

## Higher Authority Life Celebration Event

### Sermon Thoughts, Notes, Outline *Christ Is the Head*

**Colossians 2:10, primarily**, but with full (second) lesson, 2:8-12,20,22–3:3, in mind

<sup>8</sup>See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deceit, which are in accord with human tradition, namely, the basic principles of the world, but not in accord with Christ. <sup>9</sup>For all the fullness of God's being dwells bodily in Christ. <sup>10</sup>And you have been brought to fullness in him. Christ is the head over every ruler and authority. <sup>11</sup>You were also circumcised in him, with a circumcision not done by human hands, in the putting off of the body of flesh,<sup>a</sup> in the circumcision of Christ, <sup>12</sup>when you were buried with Christ in baptism. And in baptism you were also raised with him through the faith worked by the God who raised Christ from the dead. ...

<sup>20</sup>If you died with Christ to the basic principles of the world, why do you submit to its rules, as if you were still living in the world? ... <sup>22</sup>All of these rules end in destruction when they are used, because they are in accord with human commands and teachings. <sup>23</sup>While such rules have the appearance of wisdom with self-chosen religion, which consists of humiliation and severe treatment of the body, they have no value at all in checking the self-indulgence of the sinful flesh.

<sup>3:1</sup>Therefore, because you were raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup>Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things. <sup>3</sup>For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. (EHV)

This sermon is deliberately more topical than textual. The preacher will perhaps wish to add quotes or “color” from the larger text, from the day's other readings, or other Scripture passages as he transforms the outline into a manuscript.

A sermon that includes every point in this outline is not intended and would end up on the long side. The pastor should feel free to adapt the outline as suits his style and his congregation's situation. There are some points in the outline that are specific in ways that are similar to other points in the outline; the preacher might flesh them out in one spot and skip over them in the other, rather than risk repetition. Similarly, specific life issues (abortion, medical directives, fertility treatments, euthanasia, etc.) and applications that resonate particularly with the pastor or his congregation can be added, emphasized, and illustrated further as the pastor finds best.

**Theme: Higher Authority** (*More textual alternate: **Christ Is the Head***)

#### **Introduction:**

*(If the pastor has an anecdote of his own that relates a similar situation in which it is unclear who is in charge and different voices claim authority, that might be a better alternative than this story.)*

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<sup>a</sup> Some witnesses to the text read *the body of the sins of the flesh*.

Jack was eager to start work on his first day at the Williamstown Widget Works. It was his first real job after leaving school, and he looked forward to earning a good day's pay for a good day's work and making a difference while he did so.

The first sign that his first day might not be a good day came as he was on his way in from the parking lot: the hiring manager sent a text saying that he wasn't going to be there to make introductions after all, and that Jack should just ask for directions and head straight to Machine Room C to start work. When he arrived, he went straight to the corner office, thinking to find the boss there, but it was empty. After a few awkward moments wondering what to do, Jack finally cleared his throat and said, to no one in particular but loud enough for everyone to hear, "Um, Hi. Could someone tell me who's in charge here?"

He heard grunts and quiet laughter. After a moment, one of the workers said, "Depends. Who's asking, and why?"

"Oh, I'm sorry," he said. "My name is Jack. I was just hired and told to come here to start working, but they didn't tell me who to report to, or what exactly I should be doing today."

"Finally, the new guy!" said a different worker, behind him. "I've been asking for an assistant for months. You can come help me here with the welding."

"Wait a minute!" This time it was a woman with a grease-stained apron. "Who says you get him? I've been here longer than you, and I say he's going to help me with lubrication!"

Jack interrupted, "Uh, I hate to be difficult or anything, but don't you have a boss or foreman or something who can decide these things?"

"Don't need one," the first man said. "The last one quit six months ago, and since then it's just easiest for everybody to do what I tell them, after they've done things once their way and found it didn't work." As he said that last part, Jack saw every other worker emphatically shaking their heads and mouthing, "No!"

Jack made his apologies as he backed out the door and went looking for the human resources department, or maybe even just a receptionist — anyone who could tell him who actually should tell him what to do.

## **I. Who Rules?**

A. Life in general, and specifically life in our American society today, presents a problem for every individual: How do we know who's in charge of what and whom to listen to for what decisions? There are so many different individuals, voices, movements, etc. presenting us with competing and conflicting instructions and guidance, each insisting that theirs is the voice of authority that should be followed.

