

The Preeminent Jesus

“Do not think that I have come to bring peace to the earth.

I have not come to bring peace, but a sword.”

Matthew 10:34

Why did Jesus come to earth? Why was the Son of God incarnated? Many say that Jesus came to be an example for us, or to be a moral teacher, or to bring about world peace. He came to tell us how to be moral people, or to promote social justice. He came so that we could be happy, or healthy, or rich. What all these views have in common is that they are man-centered. They begin with us – we are unhappy, unloved, treated unfairly – and end with us – Jesus must have come to make us happy and content with our lives as they are.

In Matthew 10:34 Jesus rips those assumptions into little pieces and scatters them to the winds. He did not come to bring peace to the earth, but a sword. He did not come to satisfy our desires, or obey our commands. He came to satisfy the will of the Father. He came to carry out the Law of God. He came to seek and save the lost, not to make them happy in their lostness, but to save them from it, according to the will of God and the purpose of God.

Ultimately, Jesus came to take His rightful place as Savior and Lord. Both of these truths are a dividing line, a “sword.”

I’ll read what Paul wrote in Colossians 1:15-20; listen for the absolute primacy of Jesus Christ:

Colossians 1:15–20 (2016 ESV) — **15** He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. **16** For by Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through Him and for Him. **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. **19** For in Him all the fullness of

God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross.

To be a Christian is to acknowledge that Jesus is all of these things, and infinitely more. He is the focal point around which all creation is to gather, and whom all creation is to worship.

What the world wants – and I include so-called “progressive” Christianity here – is a Jesus who will do what they want, submit to their ever-changing desires and values, love what they love, hate what they hate. They want a Jesus who is surrendered to them. That’s the Jesus they will quickly call “MY Jesus,” as in “MY Jesus would never condemn homosexuality, MY Jesus would never condemn abortion, MY Jesus is happy with ME.”

Of course, THEIR Jesus doesn’t exist. THEIR Jesus is a figment of their imagination. THEIR Jesus is made of play dough, and they can shape him any way they want.

This is the spirit of Eve, who looked at the fruit God had forbidden, and rewrote the rules. SHE decided that it was good to eat, nice to look at, and would make her wise, and she rejected God’s clear and simple command. Eve created her own, unholy trinity: “me, myself, and I.”

The real Jesus is the One described in Colossians 1:15-20, the One BY whom, THROUGH whom, and FOR whom all things were created. He is the center, not us, and not our desires. HE is before all things, not us. In HIM all things hold together. HE is the head of the church, and has a right to rule over us. In HIM all the fulness of God was pleased to dwell. In HIM all things are reconciled, properly sorted out for the sake of peace. In the end, everything will be brought into subjection to Jesus Christ through either deliverance or damnation, either redemption or rejection.

We are told in Philippians 2 that one day “every knee will bow, in heaven and earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” He IS the preeminent One. He IS the center of all things. He IS Lord.

That truth is a sword that divides all mankind. On one side are those who reject Jesus Christ, who argue against His authority, who mock His righteousness and His sacrifice, who insist that He cannot make them do what they don’t want to do, who insist that they are, as William Ernest Henley wrote, the captain of their own soul.

Jesus Is To Be First

For I have come to set a man against his father,

and a daughter against her mother,

and a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law.

And a person's enemies will be those of his own household.

Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me,

and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me.

Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

Matthew 10:35-39

When we accept and recognize and acknowledge Jesus Christ as Lord of all things – we don't *make* Him Lord of our lives, He *is* Lord of all things, including our lives – there is a practical, measurable effect. Every other relationship in our lives becomes secondary to Him and His Lordship. Even the preservation of our own lives becomes secondary to Jesus Christ and His glory.

Jesus will not approve or applaud or endorse any relationship that displaces Him. It doesn't matter who the other person is; no one is to be above Him in our lives.

This is not a new idea. Moses warned the Israelites that they must not put any person ahead of Yahweh. He wrote, "If your brother, or your son or daughter, or your wife, or the friend who is like your own soul, entices you to serve other gods" – that is, if someone you care deeply about tries to convince you to put anything ahead of the One True God – "you shall not yield, you shall not pity them, and you shall not conceal them, but you shall kill them." (Deuteronomy 13:6-11).

During that same period of time the sons of Aaron, Nadab and Abihu, rejected the offering Yahweh required, and, like Eve, did what they wanted. Yahweh destroyed them for it. Fire came down out of heaven and consumed them. And Moses warned Aaron not to grieve for them, but instead grieve that Yahweh had been so greatly blasphemed. (Leviticus 10:6-7).

Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, offered a sinful offering to Yahweh, and He destroyed them for it. Speaking through Moses, Yahweh warning Aaron, "Don't mourn for your sons - don't let your hair hang loose, don't tear your clothes, or you will die, too. Instead, let all Israel mourn that such judgment was necessary." (Leviticus 10:1-7).

Jesus simply continues in the truth that God is to have the highest place in our lives. Since He is God the Son and the Son of God, the Lord of glory, He, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, is to be the focus of all creation.

If you live this way – if you even want to live this way – you will be opposed. You might even be opposed by those whom you love most on earth. Members of your own family might become your enemies.

