World's 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 to do so, saying “I am going to make Jesus so attractive that men will turn to Him.” Moody knew that preaching Christ pre-eminent - 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 life, and thousands received salvation in Jesus Christ.

I bit off more than I could chew in thinking I would cover verses 15-20 of **Colossians Chapter 1** in this same sermon. As the week pressed in on me, I could see that if I were to do a proper job expositing this text, I must do so with smaller bites. So, we're not covering verses 15-20 as previously advertised. Today, we'll study verses 15-18.

These verses we study today “have been written on by commentators more than many other texts in the New Testament and certainly more than any other particular passage elsewhere in this epistle”, according to Dr. G. K. Beale, Professor of New Testament and biblical theology at Westminster Seminary Philadelphia. (Beale, 77)

Colossians 1:15-18:

“He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. **16** For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities (‘rulers’) or powers (‘authorities’). All things were created through Him and for Him. **17** And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. **18** And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.”

Suppose I were to ask you, *Why on earth are we here? What might you say?* Listen to the opinion of the late Dr. Stephen Jay Gould, a Harvard paleontologist who was regarded as an eminent authority on how life began. Gould said, “We [exist] because one odd group of fishes had a peculiar fin anatomy that could transform into legs for terrestrial creatures; because the earth never froze entirely during an ice age; because a small and tenuous species, arising in

Africa a quarter of a million years ago, has managed, so far, to survive by hook and by crook. We may yearn for a "higher" answer - but none exists."

How depressing! Dr. Gould evidently was not a believer in Jesus Christ. If he were, he would have concluded that Jesus is the Creator of the heavens and the earth! That's what these verses from Paul's letter to the Colossians church say - and that is the highest authority that can be - from Almighty God.

These verses before us today can be segmented into three different points. Christ is supreme in each of them.

MP 1 - Christ is Supreme in Eternity (verse 15a);

MP 2 - Christ is Supreme in Creation (verse 15b-17);

MP 3 - Christ is Supreme in the Church (verse 18).

Christ is Supreme in Eternity! Notice the phrase in verse 15a, "He is the image of the invisible God." *How can something invisible have an image? What does it mean that He is the "image"?* It doesn't mean He was created in the image of God; that's **Genesis 1:26-28** and that verse speaks about man.

"Then God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."
27 So God created man in His *own* image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. **28** Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

Image is basically something that looks like, or represents, something else. As the image of God, Jesus is the portrait of God. We were created *in* God's image; He *is* God's image. He is the replica. He is the copy of God. He is the exact reproduction. In **John 14:9**, Jesus said, "If you have seen Me you have seen...who? The Father!"

Christ's supremacy in eternity is boldly proclaimed as Paul says He is the representation of the invisible God. **He is supreme!** Jesus is not a second-rate emanation from the true God. He *is* God! That not only tells us about Jesus - but it also tells us something about ourselves. Because Jesus is the image of God, He is what we were meant to be in terms of character: we were created in His image (**Genesis 1:26-27**). Jesus is supreme in eternity, and we ought to give him first place in our lives. **Is He?**

Now we look at the rest of verse 15 - "the firstborn over all creation." **Christ is Supreme in Creation!** *What does it mean that He was the "firstborn?"* It doesn't mean that Jesus was the first being created or born. The Greek word for "firstborn" (*prototokos*) means the right to rule, the heir, the ranking one, the one in authority. It has to do with the rights of inheritance. In the Jewish mind the firstborn was the one who inherited everything. It says here that Christ is the inheritor of all creation. He is the Heir of

everything. It doesn't mean that He had to be born or that He had to be the first one born. You think of Jacob and Esau. Esau was born first, but Jacob was the heir. Jacob was the *prototokos*.

Now think of what it means. Everything that was made He (Jesus) made. Look at verse 16 in Colossians 1 again, "For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth." *Do you ever conceive of that?* If this doesn't give you a grandiose idea of God you haven't looked at it.