### **1. Examples:**

- a. COVID-19 and conflicting, changing advice re: mask-wearing, hygiene, physical distancing, isolation, lockdowns, chances of infection, etc. [*no need to say who's right or wrong here; just outline the problem of authority*]
- b. Entertainment media and celebrities that have for generations "pushed the envelope" of sexual morality and propriety, always

suggesting that fame, success, and recognition somehow mean they know better about such things and should be followed.

- c. “Experts” don’t always agree (science, medicine; evolution, climate change; finance, economics; etc.)
  - d. Friends, peers, family members might give conflicting advice about a situation you’re facing, e.g. “Which college should I attend?” or “Should I take this job offer?” or “Should I marry him/her or break up?” or “Is homosexuality/abortion/living together without marriage OK for a Christian?”
  - e. Toleration gets redefined as blind acceptance, and relativism gets pushed by the media, the academy, and many in society, so not only are we told that no religion or worldview is better than another, but we’re also to believe that none of them is really right or wrong in any of their convictions. On the one hand, we’re supposed to accept Islam, atheism, Hinduism, environmentalism, Wicca, animism, Marxism, etc. — “philosophy, empty deceit ... human traditions ... basic principles of the world” — as all having authority equal to Christianity and the Bible, but on the other hand we’re supposed to behave as though none of those authorities should actually influence how society works or people live their lives.
  - f. Other examples: Politicians competing for your vote, government officials or judges presenting a decision as “the will of the people” when the people may not actually have voted on it; pundits in the papers and on TV presenting opposite positions; teachers and professors teaching that what your parents told you is all wrong; etc.
2. Further complicating matters is that it’s not just outside authorities that compete for our obedience — our feelings, self-interest, desires, etc. also insist that they be heard and have their way (and often overpower voices of reason or righteousness)
  3. This conflict and confusion of authority is especially evident in our society when it comes to life issues. We know what God says about life, but others insist that what God says about abortion or assisted suicide should be kept as a private concern, while also saying that the private and subjective experiences of a small group of people (those in authority, those deemed most popular, those who have influence) should determine laws and policies for the entire nation. State legislatures pass laws and presidents make policies respecting life, but a slim majority of the Supreme Court makes a ruling against them and suddenly the country is told the issue is settled and there’s no place anymore for other voices. Etc.
- B. This confusion and competition of authorities is not good
1. It’s bad for our communities, nation, and world

- a. When the confusion keeps right decisions from being made or contributes to unrest and division in society
  - b. When the authorities that are listened to are wrong and lead people into error, troubles, ruin, etc.
  - c. Even sometimes when they are right but for the wrong reasons, or with wrong motives (e.g. a politician makes a prominent stand for what is morally right, but is caught in a scandal that shows him to be a hypocrite: this discredits the previous moral stand).
2. It's also bad for us.
- a. As citizens and members of society: Hard to know and be certain what stands to take, how to vote, how to speak to others and when, etc.
  - b. As Christians: Who do we listen to? Is there a godly position on an issue, and what is it? How do we know we're right, when other Christians are saying something completely different?  
 [Illustration: "Both read the same Bible and pray to the same God, and each invokes His aid against the other." – Abraham Lincoln (Second Inaugural Address – March 4, 1865)]
- C. But the problem of competing authorities is bigger than personal discomfort, rational confusion, political unrest, or spiritual uncertainty.
- 1. Following the wrong authority — whatever it might be — when it leads away from God and is against God's will, takes us where we do not want to go.
    - a. Perhaps it is overtly in opposition to God — "Don't listen to what the Bible says, do this instead." "Follow your heart, don't worry about what the church taught you about right and wrong."
    - b. Maybe it is more subtle, or just ignores God altogether — "We've progressed as a society, so now we understand that sex outside of marriage is something to be celebrated, not condemned." "The compassionate thing to do when someone is suffering is to end his or her life, to stop the pain."
    - c. Or maybe it's just listening to your own sinful nature and doing the things that you want to do instead of what God wants you to do.
    - d. Whatever authorities that we obey instead of God — "self-chosen religion" — such rebellion and sin always lead to death and hell — the price made clear from the very beginning for disobeying his will. We don't want to go there.

