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Sermon Notes

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The Supremacy of Christ, Part 2

Colossians 1:15-23

Holy Ground

Moses, eighty year old, just another day, tending his father-in-law's sheep on the far side of the desert... neared the Mountain of God... saw a sight that changed his life, a sight he never forgot for the rest of his days...

He saw a bush burning with a supernatural fire... and though the fire burned brightly and with great power, yet mysteriously, the bush did not burn up... it was not consumed

Moses said, "I will go over and see this strange sight..." and irresistibly attracted to the supernatural light, he soon heard a supernatural sound: The Voice of Almighty God

Exodus 3:5 "Do not come any closer," God said. "Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground."

Now it was actually the Angel of the Lord who appeared to Moses in the flames of the burning bush, and the Angel of the Lord was Christ

And the essence of the Law of Moses was spoken immediately to Moses:

"Do not come any closer."

There it is: thus far you may come, and no farther

Why? Because the place is HOLY GROUND!

Well, in the New Covenant, we stand on even HOLIER GROUND, a much clearer revelation of Christ than Moses had in the flames of the burning bush

And the message to us is NOT **"Do not come any closer!!"**

Rather, in Hebrews 10, we are commanded

"Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith..."

And in the New Covenant, we are given a much clearer revelation of the Holy One who appeared to Moses in the flames of the burning bush:

In Colossians 1, we can stare into the spiritually brilliant light of a powerful revelation of Christ

Colossians 1:15-23 may be among the holiest ground of the entire Scripture... here we are given spiritual eyes to stare at the sun and not be blinded... to see Christ more clearly than anywhere else in Holy Scripture

Here we have the supremacy of Christ, and of the mysterious gospel that Christ came to bring... the mystery that the Holy One of God can actually LIVE WITHIN a human heart, within a human being, and that person is NOT CONSUMED

Colossians 1:27 the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Brothers and sisters... this is truly Holy Ground... here we stare at the Son and are not blinded but rather enlightened

Here we are indwelt by the Fire of Christ and are not consumed but rather transformed

Here is the Gospel... and the Gospel is Christ!!

I. Christ's Supremacy as God's Visible Image (vs. 15)

Colossians 1:15 He is the image of the invisible God

II. Christ's Supremacy over the Physical Universe (vs. 15-17)

***Colossians 1:15-17 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.
¹⁶ For by him all things were created***

- A. Christ's Role as Creator of the Universe
- B. Firstborn Over All Creation
- C. Universe Created BY Christ
- D. Universe Created FOR Christ
- E. Universe Sustained by Christ

"and in him all things hold together"

III. Christ's Supremacy over the Spiritual Universe (vs. 15-17)

***Colossians 1:15-17 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all 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 for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.***

A. Colossian Heresy: Christ Like an Angel

B. Satan and His Demons Created by Christ, for Christ, and are Sustained by Christ

IV. Christ's Supremacy over the Church (vs. 18-19)

Colossians 1:18 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.

A. Christ is the Head of the Church

1. The body analogy for the church is just one of many rich analogies for the people of God: there's also a holy temple, the family or house of God, a royal kingdom, a vineyard, a flock, a bride Head implies absolute centrality and authority
2. If the church is a body, Christ is the head over that body
 - a. All functions in the body exist to serve the head, and the head governs them all
 - b. The heart beats when the brain gives the signal
 - c. The arms move at the impulse of the brain
 - d. The lungs fill with air at the command of the brain, and give the brain its oxygen

B. Christ is the Source of the Church

1. "Arche" = beginning, the origin of the church
2. The church had its origin in the mind of God as we were chosen IN CHRIST before the foundation of the world
3. Christ was slain before the foundation of the world... and thus the origin of the church is Christ
4. So also in history, the church began when Christ died and rose again from the dead

C. Christ is the Firstborn from the Dead

1. Thought Christ was not the first to live after dying, he is the firstborn in that he takes the pre-eminent place
2. BUT EVEN MORE, Christ is the first with a resurrection body, a body that is free forever from death and pain

