

Date of sermon: 9/26/2020
Speaker: Pastor Mark Hanke
Bible passage or verse: Colossians 1:15-20
Title of sermon: **Master of the Universe**
Series: Against the Tide - #3

Colossians 1:15-20 NIV:

15 The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. **16** For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. **17** He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. **18** And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. **19** For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, **20** and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Good evening, friends. Man, it's good to see you. It's good to see anybody in church nowadays, right? Wow. It is good to see you. We are in the middle of a series. We're venturing through this series, and we are making our way through the Book of Colossians, and so, if you would turn there -- that's where we will be tonight. And that's where we will be, by the way, every weekend from now until December.

When I was a little kid, we used to play a game, and we were -- ha! -- we played games where, if you didn't get hurt you weren't playing a real game. Weird. Parents wouldn't let their kids play these games nowadays. But we did. And we would get on a hill, and we would -- it was King of the Hill. A lot of times we'd go over to the coast and play this, and you'd get up, and if you had a tennis ball, you'd use it, but we'd usually look for a -- what they use, like handballs -- we wanted it to hurt. Tennis balls didn't hurt enough. And for some sick reason, we wanted it to hurt, and if you got hit by one of those handballs, and you got hit anywhere, and it was hurling -- man, let me tell you what, it smarted! And you'd come out with a big ol' bump, and for some reason we thought that was the coolest thing in the world. But our goal was to play King of the Hill. You know? We wanted to, like, who could, you know, stand on the top. And then sometimes, it wasn't enough to throw, and we would just all out, you know, put one guy up on the top and see who could take the person down and who could stand up there the longest, and -- whoever had, you know, that wrestling ability to throw people all over the place, that person would win. And the rule of thumb was, whoever was standing last got to choose where we went and ate. So, it was worth it, because some people would choose stupid restaurants. And you wanted to be able to choose something good. And so, you know, you were fighting for something significant. That little game that we played, it's really being played all over the place. It's being played in the House of Representatives when they bring a chaplain in. And what they're doing is, they're saying, "Who's gonna be King of the Hill?" So they bring a chaplain in, and this is what they tell them -- "You can pray, and you can virtually pray in any name you want, but you can't close your prayer" -- you know the rest of it, don't you? "In Jesus' name." Why? Why do they make that statement? Because they don't want Jesus to be King of the Hill.

Today's college campuses, it's the same thing. Secular ones. Sadly, maybe even some Christian ones. What they want in those campuses is for the hill to be flat up top. Flat and broad. What do they mean by that? "Oh, hey -- we'll take any gods. We'll take anyone. But you can't have just Jesus." Why? "Because that would be exclusivity, and we can't have exclusivity, because" -- why? "That would be arrogance, and we can't have an arrogant religion." So you can put anyone up on top. Anyone can be God. But not just Jesus. It's hit some of the strangest places. Places you would

never imagine in a million years. The Church of Christ -- they're encouraging their pastors. Why? To pray not in Jesus' name. Did you catch the title of that denomination? The Church of Christ. Hmm. I could take it if it was the Church of God. But the Church of Christ, and it's like -- hello? But probably tonight, tomorrow, the most important place that that issue is going to be fought is not a college campus, it's not somewhere out there that we can be disgruntled over. Maybe the most important place that that question is going to be answered is YOU. Who's the King of your life?

When you walk in in a few weeks, and you're gonna vote. Is the King of your life gonna shape the way you think about that? When you have a discussion with somebody, and you're discussing their gender transformation -- is the King Jesus gonna have an influence in the way you relate and the way you speak to that person? Or are you gonna enter into that and say, "Well, you know, you do whatever you wanna do," or is He Lord? Is He King? Does He have the final say? When people are debating, and they are wanting to use the terms "conservative" and "liberal" -- is there a title? Is there a place? Is there a category that you go that is different because Jesus is King? And is there a lens that you look through that causes you to see the world in a way that no conservative and no liberal could ever look at it that way? They can't. Because they don't have Jesus as the throne of their life.