In this chapter Jesus has been giving His disciples and us full disclosure about what it means to follow Him, and what it might cost us to follow Him.

Christians must believe that remaining faithful to Jesus Christ is the best thing we can ever do, or every time conflict arises with a loved one we will be tempted to abandon Him.

I want you to consider a few things.

First, we are being tested. Is our faith in Jesus *really* that significant to us, or are we just fans? If we are willing to cast Him aside for a human relationship, then our claim to genuine faith is questionable.

Second, by remaining firmly and loyally submitted to Jesus as Lord, we stand upon the best possible foundation for our own lives. People let us down. *Everyone* lets us down. But He will never let us down, or abandon us, or give up on us.

Third, if we maintain that firm foundation of the Lordship of Jesus Christ, even at the expense of human relationships, we offer the best hope to those people. Imagine that the world has

been flooded, and everyone is on the verge of drowning. The Gospel Ship has come along, and you have been rescued. You stand firmly planted on that deck, and call out to others to trust in the Savior. They resent that you are standing on a solid deck, and insist that if you really love them, you'll jump back in the water and go back to drowning. In reality, if you really love them you'll stand firmly where you are, and urge them to trust in Christ.

Finally, the reward at the end of all this trouble is not just *not* going to hell, or even going to heaven. The reward is Jesus Himself. There is no marriage in heaven, not because everyone is living in a dry, joyless existence, but because *Jesus* is there, and the *Father* is there, and the *Holy Spirit* is there, and every longing of our hearts will be satisfied in our God. These close, loving, precious earthly relationships offer us so much comfort and peace, so much joy and satisfaction. But when we have been freed from our sinful flesh, and raised in immortality, and made exactly like Jesus Christ in His glorified humanity, then we will be so full of *Him* that there will no unmet needs or desires or longings in our lives for *others* to meet.

Jesus Is The Center

“Whoever receives you receives me, and whoever receives me receives him who sent me.

The one who receives a prophet because he is a prophet

will receive a prophet's reward,

and the one who receives a righteous person because he is a righteous person

will receive a righteous person's reward.

And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple,

truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward."

Matthew 10:40-42

"I am my beloved's," says the Bride in the Song of Solomon, "and he is mine." (Song of Solomon 6:3). This is exactly true of our relationship to Jesus, both as individual believers and as His Church. We are His; He is ours. We are inseparably joined to Him. He has promised never to cast us away. He ceaselessly intercedes for us before the Father; He is praying us home.

This union between Jesus and His people is so strong that, as long we are living in Him and for Him, those who receive us receive Him as well. He has raised us up to be with Him where He is, and He is present with us where we are.

Jesus blesses those who blesses us. Those who welcome us because we belong to Him, those who bless *us* because we belong to *Him*, will experience a blessing from Him. In fact, someone who welcomes us *fully and completely* in Christ will receive the Gospel that we proclaim and be saved. John talks about this in First John 1 when he says, "that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that *you*, too, may have fellowship with *us*; and indeed, *our* fellowship is with *the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ*." (First John 1:3). Someone who *fully* receives us receives the Gospel we bring, and through faith in the Gospel they come into genuine fellowship not just with us, but the Father and the Son.

You see, Jesus is not ashamed to call us brothers (Hebrews 2:11). When His own mother and brothers came to see Him, He pointed to His disciples and said, "*Here are My mother and My brothers!* For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is *My brother and sister and mother*." (Matthew 12:48-50). When He had risen from the dead He said to Mary Magdalene, "go to *My brothers* and say to them, 'I am ascending to *My Father* and *your Father*, to *My God* and *your God*.'" (John 20:17). On the day of judgment those who blessed His people will hear Him say, "as you did it to one of the least of these, *My brothers*, you did it do Me." Those who ignored or harmed His people will hear Him say, "as you did not do it to one of the least of these, *My brothers*, you did not do it to Me." (Matthew 25:40, 45).

Is it clear to you that the world can't have Jesus without His disciples? It cannot have Him without us. Many think they can have their own, private, personal, secret relationship with

Jesus, separate from the church and Christians. But Jesus rejects those who reject us, and blesses those who bless us.

BRINGING IT HOME

The Lord Jesus began the church with a handful of men, most of whom were barely educated, blue-collar workers. He didn't give them vast sums of money to set up churches and brands and buy influence. He didn't choose those who were wise or powerful or noble by human standards. To the contrary, He chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; He chose what was weak to shame the strong; He chose what is low and despised to shame the high and mighty. He did this so that no human being would be able to boast in His presence.

Beginning with those men, Jesus built His church, and it has remained ever since. His people have suffered enormously over the past 2,000 years, but by the will of God, the cross of Christ, and the work of the Holy Spirit, He continues to save sinners and make them His beloved ones.

When He chose you as His child, He joined you to the countless numbers who have gone before you, a great cloud of witnesses to His glory and grace, dressed in His righteous robes, shining and glorious. You and I have a short time on this earth, and then we will be freed from this mortal life and rise in glory.

So keep Jesus Christ as the center of your life, no matter how hard things get. Keep Him first in your life. Keep His Word and His Gospel as your foundation.