

Christians, is Jesus first in your life? And I don't mean, is he important in your life, because something can be important and yet be one of many things. So that we could consider Jesus to be important along with some other things, that he is one among many. I mean, is he first in your life? Is he preeminent, as Paul says, above all things? So that in him and through him and for him is everything that you are and everything that you do?

Because this was the problem that the Colossians were struggling with in our reading for this evening. Because of these ideas that had snuck in among them, they were starting to make Jesus become something less and less. I'm sure they thought that he was important, but he wasn't first. He wasn't preeminent, as Paul says. And we get a little hint of what their trouble was here in verse 16, because it says: "For by him all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities." Now, let's break that down a little bit, so that we understand what he's saying here. He says that God has created absolutely everything in all of creation. We get that part. He has made everything in heaven. He has made everything on earth. But when he goes on then to say "thrones and powers and dominions and authorities," he is saying that these are also created things. These are not just concepts. These are not things in the world. These are created beings that he's talking about now. Now, I don't know of anything in the world that goes by that name, anything in this physical world that we can see. So what Paul must be talking about then are spiritual beings. Some sort of spiritual creature living in heavenly places that the Colossians were entirely focused upon. Now, are these spiritual beings angels? There's lots of Christians who certainly think so. Maybe this is talking about different kinds of angels in the heavenly places. It could also be talking about demonic powers as well. But in the end it doesn't really matter whether its angelic or its demonic. What matters is that the Colossians were putting them higher than they were supposed to be. They were focusing on these things and being so wrapped up in these things that Jesus was being brought down and made less important as a result.

So how did they do it? Maybe they were doing it by considering these to be greater powers than Jesus. That was an idea that was very common in the early years of the church. This whole idea that in the spiritual realm, there was this whole ladder, for the lack of a better way of describing it, of heavenly beings, that you start here and you go up rung by rung until you finally got back to God. That was an idea that was all throughout the Church, something that a lot of people struggled with. It's not biblical. It came from the world. Maybe that's what the Colossians were thinking, so that Jesus became one rung among many, or maybe even just the first step before you get onto something more powerful and then you can really get closer to God. Maybe that's what they were doing. It's hard to say.

Maybe they were looking at these powers as saviors, as those who were greater than they were, and as a result that they could get something from them. We encounter this idea too, actually. Whenever you watch a movie these days where you have aliens, right? How are aliens always depicted? As being much more powerful than us, as being creatures of this tremendous power who have either come to destroy us or they have come to help us, to lift us up, to make us better than something that we already are. And so in this way, maybe these demonic powers are trying to do the same thing. The Colossians see them as helping them, as lifting them up, so that they are given something greater than Jesus could ever give them. And in so doing, Jesus is kind of pushed off the side.

Or maybe they're just obsessed. Maybe they just are so focused on these things that they can't think about anything else. And as a result, they aren't thinking about what it is that Jesus is doing for them. Whatever the case may be--and I don't think it ultimately matters--the Colossians have made Jesus into something less than being first. I'm sure he's still important to them, but he is not the preeminent one among all things.

And Christians, I'll ask you again. Do you hold Jesus first in your lives? Do you hold him above all other things, so that everything that you do, everything that you are, everything that you think or say is done in Jesus or for Jesus? Again, I'm not just asking if he is the most important, because we could say that he is important and yet that's all we think of him. Are we putting Jesus into some kind of box? So that we can think about him over here but he doesn't have any other relevance to anything going on around us? Because we can show how important he is to us simply by how much time we give to him. How much time do we spend in the Word? How much time do we spend in church? How much time we spend in prayer? That can say something about what we think about Jesus. But does he inform everything about your life? Is he in and before and through everything, so that he is preeminent above all?

When it comes to your work, for example, do you consider your work to be something that is done for the Lord? Do you consider your work to be something that is given to you from God? And that by doing your work to the best of your ability, you are doing it for the Lord? Or is it something that frequently conflicts with the things of God, so that it often gets in the way of being with the Lord? Or when it comes to your family, do you consider your family to be there for the Lord? Are you spending time as a family with the Lord? Are you spending time so that you are glorifying God in all that you say and do together? Or is family and God only something that's important on Sunday, and all the rest of the time, we can just forget about that? Or when it comes to something as simple as what we think or say or do, does God become first in all of those things? So that your very thoughts are shaped by God? So that your very opinions, the very things that you consider to be true, do they all come from God's Word? Or is God put in that little box that we call "church and Sunday" that doesn't really inform anything about how we think the rest of the week? Christians, this is what I mean then. Is God first in your life? Is he preeminent above all things?

Because he is, in fact, first. The Lord is, in fact, the one who is above all things. And all that we do and all that we say and all that we are is from him and through him and for him. Because that's what Paul is trying to teach the Colossians here. He is telling them something about who Christ is, something about his very identity, as a way of showing them just what it means for him to be preeminent. Paul says that Jesus is first, because he is God. He is the "firstborn of all creation," "the image of the invisible God." He is, in fact, before all things. He is the one who has always existed, and for that reason, he is first before all. Jesus is first because he is the Creator. He is the one who made us. He is the one to whom we owe everything, our very existence, our very lives. And so he was before all things, because all things come from him. Jesus is first because he is our Sustainer. In him all things hold together. If God didn't want us to exist, we wouldn't exist for a second longer. We are here because of Jesus and Jesus alone. Jesus is first because he is the Head of the Church. He is the head of his body. The fact that we are here today shows that we are in him, because he is above all things. We are who we are as Christians

because of the Lord. Jesus is first because he is the Firstborn of the dead, the one who has risen from the grave first. So that we too will rise with him, but not apart from him. We will live with him, because of him and in him alone. Jesus is first because he is the Reconciler, the one who has made peace by the blood of his cross. So that all things are brought back to God through the work of Jesus alone. And Christians, Jesus is first because he is our Savior. The very fact that we are Christians comes from him alone. So that in all things, no matter what it is, who we are and what we are is only because of the Lord. And for that reason, he is first above all things. All things were made through him. All things were made in him. And all things were made for him. Because he is the Firstborn of all things, the one who is above everything.

So Christians, let us look to him then as being first in all things. Let us look to him as being the one who is preeminent, to use the words of Paul. In everything that we say, in everything that we do, in everything that we are, let us seek after the Lord, because he is above all things. And to him and him alone will be all the glory forever and ever. Amen.

Let us pray. Lord God, heavenly Father, we thank you for your Son, Jesus Christ, whom you have given to us to be first above all things. We pray that you would help us to seek after him in everything, so that all our thoughts and all our actions may be formed in him and for him. In his name we pray. Amen.