

V. Empowered Witnesses to the World  
2016 Global Ministry Conference  
“The Supremacy of Christ in Missions”  
Colossians 1:15–20  
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February 28, 2016 – Evening sermon

Prayer:

Dear Lord Jesus, it is our desire to be Your church and that we would live with Christ. Indwell us by the power of Your Spirit so that we may exalt You and glorify You in all that we do. Cause our hearts to be more closely yielded to walk daily with You, Jesus. Thank You for the celebration of this great mission’s week, to hear the testimonies and to encourage one another all the more as we see that day of Jesus approaching. Now Father, I pray that You would open Your Word that You would allow only Your Word to be spoken from this pulpit and that You would be glorified in what is preached, in Christ’s Name, Amen.

I will start by reading from Colossians 1 and this is a very special passage of Scripture to me because it really does focus on Jesus. It highlights in very significant ways who Jesus is. It was written to the church at Colossae to perhaps deal with the heresy that was going on. This section really talks about the supremacy of Christ. As this is being read, imagine Christ and think of the scenes that you know of Jesus from His life as you have walked with Him and read His Word.

Colossians 1:15–20 says [15] *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. [16] For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. [17] And 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, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. [19] For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, [20] and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.*

This passage of Scripture talks about who Jesus is. I have titled this study The Supremacy of Christ in Missions but it’s really the supremacy of Christ in His church and in our lives. After this study is given we’ll have the opportunity to commemorate that last supper of Jesus in the communion meal. In that moment we really do hold up Christ as preeminent and the sacrifice and work of Christ on our behalf. We give thanks to Him and receive Him through the elements of the Table with joy, because He is high, lifted up, preeminent and supreme.

This last week I had the privilege to meet with many of the missionaries who were here for the conference and it was really a highlight to have one on one appointments with many of them. I still have some more that I will meet with in the coming days but one of the things that is a pre-qualifier to become a missionary is that you need to love, know and have this image of Jesus that is high and lifted up because a part from Him we can do nothing. It says in John 15 that we must abide in the Vine. So we have to have this image of Jesus being high and lifted up. It was a joy to hear how these missionaries came to know Jesus and how He called them and put His mark on their lives to challenge them to serve Him with the rest of their days.

I would love to tell you about them all but just one that is coming to mind right now is from a man whose calling was so clear where he was engaged to be married to his bride and

another man came to him and challenged him to pastoral ministry. He said 'no way.' The other man said 'I'm praying the Lord will do something dramatic in your life to get your attention.' The next day he was kidnapped and held for ten days. During that time, not knowing if he'd live or die, on the kidnappers bed he released his life and said 'Jesus, I surrender all. I'll go whenever and wherever You want me to.'

That's what happens when we're confronted with the supreme high God. Everything else in our lives becomes ordered to Jesus the preeminent. I know this is a church that has this legacy where we lift high the cross and Jesus is held in the highest regard. We have a legacy of acknowledging Christ, serving Him, giving to missions and going into missions. This church's legacy is amazing. Think of the Godly leaders that the Lord has blessed Briarwood with. Dr. Barker who was the founding pastor had this joy of starting this church along with other men and women who would take the Gospel and multiply it. He invested himself in sharing and evangelizing all around Birmingham. Then there were men and women who followed him who had this high view of Christ and shared the Gospel as well around this area to the point where Briarwood became this place where everyone knew that Jesus was on the throne.

I remember hearing reports from others who weren't at Briarwood who said 'when you go to that church they are really going to talk about Jesus and the next thing you know you're going to be telling other people about Jesus and if you're not careful you're going to be looked at like sort of a Jesus freak if you go to Briarwood.' Amen! The reason for that is because Briarwood and its legacy has held a preeminent, supreme, high view of Christ through Godly leaders like Tom Cheely who served in Global Missions for over 30 years giving his life to the Global call of Christ to spread the Good News to the nations. He mentored and developed young leaders. I heard story after story from the missionaries who I sat with this week who said that Tom Cheely invested in them. Tom Cheely was my mentor, he challenged me and he had visions to plant a church and develop a denomination. The Lord used men like Tom in a mighty way here at Briarwood to advance the Gospel.

Our very own pastor, Pastor Reeder, faithfully stands at this pulpit week in and week out proclaiming the Good News of Christ, sharing and challenging us to have a Biblical world and life view so that we ourselves would believe in Christ and lift Him up every day in our lives. It is so that we would have this supreme and exalted vision of Jesus. Briarwood has been entrusted with a lot but we cannot rest on the past. The Gospel doesn't end with our past legacy. The Gospel is active and present today.