3. Even after the great multitude is raised from the dead, even after all of us receive our resurrection bodies patterned after His, Christ will still be firstborn, preeminent above all

D. Christ is Supreme Over All Things for the Church

Colossians 1:18 so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

1. All of this should make us fall down in awe at the person of Christ
2. He was and is infinitely greater than any of us can imagine
3. No man can take His place as head over the church... certainly not the Bishop of Rome, called the Pope
 - a. From Pope Gregory VII on, in Medieval Europe, no one could become a king of one of the nations of Christendom without kneeling down and kissing the Pope's ring
 - b. The Pope was thought of as if he were Christ on earth

"The Pope is not only the representative of Jesus Christ, he is **Jesus Christ himself**, hidden under the veil of flesh." *Catholic National* July 1895.

"We hold upon this earth the place of God Almighty" ...Pope Leo XIII Encyclical Letter of June 20, 1894

**"The Pope and God are the same, so he has all power in Heaven and earth."
Pope Pius V, quoted in Barclay, Chapter XXVII, p. 218, "Cities Petrus Bertanous".**

- c. This kind of homage should be reserved only for the one who actually shed His blood for the church
 - d. Cardinals, bishops, and priests walked around in flowing robes like the Pharisees of old, demanding that people give them the pre-eminent place in society
 - e. Even in some Baptist churches, some pastors, or lay leaders, committee chairs, elders, or deacons can forget their place and think too highly of themselves
 - f. Christ alone is head over the church, so that in everything he might have the supremacy
4. Not a man woman or child in this room is thinking too highly of Christ

5. All of us need to think much greater thoughts of Him, and fall down before Him in total surrender and worship

This is even more true when we consider Christ's supremacy in our own reconciliation, our redemption, our salvation from sin

V. Christ's Supremacy in Our Reconciliation (vs. 19-23)

Colossians 1:19-23 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, ²⁰ 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. ²¹ Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. 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-- ²³ if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

A. God's Pleasure in our Salvation

Vs. 19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him

1. "God was pleased..."
2. Though the focus has been on Christ, yet it was the plan and purpose of the Father that set in motion the salvation of the church
3. It is well pleasing to God the Father to save us in Christ
4. God is a pleased being, eternally content and happy in what He proposes and disposes

Psalm 115:3 Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him.

5. Christ spoke of the delight of the Father in giving us the Kingdom

^{KJV} Luke 12:32 Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.

6. So also here God's pleasure and delight extend to every aspect of the redemptive plan
 - a. God was pleased to have all His fullness in a human body, in His Son
 - b. God was pleased to reconcile us through Christ's death... yes, PLEASED

- c. God was delighted to welcome us though we were hostile enemies... God was delighted to welcome us back as His children
- d. God was pleased to present each of us to himself as holy, blameless, forgiven, free from all accusation
- e. The PLEASURE OF GOD extends through the whole salvation plan

B. Christ's Incarnation

Vs. 19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him

Colossians 2:9-10 For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, ¹⁰ and you have been given fullness in Christ, who is the head over every power and authority.

1. God was pleased to exalt Christ and allow all His fullness to dwell in Him in bodily form
2. This is the incarnation, and it pleased God to exalt Christ this way
3. "Fullness" is was the Colossian false teaching said you needed through special insight and knowledge and a special lifestyle and philosophy
4. NO... all the fullness of God Himself is found in Christ
5. If you have Christ, you have all the fullness of God... that's why Christ said to Philip

John 14:9 Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.

