

Jesus Christ is Lord
The Lordship of Christ
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Bible Text: Colossians 1:15-20
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My sermon this morning concerns thinking and responding as Christians in a culture that is running at breakneck speed to escape biblical truth and biblical ideas. The sermon is constructed around a story and it is going to take me some time to tell that story and I hope it won't be boring; I hope you'll hang in there and listen. There really is a point to the story. It concerns three men, Bill, Eric and Chuck. Bill is a professing Christian. He grew up in a Christian family. He grew up in an evangelical church. As a teenager, he professed faith in Christ and joined that church and he remains to the present a member of it. His church is strong in the Gospel, heavy emphasis on evangelism and missions, but not so strong in teaching biblical doctrine. Bill is a salesman for a large Ford dealership in the area. On Tuesday of this past week, Bill was introduced to Eric, a new employee. Well, actually Eric is a Ford representative sent from California to supervise some technology upgrades and he will be in the area for perhaps as much as a month.

As Bill welcomes Eric, he notes a photograph that Eric has just taken out of his briefcase and placed on his desk. It's a picture of seven young adults, Eric being one, along with two young children. It's a striking group. They are handsome. They are well dressed and impressive. So Bill asks Eric, "Are these friends or is this family?" Eric responds, "This is my immediate family. All the adults in this picture are married to each other. Some time ago we entered into a marital contract in which we agreed that we would stay together for at least five years, and each of us will contribute \$60,000 a year to the family income. We also agreed that we would limit our sexual activity to the family. Some of us are bisexual, but whatever our preference we will contain our sexual activity to this family. We also agreed that we would each one have yearly physical exams to try to prevent the spread of disease in our family." Eric went on to explain that the two children in the photograph had been born to two of the women within two years of them coming together as a family; they had been together for four years total. No one actually knows who the father of the children is and they don't want to know. Everyone treats the children as their own. Everyone takes care of the children and the children call each of the men, dad, and each of the women, mom. There are four men and three women in this family.

Well, as you might expect, that's more information than Bill anticipated. He is a bit stunned. He rather weakly replies that he has never heard anything like that. But then he adds, "I'm a Christian. I just don't think that's right. It just seems wrong to me." Now, Eric

isn't fazed by that response. He almost seems to anticipate it and he knows what he wants to say. Eric responds, "Well, I'm not surprised, Bill, after all, this is the South and you folk are little bit more conservative." What he actually means, "You are backward."

"Regarding Christianity, I don't know much about Christianity but I have heard, I have heard that Christianity is all about love and I assure you there is tons of love in this family. We care for each other deeply. We have a method of making sure that everyone's needs are met, and if we ever have a dispute, and we rarely do, we have a method in place to take care of that dispute so there will be no divisions among us. And the children, well, the children are wonderfully cared for every single day. They are hovered over. They have all these adults that are doting on them. And when those children grow up, they will have the benefit of a multitude of counselors. We come from different backgrounds, different family experiences, we will be able to provide these children a much greater deposit of collective wisdom than any single father or mother could ever do." But then Eric grows more serious and he says, "Besides, I believe that spirituality and morality are very personal, private, subjective matters. I respect your opinion, Bill. You should respect mine. After all, this is not a religious issue. It has to do with real people, real feelings, real preferences, how real people, adults, choose to live their lives and your personal opinion really has no place in this discussion."

Well, Bill is overwhelmed. He is a wee bit intimidated but he manages to say this, "But how can it be good for these children not to know who their fathers actually are, not to know who is ultimately responsible for them? Children need to know their parents and you say that you have a five year commitment and you're in the fourth year of it, what if someone leaves? What if someone decides to leave the family? What will that do to the children?" Eric responds, "Listen, Bill, my dad left my mom when I was two years old. Between the age of two and 17 when I graduated from a high school, my mother was married three more times; that's four dads in 17 years with a lot of boyfriends coming and going in between, and those men, those supposed fathers, sexually, physically and emotionally abused me, and it was my experience in family that drew me to this arrangement of polygamist marriage. I don't think anybody will leave our family but if they do, there will be six more there to take their place and we would never allow anyone to abuse these children." Bill at this point is very frustrated and honestly, he's a bit confused, and he says, "Well, I need to get back to work." As he walks away he says, "Well, this might work for you but it won't work for most people." And he walks away.

Later that afternoon, Bill is really troubled, I mean, he can't get Eric and this whole matter of his mind so he seeks out Chuck, Chuck is the sales manager of the dealership. Chuck is a mature Christian. Sometimes Bill thinks Chuck is a little more concerned about doctrine than he ought to be but he knows he'll have something to say. So Bill goes to Chuck and he explains the situation and Chuck responds, "Wow. This is too big for us to talk about at work. Let's have dinner together and I'll give you my response."