*[Expand/enrich this law section as appropriate.]*
  - 2. And what makes things even worse is that we will never be able to get anything right if we have or follow the wrong authorities.
    - a. We might choose to make ourselves righteous by doing all the "right things" ... but they won't be the right things if they're not what God's authority has commanded (e.g., someone could

determine to become the most woke progressive on the left or the greatest patriot on the right, but even if he or she set a new standard for such things, it would still merit nothing before God).

- b. And even if we chose to do good by following his commandments, we will never get it right enough to undo what we have done wrong.
- c. In the final analysis, neither we ourselves nor any other authorities we might trust and follow can save us from our sins or keep us from the eternal condemnation that we have earned.

## II. Christ Rules

A. Praise God for his amazing grace! The Authority that sinners have rejected is the One who chooses to use that authority to save sinners!

1. Whether anyone recognizes it or not, our Creator has absolute authority over all people and all creation, and as both Designer and Judge gets to say what's right and wrong.
2. His justice demands that sin and rebellion be paid for, in blood.
3. But his love and mercy moved him to keep us from having to pay that price ourselves. He used his almighty authority to say, "No. Sinners will not have to die and suffer forever, though that is what they deserve. I will provide a solution myself."
4. And so, God sent his Son as that solution, to bring us salvation.
5. Though Jesus was himself Lord over all, he humbled himself to become a servant to all, to take on human flesh, to obey his Father's authority with perfection and to submit himself to evil human authorities and to suffer and die, paying for all the world's sins and rebellion with his own, innocent, precious blood on the cross.

*[Expand/enrich this gospel section as appropriate.]*

B. And now this same Jesus Christ — in whom "all the fullness of God's being dwells bodily" — having been raised from the dead and ascended to the right hand of his Father in heaven, lives and reigns as Head over all.

1. He is the Head over every living thing, over every atom, over every authority [v. 10: "Christ is the head over every ruler and authority"]. [Other Scripture that can be quoted here: Ephesians 1:20-22; Philippians 2:5-11].
2. Therefore, there is no competition when any human authority (like any mentioned above) contradicts or opposes the Lord's. His is higher.
3. Christ's authority is the highest there is, and we thankfully, lovingly, devotedly, submit ourselves to it. Not only because he is God and we therefore owe him all obedience and honor, but especially because he has used his authority over all things to deliver us from our sins — and now he also uses it for our good, to bless and keep us, and move his Church and its mission forward.

### III. Listen When the Lord Speaks

- A. Christ's headship/rule over all means that he also is the highest authority there is — and really, the only authority — when it comes to all issues of life and death — and sex, and marriage, and family, society, etc. (all the issues that relate to life matters).
1. Higher than any human authority — courts, doctors, politicians, academics, activists, misguided churches and pastors, etc.
  2. Higher even than the “Christianized” reasoning which we sometimes use to reach the conclusions we prefer (e.g., “God is love, and he wants us to be loving to others, and it can’t be loving to insist that people who are suffering endure that suffering, so we should be OK with that troubled mother killing her baby or that man with ALS opting for assisted suicide.”) [Note the danger: such arrogant and obstinate rejection of God’s will and authority can lead to the loss of one’s salvation.]
  3. Higher than our feelings, i.e. sometimes what feels “right” to us is actually wrong (We might *feel* it’s right to abort a child, to engage in embryonic research that destroys lives, to euthanize, i.e. actively end the life of a loved one in a coma, etc., but our feelings are actually nothing to rely on).
  4. Higher also than our problems and challenges, which can often lead us astray (e.g., We might faithlessly decide that the only solution to a particularly stressful situation, even though we know it’s not in line with what the Bible teaches, is to make the choice that most quickly relieves our anxiety or ends the problem [abortion, euthanasia, immoral efforts to bear a child at any cost, etc.] — effectively saying that our immediate relief is more important than God’s will).
- B. So, when there is conflict and confusion between various authorities and what the Lord says, it’s clear who the higher authority is — clear whom we should listen to and follow.
1. Our Gospel today (Matthew 7:24-29) shows the benefit of hearing Christ’s words and doing them.
  2. But it also shows how even the crowds recognized that there was something different about the authority with which he spoke — something that set him and his teaching apart from every other religious “expert” that can offer only opinions, equivocations, and estimations of truth.
  3. [God the Father: “This is my Son. Listen to him.”]
  4. Christ is the Word, which means that every word of the Bible is his authoritative teaching. We don’t have the option of picking and choosing and trusting only the parts of Scripture we like or that agree with our or society’s preferences and rejecting all the others. It is all true.
- C. So, we let Christ’s authority speak to us, and decide for us, on every issue of life.
1. When we read in the Psalms that “our times” are in God’s hands (Psalm 31) — our beginning and end, and everything in between — we

recognize that none of us — no human, no mother, no expert — has the right to declare an unborn child inconvenient and decide it should not live, and that none of us — no individual, no loved one, no doctor — has the right to declare the life of the elderly, the disabled, the hopeless, or the ill to be unworthy of living and end it. These are decisions that belong only to God.

