



# 2023 Weekly Devotions

Week of: August 14<sup>th</sup> - 20<sup>th</sup>

Sermon: August 13<sup>th</sup>



SMYRNA BAPTIST CHURCH  
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August 14

**Psalm 89:27**

This week's devotions provide a unique opportunity and challenge as I am writing daily entries without actually preparing to preach the sermon! Pastor Robert and I both were out of town on Sunday which means that I am covering devotions while Kurt Jones is currently preparing to preach. I am sure that by the time you read this entry, you will have heard and enjoyed my brother's sermon, but I am equally sure that there is a ton of depth in Colossians 1, and it is impossible for me to know exactly where he focused. This means that we are going to use the week to simply summarize some of the most glorious, and central, truths in the passage.

Kurt's text concentrates on Jesus, and rightly so. Christ is the author and perfecter of our faith (Hebrews 12:2), He is the very centerpiece of all the Scriptures (John 5:46 and Luke 24:27) and He is the sole reason for our hope and salvation. He is also immeasurably glorious and, therefore, the very thought of Christ causes Paul to erupt in theologically rich praise and admiration.

I want to make a passing observation regarding the way Paul wrote his epistles. You will notice a certain structure to Paul's work. When he writes, he starts with the excellencies of Christ and then moves to admonition. Paul believes that the greatest source of strength and motivation for holiness is grounded in the Person and work of Christ. When we understand who Christ is and what He has accomplished, the motivation to live in accordance with His precepts flows quite nicely. Unfortunately, the church often gets this backwards. Many attempt to lead with exhortations and ground the motivation for faithfulness in some passing benefit but this belies a weak stimulus. The all-encompassing glory of Christ is the richest and most lasting reason to follow Him.

Today's passage is one of the Old Testament texts that was almost certainly on Paul's mind. We know this because the title ascribed to Christ is used in this Messianic prophecy. The term "firstborn" has a literal and cultural significance. In a literal sense, we use the term firstborn all the time. Every family with children has a firstborn and the title is used to describe the person who was created and birthed first. Over the years, some have taken this generic use of the term and read into its utilization in the Bible in such a way as to teach that Christ was somehow created. Jehovah's Witnesses, for example, teach that Jesus is not eternal God but rather Christ is the most glorious and majestic of God's creation.

The problem with this logic however is that it denies clear biblical teaching both as it relates to Christ's deity and as it contradicts other clear texts. In fact, our very passage has a statement of Christ's eternal being in verse 17 when Paul states that Christ was "before all things". Hebrews 7:3 tells us that Christ has no beginning of days and Revelation 1:8 relays Jesus' Words that He is the "first and the last" denoting His eternal being.

So, if Christ is not created, what does the term "firstborn" represent? The answer is that Jesus is the firstborn in the sense of His preeminence amongst His people. Just like firstborn children had certain rights and a position of honor, so Christ takes the seat of glory amongst all the children of God. Whereas we have been born again and redeemed from our sin, Christ was never in need of salvation and has always been both God the Son and in right relationship to God the Father. Jesus is the One, therefore, who stands to inherit all things from the Father as He stands as the "most exalted of the kings of the earth." He is the great I AM who makes all things new, and He stands as the One that God exalts as our object of praise, adoration and emulation. Our Jesus is the object of our hope and affection and stands as the exalted One in the family of the redeemed.

August 15

**John 1:1-3**

In order to dive into the meat of our passage for today, we need to put on our skeptic's hat for a moment. When we read that Christ is the "firstborn" over all creation, we must understand that some folks would immediately question the grounds for such a marvelous statement. Specifically, what is it that gives Christ the right to be exalted over us? While a Christian should read those words and shudder, we must also recognize that many people have asked such a question over the years and, thankfully, the Bible gives us ample reasons with which to respond.

The flow of the passage in Colossians is interesting in this regard as Paul goes directly to one reason for Christ's exaltation, namely His standing as the Creator of everything. We all have some frame of reference for this as we understand the concept that those who create something should have certain rights over the object or even person. When an inventor concocts a new and improved product, our culture shares the conviction that he or she has certain rights over how that product is used and sold. Patents exist to declare a person's right or authority over their invention. Concurrently, our society (at least those of us with some remaining sanity) believe that parents have certain authoritative rights to dictate what happens to their children. Parents still have the right to decide on a young child's diet or schooling or choice clothes or religious affiliation. Obviously, this wanes over time but that is only because we believe that maturity brings with it a certain level of autonomy as dictated by age and experience.