Do you realize that you could bore a hole, for example, in the sun and pour 1, 200,000 earths, and still have room for 4,300,000 moons? The diameter of the sun which is 93 million miles away from us is 385,000 miles, the diameter. But the nearest star, Alpha Centurii, is five times larger than the sun! The moon is only about 211,500 miles away and you could walk in 27 years if you could cover 24 miles a day and you had something to stand on.

Think about this, a ray of light travels at 186,000 miles a second, so a beam of light reached the moon in 1½ seconds. Well let's imagine we could travel that fast. We can travel 186,000 miles a second. We could reach Mercury in 4½ minutes. It's only 50 million miles away! Two minutes we'd be at Venus...26 million miles. And 4 minutes and 21 seconds we'd hit Mars; it's only 34 million miles away. Next comes Jupiter, it's only 367 million miles away, taking us about 35 minutes. And then if we decided to go on since we were making such good time, we could go to Saturn; it's only 790 million miles away and it would take about 1 hour, 11 seconds. Then Uranus is 1 billion miles away, Neptune 3 billion.

You say, "*What do you mean?*" You ask, "*Who made all that?*" Well, once there was a puddle...tell me about your puddle. Once there was God...

We should cite **Proverbs 8:22-31** while we're on the topic of Christ being supreme in creation.

"The Lord possessed me at the beginning of His way, before His works of old.

23 - I have been established from everlasting, from the beginning, before there was ever an earth.

24 - When *there were* no depths I was brought forth, when *there were* no fountains abounding with water.

25 - Before the mountains were settled, before the hills, I was brought forth;

26 - While as yet He had not made the earth or the fields, or the primal dust of the world.

27 - When He prepared the heavens, I was there, when He drew a circle on the face of the deep,

28 - When He established the clouds above, when He strengthened the fountains of the deep,

29 - When He assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters would not transgress His command, when He marked out the foundations of the earth,

30 - Then I was beside Him as a master craftsman; and I was daily *His* delight, rejoicing always before Him,

31 - Rejoicing in His inhabited world, and my delight was with the sons of men.”

Jesus has precedence over all things in terms of time and status and is a kind of divine glue or spiritual gravity that holds creation together. God did not simply start things off and then withdrew from His creation; Christ continues to sustain the whole universe. “He keeps the cosmos from becoming a “chaos.” (Garner, 89) Jesus is not merely a political revolutionary, a Galilean charismatic holy man, a wandering peasant, or a countercultural crusader.

All of what we’ve been talking about should cause you to hope with confidence. Jesus is none of those things and more. He is Lord over all creation. And, if He is Lord He is Lord over every aspect of human life. This includes our social world, our Christian community, and our physical environment.

Verse 18 demonstrates that **Jesus is supreme in the Church**. “And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence.”

When we became believers in Jesus, we became part of Christ’s body. As members of His body we are totally dependent on the Head, Jesus, for direction. He is to control us. The reason for Christ’s exalted position in the Church is that He is the “firstborn from the dead.”

Earlier, in verse 15, we learned that “firstborn” meant first in rank; it means the same here, too. Paul was not saying that Jesus was the first person to be raised from the dead, for He was not. However, He was the most important of all who have been raised from the dead, because without His resurrection there could be no resurrection for others.

What should this mean for us? Simply this - that Jesus would have the preeminence in every possible aspect.

- First place in our families
- First place in our marriages
- First place in our jobs
- First place in our ministries
- First place in time
- First place is love
- First place in conversation
- First place in pleasures
- First place in eating
- First place in playing
- First place is athletics
- First place in what we watch
- First place in art
- First place in music

- First place in worship

Jesus is first place because He is worthy - He is God beyond all praising, the One we worship here today. Let us conclude by singing the love amazing that songs cannot repay. #660 in the *Trinity Hymnal*, "Our God beyond all Praising!"