

It's funny when you think about it, how we usually think about Jesus. I mean, it makes sense why we do, but it's still a little odd. When you think of Jesus, what do you usually picture? Probably the calm, bearded guy in robes, surrounded maybe by his disciples, walking the roads of Palestine. Maybe you think of him on the cross. But what usually comes to mind is something from his earthly ministry, from the time he was physically present on earth as a human being, with the majority of his divine nature hidden from sight. Now, like I said, that makes sense. The majority of what we have written about Jesus in a narrative sort of way is concerning those few years he spent on his ministry here. In fact we have those years recorded for us from four different perspectives. And every Sunday of our three readings, one is from those accounts of Jesus' time on earth.

And yet, even despite the focus we give on that time of Jesus' life, it's still funny that this is what comes to mind, that this humble man is how we picture Jesus. That time that we focus on amounts to roughly three years of his whole existence. Three years out of an eternal God. At the very least from our perspective of human history, that's only three years out of several *thousand*. Our Lord Jesus is so much more than the quiet man who lived a relatively unassuming life here. And I think we do him a disservice to not think about him more often as he truly is. Our reading today from Colossians is one of the sections of scripture where Christ in his fullness is more adequately described.

<Read text: Colossians 1:13-20>

Again, when we think about Jesus, we tend to think about him as sort of a late-game thing for the history of the world. His coming on the scene is the dividing line between BC and AD. But Paul, talking about Jesus, goes all the way back to the beginning. Christ was there at the beginning, not as the first thing created but as firstborn over creation. That's to say, he was over it, in charge of it from the very beginning. And as he goes on to say, everything that was created was through him, by him. Of course when dealing with the mystery of the trinity, even though we attribute certain events to one person or another, there is still only one God and so in many ways the Bible will speak of other members of the trinity participating in certain actions we usually only credit to one of them. Let me restate that in an example. We usually speak of creation as the act of God the Father. We speak that every week in one of our creeds. And yet, clearly the Son, Jesus was involved in creation as well. And that makes sense. Jesus is called the Word of God, and creation was accomplished by the word.

What is more significant though than Jesus' participation in creating this world, is the position or status that is assigned to him next. See, he's not just the one who created all the physical things we see in our world, but also all the systems behind everything that keep it all running together. So he created the invisible patterns that keep our world functioning, like gravity, cell division, molecular bonding. All the natural systems that we take for granted that keep life moving and existing on our planet were created by him. In fact, as Paul mentions a little bit further on here in verse 17, the only reason all those systems *continue* to work is because of him. **"In him all things hold together,"** Paul writes. He is the divine glue that holds our world together. We like to think of many things happening just because they do and always will. The earth orbits the sun, the day turns into night, our lungs take in air, our bodies process food, etc, etc. All those natural systems that we don't think about and take for granted each day. They don't just happen because they happen, they happen because our Lord Christ wills that they continue each day.

But that's not even the area that Paul wants to focus on here. Paul specifically mentions the sources of authority so we get the picture as plain as possible. All authority that exists on earth, from the emperors who ruled continents to every person who makes up our system of government to the simplest form of authority, the parent; all of them are created by Christ. No, not just the person who wields that authority, but the authority itself, the position. It is all created by Christ and Christ rules over that position. In everything, as Paul says here, he has supremacy.

So how definite is our Lord Christ's authority in these matters? Well, let's make it very plain. All authority that exists in our world exists only because it has been handed down from Christ. He is the final authority in this world, but he allows people here to represent him and carry out his will. They are all, all of them, working for him. And he is in complete control of this setup. Anyone on this planet who has authority only has it and only continues to have it so long as Christ allows it. And those operating in authority are only able to accomplish what Christ allows and desires. He is the supervising power, the King over all. Whatever governments or other powers exist, they operate at his good pleasure and for his good purpose. They belong to him. This does not mean the people in authority do not sin. This does not mean they are perfect Christians. We know that, we can see it. What it does mean is that despite their best efforts to frustrate God's will, whether intentionally or not, they are only able to work for him. Again, if you think God

can't accomplish his will through the efforts of sinful men, then you need to re-read the passion history of Christ. Christ is in control of it all, from beginning to end. No matter what it might look like to us, he is in charge.