These modern-day examples exemplify the truth that even lost society believes that there are certain privileges and due deference that should be paid to those who create. The principle is a good one and it leads to a stable society but that is only because it is in keeping with God's design. You see, God also believes that creation leads to authority, and this is why Jesus is exalted over us! Notice the flow of thought here... Paul says that Jesus is the firstborn (remember, we defined this as the one who has preeminence or privilege in the family) over all creation and then, to answer anyone who would want to know why, Paul immediately gives one answer which is grounded in His standing as Creator.

Jesus is exalted over us because He created us, and everything else we see. He deserves our love, affection and praise because He alone is the reason why we even exist. Without Christ, there would be no life, no planet and no universe. Without His power and foresight and matchless wisdom in design, the very life we live would not be possible. Doesn't this mean that He deserves praise and due deference?

Our text for today reminds us that Jesus' power to create was not isolated to a select few items or individuals, instead the Lord Jesus created all things, and this means that His authority extends to all people and places. As Abraham Kuyper once famously quipped, "there is not one single inch in the universe over which the Lord Jesus does not rightly exclaim 'mine'!" What a truth and what a reason to praise Jesus as Lord.

August 16

**Hebrews 1:3**

There is a religious view that is called “deism”. Deism is essentially the idea that God created all things and ordered all things but then left creation unattended once he finished His work. The concept is that God made everything we see but mankind is responsible for keeping the ship afloat! Of all the worldviews in society, this one might be the most terrifying to me. What kind of peace would there be if the prosperity or doom of the world was left in man’s hands?

The truth is that deism seeps into so much of our cultural discussions. It is a deistic perspective to claim that mankind has the ability to destroy creation. To be clear, we certainly are given responsibility to care for creation and we are held accountable by God for any harm we may do to the world around us, but the idea that we somehow dictate when the world ends or whether we warm the atmosphere enough to destroy ecosystems and climates is totally foreign to the Scriptures and the God of the Scriptures.

The truth is that we are here today as a product of God’s faithful, sustaining power. The sun came up, the oxygen continues to fill our lungs, the plants of the field spring forth giving us food and the like because God, in Christ, is gracious in upholding the universe. We breathe and talk and move because our great Lord and Savior upholds our respiratory systems and our brain power and our strength. Everything we see and expect is the product of God’s sustenance in Christ Jesus.

This is yet another reason why we praise Christ as the firstborn over all creation. We praise Jesus because without Him there would be no world in which to live. We praise Jesus because without Him we would have no life, no hope, and no prospect of a future. We praise Jesus because everything that our lives are based upon are grounded in His sustaining work.

This is yet another way that Christ separates Himself from creation. He stands over all things as the keeper and maintainer of everything He has made, and He does so for our good and His glory. The great irony of our day is that the very “science” that supposedly disproves God is only reliable because of God! There would be no predictability, no repeatable outcomes and no “laws of nature” without the One who sees to it that these things remain.

The challenge for today is simple, take the time to consider all of the ways that Christ is upholding you, in His universe, by the Word of His power and then praise Him for His matchless might and grace. Are you reading today? Thank Him for your sight. Are you working today? Thank Him for the strength to provide for your family. Are you educating children today? Thank Him for strength, patience and the joy of being entrusted with little ones to raise in His nurture and admonition. Are you worried today? Remember that there is Someone greater than any ruler or principality that you see. In all these things, Christ becomes the center and ground of our peace and the object of our affections and praise.

August 17

**Ephesians 1:22**

It is commonly held that the text from Colossians 1 is taken from, or perhaps an exact quote of, a hymn that was commonly sung in first century churches. The conviction of most scholars is that the song was divided into two sections (or verses as it were) and the second verse would begin in verse 18. The first verse of the hymn was concerned with Christ's Lordship over all things and the second begins with Christ's Lordship over the church specifically.

If you've spent any time in church at all, the refrain "Jesus is Lord" should not be foreign to you. Indeed, the very backbone of the Christian confession is that Christ is the Lord of the church, but it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure out that many churches do not hold to that declaration in practice. You see, Christ's Lordship has many implications for the local congregation. If Jesus is really Lord, then His teachings on the nature of worship, the reality of sin, the necessity of biblical sexual ethics and the like should be held by the church. After all, the very term "Lord" screams of authority!