2. In the same way, when David confesses that he was a sinner from the time his mother conceived him (Psalm 51), we recognize the spiritual horror of abortion, because the life that is taken is a fully spiritual human being, not merely some clump of cells.
3. And everything that Scripture tells us about keeping sex between a husband and wife, to bring forth children, and avoiding every other kind of sexual indulgence, we know that this is not old-fashioned prudery, but the loving wisdom and guidance of the God who designed us and wants what's best for us.
4. So we honor life, and children, and mothers and fathers — and the sick, the troubled, and the disabled — as God's gifts, and we recognize that any decision about what to "do" with them belongs to God, not us.
5. We respect life, and everything that goes into making life and everything that comes from having life, as the Lord has laid it out for us.
6. And even more, we hear Christ's command to love others as he has loved us, which means we determine not just that we will not harm or oppose life, but that we will actively do the good works which protect and advance life in our families, communities, and society. We are stewards over life – caretakers assigned to watch over this blessing from God. Examples:
  - a. Speaking up ["Speak up for those who cannot speak. Speak for the rights of all those who are defenseless." (Proverbs 31:8)]. Conversations. Social media. Petitions. Voting.
  - b. Working to actually *persuade* those who do not know or accept what is right. (Rather than humiliate, crush, or "own" them)
  - c. Adopting unwanted children, being a foster parent. Volunteering at a pregnancy help center. Helping with a home for unwed or single mothers. Visiting patients in a nursing home or hospice.
  - d. [Donating to/helping with organizations like Christian Life Resources.]
  - e. [Etc.]

### **Conclusion:**

One of the more enduring and endearing characters from the movies of the last 30 years or so is Forrest Gump, as played by Tom Hanks. Many of you probably remember the

scene in Vietnam\* <sup>1</sup>when Forrest's platoon walks into an ambush and he runs at high speed to escape the danger. Soon, though, he realizes that he needs to go back to make sure that his best friend, Bubba, is safe, and while looking for Bubba, he keeps finding other men from the platoon who are too injured to get to safety, so he picks them up and carries them out of danger. Eventually he finds his lieutenant, who is seriously injured and trying to radio in a counterattack. Forrest picks him up to take him away, but Lt. Dan tells him to leave him behind. Over and over, with anger, frustration, and profane language, he orders Private Gump to put him down, but Forrest doesn't listen — he just keeps running. And even when Forrest puts Lt. Dan down with the others, the officer is angry: he wasn't supposed to be saved, he was supposed to die in battle, with his men, not survive and live the rest of his life without his honor — or his legs.

Forrest was a simple man, who always did what he was told, but in this case he ignored his lieutenant's orders — because he knew there was a higher authority he had to obey: the one who told him that every life mattered, and that he should do everything he could to save and protect it, even if the person he was trying to save didn't agree. It was the right decision — and though it took years, eventually Lt. Dan realized it, too.

Now, Forrest Gump is a fictional character, so we can't point to him as a prime example of Christian faith, but he illustrates for us what it is to know and to listen to the Higher Authority that values life as a gift and responsibility given to us all. Living as Christians in this world presents us with no end of conflicts between what God and his Word tell us is right, and matters, when it comes to issues of life and death like abortion and euthanasia. Often the easy road to take is the one that goes along with the “authority” that is loudest, angriest, or most insistent — or the one that threatens us with trouble if we don't obey.

But the right path is the one that follows where Jesus leads. The right decision is the one that recognizes Christ as the head over every ruler and authority and his Word as the guide and power that equips us for every argument, every challenge, and every trouble. The highest authority there is tells us to choose, defend, protect, and promote life in every situation. So, we listen, and follow. Christ is the Head.

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<sup>1</sup> *If you are interested in showing the actual video, you might want to find (or create) a “sanitized” version before showing it in church (lots of cursing and such)*