6. The emphasis on Christ's body is clearly to thwart the false teaching that matter is evil, that bodies are evil

C. God's Glorious Plan for Comprehensive Reconciliation

Vs. 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven

1. Sin had an explosive effect on the universe... as though the beautifully ordered universe were blown apart by a massive fertilizer bomb
2. ALL THINGS were estranged from God by sin... not just human beings in their relationship with a holy God
3. The universe itself was cursed, subjected to frustration by human sin
 - a. So the present creation is groaning as in the pains of childbirth

- b. But in the end, God will reconcile all things, including spiritual things
- 4. God's marvelous plan is to reconcile ALL THINGS BACK TO HIMSELF
- 5. This does not mean universal salvation, but rather a universe totally cleansed of all effects of evil once God's redemptive plan in Christ has reached its consummation

1 Corinthians 15:24-28 Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. ²⁵ For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. ²⁶ The last enemy to be destroyed is death... ²⁸ When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.

D. Christ's Blood Atonement

Colossians 1:20 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.

- 1. The marvelous plan of God is to put Christ's BLOOD ATONEMENT at the center of His plan of reconciliation
- 2. The cross is at the center of time and history, at the center of God's eternal and infinite plan
- 3. It was human sin that threw the universe out of kilter... and the wages of sin is death... even physical death
- 4. Therefore God was PLEASED to crush His only begotten Son as part of His marvelous plan to reconcile all things to Himself

You must extend the pleasure of God here in Colossians 1:19

It was the Father's good pleasure to make peace by shedding Christ's blood on the cross...

- a. This pleasure of God is strangest of all
- b. I have a hard time fathoming it myself
- c. I have two sons and three daughters... I can scarcely fathom a father who would not make every effort to save his son from death
 - i) Most fathers would rather die than watch their own sons die
 - ii) I read a story some time ago about a father on a fishing trip with his son and some friend in Alaska; their sea plane sprang a leak in its

pontoon; three men swam to safety in the frigid water... but the twelve year old boy couldn't make it... the father swam back out to try to save him, but didn't have the strength to rescue them both... the father chose to die with his son rather than live without him

- iii) You've perhaps heard a story told by Richard Wurmbrand of Voice of the Martyrs and a victim of persecution himself by Romanian Communists

The Communist torturers came towards Pastor Florescu again, this time with red-hot iron pokers, "Who else believes as you do? Give us their names." Florescu would not speak. They had already cut him again and again with knives and beaten him very badly. When he refused to cooperate, he was returned to his cell.

Starving rats were then driven into his cell through a large pipe. He could not sleep, having to defend himself at all times. If he rested a moment, the rats would attack him. He was forced to stand for two weeks, day and night. The Communists kept asking him to betray his brethren, but he resisted steadfastly.

In the end, they brought his fourteen-year-old son and began to whip the boy in front of his father, saying that they would continue to beat him until the pastor told them what they wanted to know. The poor man was half crazy. He bore it as long as he could. But when he could stand it no more, he cried to his son, "Alexander, I must say what they want! I can't bear your beatings anymore!"

His body bruised, blood running from his nose and mouth, Alexander looked his father in the eye. "Father, don't do me the injustice of having a traitor as a parent. Withstand! If they kill me, I will die with the words, 'Jesus and my fatherland.'"

This enraged the Communists. They grabbed the young man and beat him to death, his blood splattering over the walls of the cell. He died praising God as his father watched. Not only did he hold onto his faith, but he enabled his father to do the same

- iv) Okay, so a father is willing not to save his son by betraying the church... I can stretch my mind to that point too
- v) BUT what of a father who willingly tortures his own Son for the benefit of others... and is pleased to do it?

Isaiah 53:10 Yet the Lord was pleased to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.

Deepest mystery: the pleasure of the Lord in crushing Jesus for our benefit

Not that God didn't love Jesus... He made the earthquake that day... the sky was darkened and the ground shook with the passion of a Father who had the power to save His beloved and perfect Son but who chose to pour out His just wrath, and keep pouring it out until justice had been served

What must the Father, the most passionate lover in the universe have felt as His perfect Son, bearing our sins in His physical body cried out,

“My God my God, why have you forsaken me??”

But it was as much God’s pleasure to do it as it was Christ’s joy to endure the cross, despising its shame

5. Christ’s blood MADE PEACE with a perfectly holy and righteous God... there was no other way

E. The Infinite Journey of Our Reconciliation

Colossians 1:21 Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior.