This is our Lord Jesus as we should think of him. We certainly appreciate what he went through during his time of humiliation, and we are right to hold up Christ crucified for our sins as the center of our teachings. But when we think of our Lord Jesus, we shouldn't think of him so much as the frail man who allowed himself to be beaten and hung on a cross. We should think of him as he is in eternity: the supreme King over this whole existence. He is our King, and he rules over us with that complete and unquestionable authority. Jesus certainly loves us and cares about us. He wants to help us, he wants to hear our prayers. But I think that perhaps too often we allow those truths to slide us into a mentality where we think of Jesus as our "buddy" and less our Lord. Let's not forget who Christ is and the authority that he wields as our Lord.

And that is not a bad thing. It's not meant to scare us, but to make sure we treat him with the reverence and respect he deserves. When we think about it, in fact, it's a great comfort because he is the head of the body, which is the church (v18). This means that all his authority is used to this one end, to benefit the body of believers. Both to strengthen those that do believe and to do what is necessary to bring more to faith. All authority on this planet, whether they know it or not, whether they like it or not, is working at Christ's direction to accomplish this singular purpose; to benefit the church.

That's a little bit tricky for us to swallow sometimes though, isn't it? Because we want to equate the good of the church with a government that promotes Christian values. Except it doesn't work that way. In fact, there have been a number of times in history where a government that promoted Christian living has led the church into a state of decay. And other times when the church was severely persecuted by the government that it flourished greatly. But here's the point of the matter: Jesus is our King. He is in control of the authorities of this world to accomplish his purpose and he has stated that purpose as whatever is beneficial to the body of believers. That is all he tells us and even that is more than he needs to tell us. A king has no obligation to explain himself to his subjects. Christ is not required to tell us why what he does will be to our benefit, it is enough that he promises it will be.

Yes, we are used to dealing with fallible human authorities, and questioning their wisdom and their motivations. But that's not who we're talking about here. We're talking about God. He is complete both in wisdom and love. When he promises that something is what is best for us, then that is the rock-solid truth. There is no need to know how or why, it is enough to know that it is. This doesn't mean we just sit idly by and not participate in our government, since we're fortunate enough to live in a system that encourages that, but it does mean that when despite our efforts something happens or laws are passed we disagree with, we can recognize that Christ is working through those things to accomplish his good and holy will. We do not need an explanation.

The only thing that does matter is our relationship to our King. We only are able to take comfort in these promises if we are part of his holy kingdom. We can only trust them for our benefit if we are part of the body it benefits. We need to be on good terms with our King. But our sin, especially our rampant and sometimes vocal distrust of how he rules over this world would be enough to offend any earthly king. We certainly have no right to claim to be part of those he cares about or watches over.

And yet he does. And we know our king did everything he could to reconcile ourselves to him. In the greatest battle he ever fought, he met the forces of death head-on and defeated them. He made peace between himself and us through the shedding of his blood on the cross. And that peace is the comfort and security of knowing for certain that his entire rule is directed toward our benefit. Because of everything he has already done for us, because he has kept every promise he has ever made so far, we can trust the promises we have yet to see fulfilled. We can know with certainty that we will be rescued from this world and brought to his everlasting kingdom in the end.

When we consider the wider perspective, then much of Christ's rule of this world makes more sense. We don't need governments that legislate Christian values or morality. That's trying create heaven on earth. That's trying to make our home here when clearly heaven is our home. What we do need is whatever is necessary to make the gospel easier to spread and whatever makes the hearts of the sinner more receptive to hearing the healing message of the gospel. If that means that the people of a country need to be handed over to sin more, then so be it! The most important thing is that by whatever means necessary, Christ is proclaimed and souls are rescued from eternal death.

And by his rule our Lord Christ will accomplish this. See him as he is, King and Lord over all creation. See that he is working through all earthly authorities. Trust that what he does is for a singular purpose, to spread the word of salvation to everyone possible. Don't look at the world and let yourself get distressed by how out of control it appears. Remember that Christ is over everything, and the Christ that shed his blood for you will not fail to rescue you for life eternal. Amen.