

The One and Only  
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In 1989, No Fear Inc. was founded and from that came the plethora of No Fear t-shirts that now grace the bottom of dressers and thrift store clothes racks across America. I was hitting my teenage years about this same time when everybody and their dog began wearing some sort of No Fear t-shirt. Being the contrarian that I was (and confess, still am) I refused to wear anything that everybody else liked (that's why my favorite college bball team was Seton Hall... Never heard of them, have you? That's on purpose!). I remember one No Fear t-shirt that a HS buddy used to wear and it said No Fear: 2nd place is 1st loser (so take that!).

Coming in second (or third or fourth) is hard to do. I love trying to explain to a young child that she hasn't won the game of Candy Land. Doesn't go over very well, does it? At that age it's hard even understanding what it means not to be first. But *understanding* this doesn't solve the problem; I understand fully that there can only be one winner and I still hate to lose.

To be the best, to be on top, to be first. There's a word the Bible uses to get at this idea; the word is preeminent. Preeminent means greatest, finest or best. There's even a celebratory aspect to this word; to be preeminent means to be celebrated as first. Tomorrow night, the college national champion in basketball will be crowned; college basketball fans will celebrate their status as the best. They will be preeminent in college basketball.

But that word, preeminent, is only used one time in the entire Bible. Just once. And that's fitting, right? Only one thing can be preeminent (you can't have many preeminent people or things) so it should be used only once. And that one time is in reference to Jesus. Jesus is preeminent; Jesus is celebrated as the finest and greatest. Nothing and no one can compare with him.

Today, Easter Sunday, we celebrate Jesus. But not just Jesus; we celebrate his preeminence. We're going to read the passage that highlights the preeminence of Jesus and I'm hoping that God will enlighten your mind and my mind about the glory of Jesus Christ. I'm hoping you leave here today transformed by his greatness.

This is meant to be more than just some religious exercise that makes us feel good on Easter Sunday. This is meant to change the way you live and here's how: You and I both (along with every other human being) orient our lives around that which we count as great; around that which we think and call preeminent. You do what you do because of what you think is supreme. For some, the applause and the praise of other people is preeminent to them so they dress and do their hair and drive cars and buy houses that gets the approval, the nods from other people. For others, money is preeminent so they will lie, cheat and steal

to get more. Some people count sex as the best, so they will throw away precious people and things like families and reputations for more.

And really, friends, at the heart of all those sinful lives is the belief and conviction that you are the preeminent one - the guy, the gal in the mirror. Nothing is more important than me. That's why we might yell at our kids when they talk during our favorite TV shows; it's why we're impatient in the grocery line. That's why a person throws away a family in an affair. That's why a person takes another person's stuff; I'm supreme and they are not. My preeminence is why we must do things my way at work, in church or at home. If you call FBC home you've heard me talk a lot about the self-esteem movement and that value that's so entrenched in American culture. This is why it's so dangerous. The self-esteem culture encourages this. It tells us to count ourselves more important than others. It tells us to put ourselves first. It's ugly, it's sinful and dangerous.

I'm trying to show you, my dear friends, why it's important to know what's really great; we arrange and order our lives around that which we think is supreme, is preeminent. And when you get it wrong (when you count the wrong thing preeminent) life simply doesn't work. Only when we arrange and order our lives to that which truly is supreme, then our lives will begin to be fruitful. Maybe take a quick survey of your life, friends. Is life what you'd like it to be? Do you have the peace, the joy, the hope your heart is longing for? Do you have the sense of purpose and mission? Are your most significant relationships flourishing? I want you to consider the possibility that if there are areas, pockets of your life that are less than ideal that it might just be the case that you are counting the wrong thing as preeminent. I want to show you who really is supreme from Col 1 (READ Col. 1:15-20).

The word preeminent is found in vs 18. Paul says, "that in everything he (Jesus) might be preeminent." So, how does Paul actually spell that out in this passage? Paul tells us that Jesus is preeminent...

- in creation
- in the church
- in salvation

When we recognize, embrace, celebrate the supremacy of Jesus in all three of these realms, friends, we will be living in tune with reality. God will be rightly honored and we will be rightly blessed. Let's take a peek at these.

Jesus is preeminent (the greatest) in creation. Now, when I say the word *creation*, don't think of something small. Think of something great, something magnificent because creation is just that. The range of mass of a typical person, for instance, is about 43 to 141 kg (sorry for the reference to the metric system). The mass of the earth is 5.97E24 kg. That difference is absolutely enormous. We could accurately say that you and I are infinitesimally smaller than the earth. The comparison almost can not be made. And that's the earth. Jupiter, our largest planet in the solar system, is 300 times larger than the earth. Astronomers

don't know this for sure, but they estimate that there could be 100 billion solar systems in the Milky Way Galaxy. And if that doesn't make you feel small enough, they estimate 100 billion galaxies in the observable universe. Creation.

When I'm trying to think of creation well, I also compare my power with the power in the world. I'm really looking forward to summertime. One of my favorite pastimes is sitting by the fire pit. To keep the fire going, I need to hunt for wood. So, I find downed limbs in the forest. I can break some of them into pieces with my bare hands. Not very big ones. (PIC) This picture shows entire trees mowed over in the Brimfield State Forest in Massachusetts from a tornado in 2011. My power; nature's power.

And Paul says in Col. 1 that everything in creation (everything!) was created by Jesus, through Jesus and for Jesus. Everything doesn't just mean things we can touch with our hands. He says, "the invisible stuff of the world that we can't see or handle... Jesus made that, too." And even thrones, nations, rulers and powers are made by, through and for Jesus.