We must constantly remember our Lord. We have not been saved and set apart in the church for creative purposes. God has not designed the church to function through the ultimate leadership of some mere mortal and He has not asked for our input in the church's direction or convictions, but this doesn't mean that churches don't often attempt to wiggle their way into the decision-making process!

Christ's Lordship is expressed here in terms of physiology, he is the "head of the church". The head is the control center of the body. It is the place that houses the brains which control the thoughts and actions of the rest of the person. It is also essential to life. A person can live without a limb and even without certain organ function, but a person is lifeless and deceased without a head.

As the head dictates all that the physical body thinks and does, so Christ should dictate all that His body, the church, should do. Imagine the lunacy of a body whose kidneys decided they were going to run operations! How ridiculous it would be for a finger to tell the brain to take a hike. Yet so many of the members of the body of Christ are guilty of the same infraction and this is why the church, in many locations, is in shambles.

The implications of Christ's headship are simple but profound. Our job is not to chart a new course but to follow the one that has been set by the head. We do this by consulting His revelation to us and following His clear orders and when we combine this implication with what Paul has already told us, namely that Jesus is the Eternal One who made all things and upholds the very universe in His power, the order to follow Him is not only clear but extremely logical.

Church family, what the body of Christ needs today is not creativity but obedience. We are not responsible for charting a new course, we are responsible for holding steady on the path that Jesus has marked out for us. He is the head, let Him worry about the headwinds and the resistance.

August 18

### **1 Corinthians 3:11**

Paul gives two reasons why Christ is the head of the church in verse 18. Today's devotion deals with the first of those reasons, namely that Christ is the head of the church because He is the "beginning" of the church. I do believe that this line of reasoning is fairly apparent to the reader, the point of course is that Jesus is the very initiator of His church! Without Christ, there is no church and, therefore, He is both the reason for the church and the rightful head of the church.

Today's devotional passage employs a different metaphor to communicate the same truth. In 1 Corinthians, we are told that Christ is the "foundation" of the church. The foundation of a building must be constructed first! If a person is going to build any structure whatsoever, the initial steps that must be completed are foundation work. One cannot build a house and then worry about the foundation; one must start with a foundation in order to build a house.

The analogy communicates quite well as the same must be true about the spiritual structure known as the church of Christ. While we are responsible for obeying God in the construction of His church, there is no doubt that the foundation has been laid years prior to our existence. We do not build on our own foundation but on the foundation of Christ, crucified and resurrected for the salvation of sinners.

Now, this picture becomes even more beneficial when we consider the ways that churches suffer when another foundation is laid. It seems that many throughout history have attempted to neglect Christ as the foundation of the church. The Roman Catholic tradition attempted to subvert the Gospel truth of justification by faith alone in order to lay a foundation predicated on the authority of the pope and built around faith and works as a means to salvation. The effect of building on that sandy soil is obvious as the church swerved into all kinds of heretical teachings and bizarre traditions which continue to abound today. How can we go from biblical truths to a sinless virgin Mary, the need to confess to a priest and a mass whereby Christ is supposedly crucified again and again for sinners? The answer is that the foundation of Christ has been shirked for some other base.

Today, the foundation of Christ crucified has been abandoned for the foundation of material prosperity. Large swaths of supposed Christian organizations teach that Christ's sacrifice is not the ground of our convictions, rather Jesus acts as a "cosmic vending machine" to deliver to us all that we desire, specifically material wealth and health. This teaching makes Jesus the butler of the church and not its head and it renders a kind of carnality that resembles the lifestyle of greedy fortune 500 CEO's far more than servant hearted disciples.

The point is that every attempt to construct a church on a foundation that is not the Gospel of Christ will fail. God has poured His proverbial concrete upon which He will build His church and that slab is named Jesus. He has promised to build His church upon the confession of Christ the Messiah and any attempt to do otherwise will lead to inevitable ruin as the structures will not stand the force of the pending storm.

August 19

**1 Corinthians 15:23**

Today's devotion deals with the second reason for Christ's headship over His bride, the church as Paul tells us that Christ is also the "firstborn" from the dead. The connection between this verse and verse 15 should not be overlooked. There is an obvious parallel here between Christ being the firstborn over creation and the firstborn from the dead. In both cases, His being first gives Him a position of authority within the church.