Paul's wrestling with this question. Who is the head of your life? Who's supreme? Who has final authority, who has ultimate authority in your life? Because, until you can answer that question, you're going to have all kinds of issues when you get into all of the secular issues, all of the political issues, all of the social issues. You see, when I get into the issue of race, does King Jesus have a say in that issue? And what Paul says in this text, I want to wrestle with why -- and I'm going to place it this way -- why should Christ, and why does Christ deserve to be supreme and the King in your life, and what difference does that make?

Let's gather together in Colossians chapter one if you would, and let's start in verse 15. And we're going to go through verse 20. "He" -- speaking of Christ -- "is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him, and" -- by the way -- "for him. "He's before all things." In other words, before anything was ever created, he existed. "And in him all things hold together, and He is the head of the body, the church." That's this place. "He is the beginning, the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross."

Why does Paul suggest to us that Christ should be on the top of your mountain? Well number one, he starts off with this issue, and he says that Christ is the supreme revelation of God. There was a little boy who was drawing a picture one day, and his mom came up to him and said, "What are you drawing, son?" and he said to his mom, "I'm drawing a picture of God." And the mother looks at him, a little afraid, and said, "Well, honey, no one knows what God looks like. How are you ever drawing a picture of what God is like?" And he looks up at his mom and he goes, "They'll know what he looks like when I'm done." That's confidence, isn't it? Well, the reality is, all the way through church history, that was some of the debate of the book *The Shack*, is because God in that book was personified, and that's been one of the things Orthodoxy has suggested that we would never depict God, the Father, God, the Spirit, in any kind of way. Ah! But, the scripture says He has been -- God has been. In fact, Jesus says in John 14, "If you've seen me, you've seen the father." Here he says, in verse 15, "He" -- speaking of Christ -- "is the image of the invisible God." Now, our use of the term "image" kind of dilutes that, because we use the image, and it's like you say, "Wow, you're a

spitting image of your dad." There's no way we use that term to say, "Boy, you are the exact representation of your father." Or we say, "I need a new image." People are always conscious of the issue of image, and that means we need to remake. Marketers use that term. That kind of diminishes and heads us down to a path that's not where Paul is speaking. When the word "image" is employed in this context, it means more than just a symbol. It's not a spitting image, it's not a new image -- it also means that the symbol brings with it the actual presence of the object. You see, Jesus, when He came to earth, "The Word was with God and the Word was God." John 1:1. "And the Word became flesh." "The Word was with God, and the Word was God, and the Word became flesh." And what did we see? God on display. He's answering the question, "Why is Jesus supreme?" "Why does Jesus stand head and shoulders above all religious figures?" "Why is Jesus worthy of placing as the head of the church and the head of your life?" It's because, Paul says, He's the revelation of God. He's the very revelation of God. It's what Jesus said. He who has seen me has seen the Father. If you want to know what God looks like, look at Jesus. This is what Paul is saying. If you want to know the values of God, look at Jesus. If you want to know about the creator God, look at Jesus. In fact, it says here that before the foundation, before anything existed, He was the one, Christ who is God was the one created. He's not just a super human. He is not just a highly actualized religious being. You can't go there in this text. Scripture doesn't give you that option. You may disagree with this text. You may say this text is not divine. But what this text is suggesting is that if you want to see who God is, Christ is the very actual presence of the object of Christ. In Jesus Christ, the invisible God became visible. Ah, but those who defend that He is a created being will go to this very text and say, "Oh, but Pastor, look what the text says. 'For by him all things were created.'" Oh, but before that. Yes, he's the creator, but -- what does the text say? "He's the firstborn over all creation." And I know what the firstborn means. Firstborn -- means what? Tyler. At least in my family. Right? First born in my family -- Jeff. He's my older brother. He was the firstborn. Whenever you hear firstborn, what do you think? Time. That's what we think. Firstborn -- Tyler. Firstborn -- on my wife's side -- Darren. We're not talking smartest -- we're talking firstborn. We're not talking the most brilliant, we're not talking the cutest. If we go to the cutest on my wife's side -- ha! The two boys -- they're just sorry! I'm gonna send them this tape. Firstborn. How would we ever get a creator who is God, who is eternal, who gets titled the firstborn? And if you've ever had a conversation with a Jehovah's Witness, let me tell you what -- if they haven't taken you to this text, you haven't talked with a Jehovah's Witness. This is their favorite text. See, the problem is, you've got to go to the rest of scripture to look at this text and see how this word is used. If you go back and look at Solomon, it says that Solomon was David's firstborn. Biologically, we know that Solomon was not David's firstborn, do we not? Absolutely we don't. What is the text trying to say? Firstborn in the scriptures doesn't deal with time. It deals with rank. Firstborn in my family, my immediate family, is Tyler. Rank -- it's Annie. I've told you that before. My three boys know it. I had no intention of being fair. I love you, but she's better. She just is! She ranks -- it has nothing to do with the sequence. And so, when the text is saying He is the image of the invisible God, the highest of all or ruler over all creation, He's not trying to tell you that there was a sequence in time. He's trying to tell you the place that Christ serves in creation. Why is Jesus supreme? Because He's the supreme revelation of God because He is supreme in all of creation.