How is your view of Jesus today? Are we passing it on to our children? Do they know you love Jesus? Do they see you in the Word of God? Do they see you in your prayer time? What are the burdens that God has put on your heart because He is so elevated and exalted? How do you view Jesus? We cannot rest on our past legacy and while it has a rich history we need to be advancing into the future trusting Jesus and seeing Him as He is. Who will the leaders be in the next generation that takes Briarwood forward? Where will they come from? Maybe some have been in the GLOW mission's conference for the children this past week? Maybe they are your grandchildren or your sons and daughters that would be gripped with this view of Jesus that is so supreme that they would give, go and share with others the Good News of Jesus?

My concern is that if we take our foot off the gas pedal and start to coast then all that legacy would be a thing of the past. It shouldn't surprise us that there would be a concern because if you look at the church of Israel in the Old Testament this is what happened to them time and time again. Men and women who were gripped by God, saw the cloud and the pillar,

were led out of captivity with the chains of bondage being broken in their lives and fed everyday by the manna on the ground and yet they wandered. Their hearts grew cold. Their image of God was reduced and they chased after the things of the world. They became like the nations that they moved among. Idolatry crept in.

May it not be so in your lives so that Jesus may be high and lifted up always at Briarwood church. We wouldn't ever think back to the glory days gone by at Briarwood but it would be every day that it would be fresh and we'd be renewed by His Spirit so His Spirit would indwell us and live with us. We want to be constantly raising up and sending out believers to the mission field.

John 12:32–33 says [32] *And I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all people to myself.* [33] *He said this to show by what kind of death he was going to die.* Earlier in John's Gospel when Jesus is talking with Nicodemus in John 3:14–17 it says, [14] *And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up,* [15] *that whoever believes in him may have eternal life.*

[16] *“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. [17] For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him.* What is our image of Jesus? Is it high and lifted up? Is it the one from Colossians 1:15–20 shares? May we never take our foot off the accelerator at Briarwood church.

There was a book written about a year or so ago titled Mission Drift: the Unspoken Crisis facing Leaders, Charities and Churches written by Peter Greer, Chris Horst, and Anna Haggard. In it they lay out case study after case study of how Christian Organizations, churches and mission entities were started and formed with a compelling conviction that Jesus must be exalted and lifted up and how these organizations had drifted from Jesus. Academic institutions like Harvard and Yale were included in these. Mission agencies that once started the YMCA to reach young men with the Gospel have become reduced in their own writings and organizational papers to becoming just an athletic exercise facility. The Christian Children's Fund found themselves many years later having been started by a pastor to reach children with the Gospel, having drifted so far from Jesus that they chopped the word 'Christian' out of their title and now they are just known as The Children's Fund.

May it not be so at Briarwood. May each of us, as men and women of this church, continue to put Christ first. Author Steve Addison in his book Movements that Change the World, outlines five movement dynamics of a Christian movement. It should not be surprising to us that the first two are this; one, movements that change the world, have people who have white hot faith. How do you get white hot faith? It is by seeing Jesus as high and lifted up. The second is that men and women demonstrate a commitment to a cause. They will do anything for the cause. How do you get that commitment to the cause? It is when we follow our Leader, Jesus who showed His great commitment to His cause by shedding His own blood and by having His body broken and pierced for us. May we hold onto this and pass it on to the next generation and that on our watch we would hold Jesus in highest regard and that He would be supreme.

Your takeaway in this study is that I would encourage you to cultivate in your heart a view of our Savior Jesus who is preeminent, supreme, high and lifted up and that can be done through crisis like the Apostle Paul on the road to Damascus or it could also be done by process by daily studying the Word, praying with and for your family and for the nations and by seeking Him. Practice those spiritual disciplines and see where God leads you. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father in heaven, we thank You for Jesus. Grant to us a view of Jesus that is supreme, exalted and high. He is the Name above every Name. He is the Name in which every knee in heaven and on earth will bow and confess Jesus and we want them to confess Jesus Christ as Lord among every nation, tribe and tongue to the glory of Jesus. Father, do this still here at Briarwood and enable us to see You. Enable us to seek Your face with all of our hearts, mind and strength so that You might receive glory and we might continue this great legacy at Briarwood to send out and be a blessing to the nations because of Jesus, Amen.