Friends, it's not hard to look around and see the greatness in creation. It's everywhere. No wonder humans worldwide have worshiped the sun and moon, rivers and mountains. We are dwarfed by the greatness, power, majesty of creation, yet our own bodies and how it functions so amazingly might be the greatest thing in all of creation. And this passage tells us it all came from Jesus. It depends on him, it needs him; creation holds together because of his power. That means, friends, that Jesus is preeminent, he is supreme over all of creation. Nothing is better.

Col. 1 also says Jesus is preeminent in the church. Notice how it does that in vs. 18, "And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead." By saying Jesus is the head of the church he is saying he's on top; he's preeminent and supreme in family of God. One passage in Philippians says that God the Father has given Jesus the name that is above all names. You can feel the emphasis on Jesus' supremacy in that, can't you?

Now, you might be tempted to wonder, "Well, so? Why is this such a big deal? Creation, sure, I can see that. But, the church? What's so great about the church?" I understand why some might feel that way. The greatness of the church is hard to measure with these eyes. And God's people have made mistakes, no doubt. But I'm wondering if you can hear and see the greatness of church in this passage (READ Matthew 16:13-20).

These words are the earliest teachings of Jesus about his church, the people of God. The church will be founded on the confession that Jesus is the Christ. That's who the church is; the collection of people who say together (like Peter said), "Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God." But notice what Jesus does next; he gives Peter the keys to the brand new Camaro.

In South Dakota, you don't have to be 16 to get your drivers license. I got mine at 14 and that's still the way it is today. Right now there are 8th graders (get that, 8th graders!) turning 14 and getting their drivers licenses in South Dakota. Yeah, start rethinking that trip to Rushmore this summer, friends. When I was 14, nothing was better when my dad would give me the keys to his pickup that looked like this. (PIC) My dad had Dodge Dakota pickup that was a convertible. All I thought was "Sweet!" For a 14 year old to get the keys to the car was heavenly.

Jesus says to Peter, "I'm going to give the keys of the kingdom to you and the church." And what can the church do with those keys? He says, "Whatever you bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." Now, there's plenty of debate in church-world as to what exactly that means, but without getting into the soupy-details just consider the big picture. Jesus is saying that the church is a very special community of people; whatever whatever they bind on earth will be bound in heaven; and whatever they is loose or let go on earth will be loosed in heaven. Another way of saying that would be like this: "The power and impact of the church on earth is so great that there a ways that the church and the church alone will impact and influence heaven. What you as a church agree to and hold on earth that's what's going to be bound and held in heaven. And whatever you let go of, whatever you say goodbye to on earth that, too, will be let go of in heaven."

Talk about power and influence! The church is amazingly influential and powerful. The church of Jesus Christ has an impact of what will happen in heaven. No government, no leader, no army, no university... nothing in all the earth can boast of such power. EPA policy, Obamacare, decisions by the Supreme Court, new research developments by university scientists; these are impactful... only here on earth. The church has the power to make an impact in heaven. So, to say that Jesus is head of the church is to say that he is supreme over the most powerful and most influential community the world has ever or will ever see. That's how preeminent Jesus really is.

One more: we see in vs. 19 and 20 that Jesus is preeminent in salvation (READ). The key phrase is "through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of the cross." Salvation is completely a work of God. It is what God has done for us. He made peace for us, bought this reconciliation for us, by the blood of his cross.

Just a few days ago, we remembered the crucifixion and death of Jesus on Good Friday. The suffering was inhumane; the death was excruciating and sapped all the hope from the followers of Christ. We read in the gospels that when Jesus died darkness covered the lands it was such a terrible thing to have happened. The only begotten son of God, innocent and pure in every way, was killed and murdered like a guilty criminal.

But what we also learned and what we read this morning is that what Satan meant for evil, God meant for good. God worked his work of grace and justice through the death of

Jesus on the cross. God's wrath and justice was satisfied. The penalty of sin was enacted. That means, everyone who calls on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation will be saved... even though they are sinners.

How do we know this? We know this because of Easter. Easter is the celebration of Jesus' resurrection from the dead. Though he died and was dead three days, Jesus was given a new, resurrected life. And no longer is Jesus dead; he is alive today - more alive than you and me.

What does it take to receive this salvation? Well, as I mentioned earlier, you must call on the Lord for salvation. Romans 10:13 says, "For everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved." Isn't that good news? Nobody will be turned away; whoever you are you can call on the Lord and be saved.

But here's the thing: not everyone calls. Oh, many believe (you know, I believe that Jesus died on the cross... like I believe Columbus sailed the ocean blue... it happened, but it doesn't make much difference in my life), but not everyone calls. Do you know why? Because salvation doesn't feel supremely needed. Do you feel the *need* to be saved? I confess, I don't always do. I feel the need to eat; I feel the need to play. I feel the need for alone time and the need to watch the Final Four. But I don't feel the need to be saved all the time. And because of that, I don't count salvation preeminently important either.

Oh, we do up here in our heads. But, we don't feel it in our gut (at least not without God's grace). And that's why we do what we do; our hearts. What we love, what we treasure, what we value. And the only way God, Jesus, the gospel, his word, his church feel preeminently important and necessary is because God works on our hearts. And when he does, we believe in him and call on his help.

Friends, does God feel preeminently desirable to you today? Does your need for him feel supremely important? You must. And if that's happening that means God is working on you. If you don't feel this need; if you don't count salvation desirable, call out a for help. Call out for his grace. Plead for his mercy. Tell yourself what you've heard today, "Soul, nothing is greater than Jesus." Consider Jesus and his way, his word, his church better than alone time, sports, shopping, food and family (Yes, family... Count Jesus better than family; in fact, Jesus said, "whoever will not leave mother or father, son or daughter for me is not worthy of me"). And friends, God says he hears that call and saves those who believe in such a way that they will cry for help.