In two specific areas, the text tells us. Number one, as the agent of creation, Christ has power over it. What do I mean by the agent of creation? Let's look at the text. "For by him all things were created, things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible." What it tells you is that Jesus Christ was the creator God with the Father, with the Holy Spirit. He was the initiator of creation. He's the agent of creation. And if you're the agent of creation, you have what? You have power over it. That's why Jesus can walk on water. Why? Because He created the water. That's why Jesus can do all of the things -- turn water into wine. That's why Jesus can do all of these things, is because He's the creator of -- He's the agent of creation. That's why He has the capacity to tell the wind to come and be still is because He's the agent of creation. Scientists tell us that in a human chromosome it contains

upward of some 20 billion bits of information. What does that extrapolate out to be? That extrapolates out to be some 4,000 volumes worth of information. Of one chromosome. Did you know that you're a veritable library walking around to God? And He created you. And He understands you. And He knit you together. And He created the heavens and the earth, and He placed the stars in order, and He named every one of them. And He placed them perfectly, none of them were an accident. And even their distance apart from each other. Why? Because He's the agent of creation and He has power over it. Implication? If God has the capacity to name every star, then He has the capacity to know exactly what you face right now. If God has the capacity to be the agent and the power over all things, then God has the power to control, to protect, and to even sustain your life. There's no godly reason that you should worry about your future. There's no godly reason that you should panic at what's happening in our world. God's been here before. He knows exactly what He's doing, and He's not threatened. He's not one iota threatened because He has the power of creation. He's the agent of creation, and as the agent of creation, Christ also has an understanding of it. Not just power, but an understanding of it. The text goes on and he says, "Whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities, all things were created by him and for him. And he is before all things and in him all things hold together." He networks, he bonds them together. He understands every sinew of your body, and He understands every aspect of this world. And the reality is, the reason why the sun stays exactly where it does, you can explain it scientifically, but what the text says is that behind the sun and the moon and the stars, and behind the whole atmosphere is Christ Jesus, who the text says literally is sustaining or carrying along this world in His palm. And by the way, you're in there.

Periodically, Kerri and I will have culture nights. We don't do it as much as we used to, but -- it was Friday nights where we had first Friday nights and we used to go to art galleries, and one of the things that I just absolutely loved was looking at the art that we went to, but what I thrilled at is when the artist was there. Art critics are marvelous. I think half the stuff they say they make up, but the reality is, they're marvelous people. And they see the things, and they can tell you the history of various arts, and they can talk to you about the various seasons of art. But it's very different when you get an artist there. Because when you get the artist, they begin to tell you the story behind the picture, or the story behind the sculpture. It's kind of like the song. Have you ever the song, "It Is Well With My Soul"? "When Peace like a river" -- right? Have you ever heard the story behind that? Probably one of the most famous stories of a hymn. How many have you, when you have sung a hymn like that, "It is well, it is well with my soul" and then you hear the story behind of a man who had lost his family and was taking the same trip that they were, and realizing in the midst of that that he can write that hymn -- does it not take the hymn and drive it much deeper when you know the story?