The remainder of my message is the essence of Chuck's response to Bill's questions, and essentially Bill's questions are incredibly serious. Is religion merely a private, personal and subjective matter that has no place in a discussion of public morality or private

lifestyle choices? Is that really true? Is it true that the matters of sexuality, marriage and family are open to social innovation in response to changing cultural ideas and morays? Is that true? Is it true that difficult abnormal personal experiences, painful personal experiences, entitles one to strike out on a different course and to ignore well-established principles? These are huge questions. All of us are facing these questions, particularly those who are in public schools, especially in colleges. How do you answer these questions?

What did Chuck tell Bill? Well, he told him that the fundamental answer, the fundamental answer to all of these questions is this, it's really quite simple: Jesus Christ is Lord. Jesus Christ is Lord over all creation and all of life. He is not just Lord over Christians, he's not just Lord over the church, he is Lord over everything that exists and every human being that lives in his created universe. It's very important, beloved: Christianity is not merely another world religion rooted in centuries of tradition, cumulative human opinion and maybe even a little bit of mythology, the other religions of the world do have that as their origin, but Christianity is not that. Christianity is, it is the truth and the will of the only true and living God. The one who created all things. The one who reveals himself, his nature, his will, his power and his grace in the man Christ Jesus. The most important thing to know about Christianity is Jesus Christ. The most important thing to know about right and wrong is Jesus Christ. The most important person to consult concerning personal lifestyle choices is Jesus Christ.

Let me show you why. Alex and I did not talk, it's pretty obvious God wants us to consider Colossians 1. He read it earlier, I ask you to open your Bibles again to Colossians 1. He read verses 13 through 20, I was going to read verses 12 through 20, but I think I'll just read verses 15 through 20. This whole passage is about Christ. Verse 15,

15 Christ 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 or powers. 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. 19 For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell, 20 and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.

What I have just read to you is commonly considered by New Testament scholars to have been a hymn. A hymn. I personally think that the Apostle Paul wrote the hymn. I don't think he was quoting a hymn already in existence. That's my opinion. I believe that Paul wrote this hymn. I believe he wrote this hymn for this epistle.

The hymn, as I said, is all about Christ and it focuses upon three distinct glorious realities concerning Christ. First, it focuses upon his relationship with God. Look at verse 15, "He is the image of the invisible God." He is the perfect revelation of the God that cannot be

seen. He is the image of the invisible God. Verse 19, "For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness," all the fullness of the Godhead, "should dwell." You take these statements and you combine them with passages like John 1, Hebrews 1, and other New Testament texts, and you are brought to this conclusion: Jesus is God. He is eternally one with the Father. God exists as an eternal Trinity: Father, Son, Holy Spirit. One God existing eternally in three persons. Jesus is the Son of God sent into the world that he himself created. He is God who came into the world as man. He is God and man in one person, not 50% God, 50% man, 100% God and 100% man in one person. He is the perfect revelation of the invisible God.

Next, the hymn talks about our Savior's relationship to the creation. Look at the last part of verse 15, he is "the firstborn over all creation." That doesn't mean that he himself is created, it simply means that he is preeminent over the creation. It may also mean that he is the beginning of the new creation. Verse 16 and 17 explain his preeminence over the creation, "For by Him," by him, that man who walked 2,000 years ago in Israel, that man, "by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers." We don't think a great deal about the spiritual world. We read from Matthew 4 about the temptation of Jesus by Satan. Who is Satan? Where did he come from? He was one of those invisible spiritual beings created by Christ at the beginning who rebelled against God and led an insurrection of angels against God and were cast out of heaven and became the arch enemies of God and of his Christ. All things spiritual or material were created by Christ.

"All things were created through Him and for Him." For him. The creation doesn't exist for itself, it exists for him. "All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him," in him, "all things," cohere, "all things consist." Adam's molecules are held together by him. The earth continues to revolve on its axis at a particular angle because of him. The planets are held in orbit by him. You are held together by him.

Then lastly, this hymn speaks about the relationship of Christ to God's purpose of redemption; God's purpose of renewing the world including human beings in every generation. Look at verse 18, "And He is the head of the body, the church." The church is a reference to that accumulative congregation of people that God has determined to renew, remake and save for his own glory. Christ is the head of the church, "who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. And by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross." Jesus Christ is not only the Creator and the Sustainer of the world, he is also the one who saves the world from the dominion of sin and evil, darkness, death and ultimate and final judgment.