1. Fundamental to our gratitude to Christ is to understand how wicked we were apart from Him
 - a. We were alienated from God... at a distance from Him
 - b. Enemies in our minds... our thoughts were wicked, the inclinations of our hearts befouled
 - c. The mind of the flesh is death... it is hostile to God... we were God-haters
 - d. This internal life of hostility we lived out in patterns of sin and rebellion
 - i) We violated the Ten Commandments... we had other gods, we dishonored our parents, we committed adultery and murder in our hearts if not in actuality, we coveted our neighbors possessions
 - ii) We violated the Two Great Commandments: we did not love God with all our hearts souls minds or strength, neither did we love our neighbor
 - iii) This was evil thinking leading to evil behavior... it was our alienation from God
2. Fundamental to missions
 - a. This is where all of your lost neighbors on the mission field are now
 - b. They are at war with God, though they may not know it... and even more terrifyingly, God is at war with them
 - c. Only by the peace of the gospel can this dire tragedy be addressed and sinners be reconciled to God
3. The Joy of Reconciliation

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--²³ if you continue

in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

- a. Look at your gospel treasures
 - i) “without blemish”... no stain at all in the sight of God... Christ’s perfect righteousness imputed to you through faith in Christ
 - ii) “free from accusation”... Satan’s mouth will be stilled on judgment day... your own conscience can be silent, because of the magnitude of Christ’s achievement at the cross

F. The Ongoing Ministry of the Gospel: “IF you continue...”

- 1. This “if” shows the need for ongoing gospel ministry in our own hearts and in the lives of your people

“If you continue in the faith”

- a. Faith is not static, it is dynamic
- b. Faith must be nurtured and sustained by the ongoing ministry of the word
- c. This does not mean you can lose your salvation
- d. Rather

Philippians 1:6 that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

- 2. The Gospel has the power not just to start faith but to sustain it to the end of our lives

Vs. 23 if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

And what is the hope held out in the gospel?

Nothing less than the final reconciliation of the universe in Christ... the New Heavens and the New Earth (more later)

VI. Application

- A. Give Thanks to God the Father for this Marvelous Plan of Reconciliation

1. Go over these verses that show the greatness of the gospel... incarnation, blood atonement, reconciliation, peace with God
2. Lavish thanks and praise on God for your own salvation
3. Meditate much on how infinitely far God had to stoop to save you, how long a journey of reconciliation its been
4. Feed your faith in the gospel... continue established and firm not moved from the hope
5. Speak often to yourself: God is at peace with me; God is at peace with me; I am without blemish and free from accusation
6. BUT that is only true through faith in Christ!! Give all glory to Him

B. Continue to Make Progress

1. "If you continue in your faith..." it says
2. Feed your faith, then
3. Feed it with the word
4. Learn to trust in Christ for more and more; don't be independent, but actively seek His presence throughout the day; feed your faith
5. "Not moved from the hope": the hope is FUTURE... glory in the presence of God; a future, perfect world where we will dwell with God
6. Feed your heart on this
7. MAKE PROGRESS!!! Don't stay put in your Christian life

C. Rededicate Yourself to the Gospel Ministry

1. This is the gospel of which Paul was a servant
2. This gospel of the Supremacy and Deity of Christ
3. This gospel of reconciliation through his bloody death on the cross
4. Rededicate yourself to trusting this message, praying it, living it and preaching it to the people God has entrusted to your care
5. JOBS FOR LIFE: Inner City ministry
6. Our mission fields:

- a. college students—UNC, Duke, Central, State
 - b. Internationals
 - c. White collar professionals: RTP, Medical
 - d. Suburban population
 - e. SEBTS
 - f. Inner city: African American, Hispanic
7. WHAT IS YOUR MINISTRY? Are you holding out the gospel to anyone?
8. Paul was a servant of the gospel... are you?