It's the same thing for me with an artist. When they tell you what's behind, I am now not looking just at the colors. I am now looking at this picture, this sculpture, in the context of a larger story. And that's what gives it power. What gives amazing grace power is when you know the artist. When you know what God redeemed that man from, and when you know that God took him from a place of moving slaves and of looking at people less than human beings and moving him to a place where he sees his wretchedness but he's moved more by grace, and when you hear the story, then you sing the song, and your heart is gripped. My friends, it's the same way. When you understand that the one who is holding you together is the one who knows you more intimately than anyone because He created you. And when He says, "I will be with you," and when He says, "I will calm the storms in your life," and when He says, "Trust me and walk with me, don't lean on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him and he will make straight your paths," He's the One Who made the dirt! That's when he says, "I can take a mountain and part it. I can take a hopeless situation and make it better." He not only has the power to do it, but He has the understanding. My friends, whoever is at the top of your life, he'd better have that kind of power. Whoever you allow to direct your life, to orchestrate your life, to determine your life, to shape the

way you think, to shape the way you love -- my friends, I hope he has that kind of power. Jesus is supreme in creation because He is the agent of it. And when He says he is before all things and in him all things hold together, what He's saying is this -- your life only finds its meaning and purpose in its relationship to Christ. You will spend the rest of your life trying to find meaning and purpose until you understand you were created by Christ and for Christ, and when you get that, that's when your life takes on a whole new meaning. And because He's supreme, He's taken up this position as the head of the church. Why? Well, He's supreme. Why? Because He's the head of the body, the church. He's the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead. Why is Christ deserving this place as the head of the church? Because He walked out of the grave. Mohammed didn't. Why does Christ deserve this place of headship over the church? Because He walked out of the grave. Joseph Smith didn't. Why does he deserve this place? Because Christ walked out of the grave. Moses didn't. He's the firstborn, He's the highest ranking from among the dead. And therefore, He takes on the position as head.

What does a head provide? Heads provide direction. Your head tells you where to go. Last I checked, your arm never determined the direction that you were going to walk -- your head does. Your legs take you there, but they've never made a decision in their life. They've probably maybe forced your head to sit down. But the reality is, your legs and your elbow, and now your elbow can smart -- as it did the other day, I hit something and I found that that funny bone wasn't funny at all. It's the dumbest-named thing in the world. But it really didn't make the decision. Oh, it grabbed my attention, but it had no direction, it had no foresight, it had no vision. The head does that. And Christ wants to direct your life and He wants to direct the church's life. The head directs and the head orients. The head says, "We're taking the mountain." But it's not just taking the mountain, you see, the head also works with the legs and says, "Hey legs, let's work together." And we'd like to go the same direction as the hands and the arm, because the hands and the arm say "Wait wait wait! We're going to the beach," and the legs say, "No, we're going to the mountains," and the head determines where they're going, but he orients them, and he puts them all together so that they work together. And that's exactly what Christ is doing in the church. He's taking all of these people, and that's what makes it a miracle. You see in my body honestly, my legs and my arm -- well, I've never known them to have a civil war. I don't even know what that would look like. Maybe for some of you who have had that, you can come and tell me! I've never had that. I've seen it in the church!

But that's why he says, if Christ is supreme, let Him be supreme. Let Him direct the church. Let Him orient the church. Why? Because that's what it was created for. It was created to do that very thing, and when Christ is the head of the church, what happens? We find the most beautiful unity in the world. "So that in everything he might have supremacy. For God was pleased to have all of his fullness dwell in him, and through him, to reconcile to himself all things." That's us. He doesn't reconcile trees. He doesn't reconcile dogs. For once I picked on dogs, not cats. He reconciles people. By making peace through His blood shed on the cross. What happens when they come together? They form the church. It's a miracle. It is. And today it's hard, because the church is getting pulled with all kinds of issues. And yet, my friend, it won't be the issues that will drive us back together again. If we all agree upon masks, that won't bring us unity. If we all agree upon race, that won't bring us unity. If we all agree in a few months on vaccine, that won't bring us unity. It won't. No, what will bring us unity is when we recognize Christ is our head, and He has reconciled us and He's brought us, He's made enemies -- people who were enemies with God, and He's made us His friends. He's bound us together. He holds us together and enables us to even overcome our differences.