You see, what Eric most needs to understand is that ultimate dominating reality in the universe is Jesus Christ. This is not a private, personal, subjective opinion. It doesn't depend on people accepting it to be true. Everybody can reject it, everybody can mock it, everybody can ignore it but it is still true. This is the ultimate truth. This is the ultimate reality and it's not subjective, it's objective. Jesus Christ is real. Everything that exists

exists because of him. He rules over it. He is the only hope of it. And Bill himself, needs to have larger views of his Savior. You see, Jesus is not simply the answer to the question, "What must I do to be saved?" Jesus is the answer to the question, "How shall I then live?"

There is another statement in Colossians which is crucial to Eric's need. It is found in chapter 2. If you would turn the page of your Bibles to Colossians 2, it's verse 3. The antecedent of the pronoun "whom" is Christ, "in Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." You want something profound? That's one of the most important statements in all of the Bible. It's a very short sentence, "in Christ are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and of knowledge."

Note that word "all." Everything, beloved, that is true, everything that is valuable to be known, every part of wisdom. Now, what is wisdom? Wisdom is the ability to put knowledge to its intended use. Everything that is true, everything that is valuable to be known, all the wisdom in terms of how to use knowledge and respond to it, it's all found in Jesus Christ. He's not just a Lord over all, he is the source of all truth and knowledge and wisdom. All of it. And I assure you that includes the proper meaning of marriage, and it includes a proper practice of human sexuality, and it includes a proper context for the rearing and nurturing of children.

The idea of this treasure being hidden in Christ is that we have to seek it from him. We have to trust him and we have to desire wisdom and knowledge enough to go to its treasure box and to seek for it. Augustine said, "God did not hide wisdom and knowledge in order to deny them to us but to rouse our desires for what is hidden." It doesn't come easily. It's not obvious to fallen and depraved sin-darkened minds. Knowledge and wisdom have to be sought and where do you seek it? Not in Confucius. Not in the great philosophers. In Christ it is to be sought.

These words "wisdom and knowledge" brought together in this text cause us to think about the wisdom literature of the Old Testament and passages like Proverbs 2. Would you please turn quickly to Proverbs 2. Solomon is giving practical counsel to his son and he says in verse 4, speaking of wisdom, "If you seek her," if you seek wisdom, "as silver," seek it as precious treasure, "search for her as for hidden treasures," what will it bring you to? It will bring "you to understand the fear of the LORD, And find the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom." It is found in him. You don't begin to be wise until you revere the God who rules and reigns. "From His mouth come knowledge and understanding." All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ. You must seek it from him and he will give it to you through his word and the illumination of his Holy Spirit. So, you see, the thing that Eric must understand is that matters such as marriage and human sexual activity and the rearing of children, these things are not determined by popular consensus, they are not determined by private judgment or personal experience. The Creator, the Ruler, the Redeemer of the universe has determined all such matters and his wisdom will come to us through the word of Jesus Christ.

And beloved, this is what you must remember. I am so concerned that some of you might be like Bill, a Christian standing before the confident boast of a God-rejecting culture who is adopting all kinds of unheard of innovations, and you like Bill may be confused and you might actually conclude, "Well, maybe that'll work for you." Listen, it doesn't matter whether it works. It doesn't matter if it makes people feel good or feel happy or meets needs. That doesn't matter. That is beside the point. The point is: what has the God of the universe said? What is his mind? What is true? What is consistent with his word?

Young people, this is what you must remember when you are seated in a college classroom and a professor is mocking Christianity and mocking as feeble-minded those who actually believe the Bible, this is what you must remember; and beloved, when we listen to politicians speak as if there is no God and God is irrelevant, when we watch on TV social pundits declaring the legitimacy of all kinds of aberrant lifestyles, this is what you must remember: Christ is Lord and all the wisdom and knowledge of the universe is stored up in him. It's not what Christianity dictates, it's what Christ dictates. It's not what Christians think, it's what the Lord of glory thinks. That's what matters.

Now, let's bring it back to the issues at hand. What does Christ say about marriage? What does he say about sex? Well, I refer you to two familiar texts. The first is Matthew 19. Christ is confronted by some of his enemies. I'll simply read verses 3 through 6 and then verse 9. "The Pharisees also came to Him, testing Him, and saying to Him, 'Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for just any reason?' And He answered and said to them, 'Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning,'" the Bible goes again and again and again to the beginning and to the Creator, "'Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning "made them male and female," and said, 'For this reason a man,'" singular, "'shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife,'" singular, "'and the two shall become one flesh"? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate.'" Then verse 9, "And I say to you, whoever divorces his wife, except for sexual immorality, and marries another, commits adultery; and whoever marries her who is divorced commits adultery." The treasures of wisdom and knowledge are stored up and what does Christ say? Well, what he says is pretty clear, right? God established marriage from the beginning to be a lifetime union between one man and one woman and those who violate this arrangement are guilty of adultery. What God has set in place, what God has joined, man must not separate. That's pretty simple. That's what Eric needs to be taught.