Nevertheless, there is a further meaning here as Paul unveils to us that Christ's victory over death is the very ground of the church's hope and, therefore, He becomes the head and hero of our assembly. Once again, the Bible uses a different picture to illustrate the same truth, this time it is found in 1 Corinthians 15 where we read that Christ constitutes the "firstfruits".

The term "firstfruits" denotes the very initial harvest. It speaks of the initial crop and has significance as a harbinger of things to come. When a farmer harvests the first fruits from the fields (the first soybean, tobacco leaf, etc.), he is given a picture of what is sure to follow. The first fruits are not the last benefit that a farmer should expect, they are an indication of what is to follow. When a farmer takes that first piece of produce in his hands, his job is not finished, in many ways it has just begun, but he also holds a window into the future joy of reaping much more in the near future.

In this case, the idea is that Jesus' resurrection is a picture to His followers of their future resurrection. He is the first One who overcame the grave, the first "reborn" Person and, because of His power as unveiled in His resurrection, we have reason to hope that we will follow Him by virtue of His promises and the ability He demonstrated to overcome the grave. When the tempter tries to stir up doubt in our minds about the resurrection, we can simply point to the empty tomb and the ascended Savior as reasons to believe, with great conviction and ample reason, that our overcoming the grave is sure.

The fact that Jesus rose again is the sole reason for our hope. If Christ was still in the grave, then we have no reason to continue in our Christian faith. However, because He is the firstborn in resurrected life, we have every reason to be both confident and expectant of following Him. Just as a farmer looks at the first piece of corn on the cob and joyfully thinks about all that is to follow, so Christians look at Christ as an indication of what awaits us.

Additionally, the fact that Jesus rose again of His own power and strength is the reason why we follow Him. No one in the church can rival such a marvelous, miraculous and saving action and, therefore, Jesus is the rightful head of the church. No one can come close to matching the power of Christ, the grace of Christ and the love of Christ and these are just a few reasons why our Lord and Savior is the rightful firstborn over the body, a body that He died to secure and that He will ensure rises with Him for eternity.



August 20

## 2 Corinthians 5:19

The final devotion is dedicated to the most pertinent reason for our worship and submission to Christ, namely His work of reconciliation. Colossians 1:20 says that the effect of Christ's work on the cross was "peace" with God. The peace that results from Christ work on the cross is the product of the reconciliation that He alone accomplished for us through His substitutionary death.

It strikes me that everyone lives with a certain level of guilt. Whether a person is a believer or unbeliever, we all have an innate sense of God's law and an understanding that we have transgressed this law resulting in some proposed solution to the problem. For some, the plan of action is to attempt to live by some self-imposed standard that either denies what we know to be true about our sin OR seeks to fulfill a law of our own making to commend ourselves to God. These two responses give rise to many iterations of thought patterns. Atheists are really reacting to their own disdain that a God they deny really exists, so they deny the law giver to assuage their real guilt. Moralists and false religionists take what they know to be true about their transgression of the law and fashion a system that allows them to somehow make restitution for their rebellion by earning their own salvation.

While the thought patterns are radically different, they are motivated by the same intuition. We all know that God exists and that we have violated His law, and this is why the Gospel of Christ is such good, and pertinent, news. It is Christ alone who has reconciled us to God and this reconciliation requires two things.

First, to reconcile, wrongs must be made right. The biblical teaching on the subject is clear, sin requires death. Our debt to God for our violations requires an appropriate penalty to be paid and that punishment must come if God is going to uphold His righteous standards. The Gospel teaches us that Christ brings about reconciliation by dying the death we deserve, and, in this way, He offers us peace with God.

Second, to reconcile, lasting peace must be achieved. We have "peace with God" now through Christ and that peace is eternal in nature. You see, Christ didn't just atone for our past sin, He atoned for ALL of our sin, past, present, and future. We have peace with God because the One who died in our place now intercedes on our behalf, pleading the sufficiency of His own blood even in our current, sinful state.

The great news of the Gospel is that God finishes what He began, and that God never casts one of His children out of His family. The reason behind this is the sufficient work of Jesus. Jesus made it possible for God to justly punish sin while justifying sinners. He also stands as the ground of our peace as we recognize that He has accomplished everything necessary to deal with our guilt and bring us back into right relationship with God.

This is the ultimate reason why Christ is to be praised. Jesus is the Savior of every sinner who repents and believes. He is the way, the truth, and the life (John 14:6) and, therefore, He is the object of our adoration and praise.