Dr. Howard Thurman, who used to be the pastor of Howard University Rankin Chapel in DC, he was once preaching a sermon, number of years ago, on fellowship of the church. And a young college

student came up to him afterwards, back in the day. Some of you probably remember these days where the pastor would preach the sermon and go to the exit door and shake everyone's hand on the way out. I won't be there today; it's COVID year, so we won't be doing that. But -- this young boy, he was a collegiate student, and he walked up to him and he put out his hand. And he said, "I have a question for you, Dr. Thurman. How far are you willing to go? You being a black man in a white man's world. How far are you willing to go with that fellowship issue?" Dr. Thurman looked at the young boy and his eyes -- still shaking his hand -- grabbed the hand and pulled it a little tighter and a little closer. "I'm willing to go all the way. I will hold nothing in reserve, and no escape hatch in my back pocket. Nothing will stop me, because Christ has drawn us together."

How far are you willing to go? How far are you willing to go with people in the church that have posted things on Facebook that differ from you and that you're just getting frustrated with? Are you willing to go to the degree of John Wesley, who said, "If thou love God, dost thou fear Christ? That is enough. I give thee the right hand of fellowship." See, if Christ is Lord of all, then we should let Him be lord of us all. And we should allow Christ, who is supreme, to be the one who has reconciled us together and is become more defining to me than any position that I take. If He's Lord, if He's head, then He directs and He orients, and I can't imagine that Christ would not take the brothers and sisters that name Him, that have the Holy Spirit within them, that if they're not yielded to Him, He wouldn't draw them together. Might it be fairly stated, if there's a lack of unity there's a resistance to the work of Christ. Think about that. If there's a lack of unity, there is a resistance to the reconciling work of Christ. If Christ is actually Lord of all, as Paul argues, He is supreme, He is the creator, He's the sustainer, He is the image of the invisible God, and if as that position He is the head of this church, what is His goal? To reconcile all things to himself. And if He is Lord of all, should not you and me let Him be Lord of us? Should we not allow Him to draw our hearts together?

Then what do we do, Pastor? Number one, trust Him. Trust Him with your life today, because He can handle anything that you face, and He will get you through this. If you're a parent and you think, "By the end of the year, if my kids don't get back into school I'm gonna kill 'em," He's gonna get you through this. May not get the kids through it, but He'll get you through it. If you're a manager and you're wondering how to ever manage people that are -- the poor families are living at home in their office trying to do work at home, trying to sustain things, and if you're like me, I've had multiple meetings on Zoom, not with my staff but with other people, and behind these poor folks, trying to do their job, are their kids back there throwing things, wondering, "Mom and Dad, can you help me!" And if you wonder, are you gonna get through it, trust Him -- if He's Lord of all, let Him be Lord of us. Surrender to Him. When you don't understand life, surrender. I did a funeral today of a lady who died way before she should've. You look at it and you say, "God, it's unfair. It's unfair that a woman in her forties would die. It's unfair that somebody in their thirties would die." And you either fight God or you surrender. Because in that moment, if He's gonna be Lord of all, I have to let Him be Lord of my life. Trust Him. Surrender. And -- honor Him. What does it mean to honor Christ? I think it means to love His church. It's His bride. You come and tell me that my bride is ugly -- we're gonna have a real not-so-fun evening. You come and tell me that my bride is ugly -- I'm gonna have a hard time hanging out with you. Think about it for a moment how many people tell God every day that His bride is ugly. If He's the head of the church, it's His church. Love it.

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