Well, what are the consequences? Say you don't like God's arrangement. You don't find that it fits your preferences. You've had a bad experience. You want to try something new. What are the consequences? What does Christ say about that? Matthew 5, Christ said, "You have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not commit adultery.' But I say to you that whoever looks at a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart." And I think the real point there is that the first step to physical adultery is mental lust. It's mental lust. So if you have a problem with your eye, what should you do? Well, Christ illustrates, you should get rough with yourself. He says, "If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish," listen, "than for your whole body to

be cast into hell." What is he saying? He is saying the consequence of adultery is hell. Oh, we're not allowed to use that word. You never use that word. You never use the word "hell." Except Jesus did and he used it quite a lot, actually, and, beloved, though we may find the idea of hell difficult and coarse and we don't want to talk about it, listen, it's real. There is a place in the created universe where God executes judgment on the wicked. It's a real place. What are the consequences of going your own way, trying new things, ignoring God's will? What's the consequence? A very severe enduring punishment. Somebody needs to tell Eric about that, right?

So, what must Bill go back to Eric and say? He must go back and he must say at least four things. 1. "Eric, Jesus is Lord over all, including you, and he has spoken about the whole of life. All wisdom and knowledge is stored up in him. There is nothing subjective about this, it's not personal, it's not private. It's universal, it's objective, it's eternal. Jesus is Lord."

Secondly, "Eric, your life is being lived in defiance of Christ's revealed will and you know that in your conscience. Even if you have never been to a Christian church, you know in your conscience that what you are doing is wrong and there are horrendous consequences to what you're doing. You will feel those consequences in time but the major consequences won't come in time, they will come in eternity. Eric, listen, no one, no one gets to live in God's world and use God's good gifts and play by his own rules. Nobody. Not you. Not me. No one. There are consequences, Eric, to what you're doing. I don't care how right it feels. I don't care of all the arguments you give. There are consequences because you're living in defiance of the Lordship of Jesus Christ."

The third thing, Eric must be told that the sad and wicked things done to him in his youth, that they will be judged by God, but they do not give him license to strike out on a new path and to throw off the shackles of divine wisdom. You need to understand that, beloved. Bad experiences, bad experiences don't cut you free to go your own way and ignore the revealed will of God. The will of Christ stands.

The last thing that Eric needs to be told, he needs to be told that this great sovereign Lord, this glorious Lord who has preeminence over all things, the Lord Jesus in love came into this world, his world, so that he could die in the place of transgressors like Eric. And he died and bore the wrath of God and he was raised from the dead so that he would qualify, you see, even though he was Lord, as Lord he was not qualified to forgive sins, sins have to be punished, justice has to be satisfied. Jesus became man in part so that he could satisfy justice in the place of people like Eric, and now that he has died and borne the wrath of God and he has been raised from the dead, testifying that God is pleased with his death, now he is qualified to invite sinners, "Come, and I have the authority justly to forgive your sin, to forgive all of your sins, to forgive your sins forever. I am qualified not just because I am Lord but because I am the perfect God-man who died and was raised. Come." Eric must be told that even though he has committed horrendous evils in the sight of God and there are terrible consequences awaiting him, he can be free of the consequences and free of the guilt. He can be forgiven. He can be forgiven. It's not all lost, but he will have to come to Christ and he will have to repent of his polygamist

marriage. He'll have to repent. Beloved, we don't tell people the truth when we just tell them that Jesus will forgive them and we don't tell them: but they must turn from their sins and give up their rebellion.

That's what Eric needs to be told. "Eric, you're wrong. I can't begin to tell you how wrong you are. You're living in defiance of God. There are horrible consequences before you but the Lord who rules will save you, he will forgive you, he will cleanse you, he will give you the grace to extricate yourself from this very complicated life arrangement but, Eric, you're going to have to repent, boy. You're going to have to turn your back on your sin. You're going to have to trust Jesus and give him your heart and your life and your sins." That's what Eric needs to be told. That's what you need to hear. That's what I need to hear. That's what the whole world needs to hear.

Father, we plead with you, we plead with you, we plead, Father, that you will send the Gospel of Christ throughout this world, every part of the world; that you will send this Gospel powerfully, effectually throughout these United States, in every university, in the halls of Congress, in the halls of the Supreme Court; that you will cause Jesus to be recognized as Lord in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. And some here have never bowed before him, perhaps some here are living in a very disorderly, even wicked way. We pray for them, that you will arrest them and turn them and bring them savingly to Christ. We pray in his name as sinners ourselves who have no hope but Jesus. We pray in his name. Amen.