Jesus is Supreme!
Colossians 1:18

In our history as a local church, we have had several airplane pilots as part of this congregation. Every US pilot has to go through a lot of learning, practice and testing to be licensed by our government to be able to fly a plane. I’ve personally had the opportunity to fly with two of them. Since we went up in small single engine planes, I ended up being the co-pilot – in name only, of course. Now I have literally flown around the world on large jets as I’ve gone both east and west to get to India but there is something very different about seeing your own area from a single engine plane. In fact, because of the increase in strength the last 2 years, I can now finally use a present I was given about a decade ago – a ride in a glider which will be yet another new sensory adventure since single engine planes are really loud!

One thing that was fascinating to me was the instructions I was given before we took off – they are very different than the ones you hear before taking off in commercial jets. No mention of oxygen masks coming down or that your seat cushion can be used as a life vest. Instead I was given very specific instructions that would help the pilot in case of a problem – that is a crash. So Bill Housley instructed me that if we started to crash I was to take off one shoe and jam the door open so we would have a way out of the plane should we crash. Fred Squiers told me that the most dangerous part of flying is actually the take off. So if something started to go wrong there was no time for explanations – It would look foolish, but our best chance of survival was to head towards the trees and crash into them. My job was not to get freaked out if that happened. Having been in the presence of frantic people before, I know it helps leaders or pilots greatly when people don’t get unglued while the other is trying to make an emergency move.

Today we are continuing our multi-summer series on the book of Colossians. We’ve made it all the way to Colossians 1:18. READ. The “he” here is Jesus – the eternal Son of God who came down to earth in human form over 2,000 years ago. Now in the verses right before this, we have seen the incredible awesomeness of Jesus who is fully God (and there is only One true God). Jesus actually created the universe and all in it as well as creating all the spiritual beings & the invisible heaven which we cannot see now. The Son of God is eternal, the very image of God – or as our church sign says today “Jesus is God’s selfie”. Not only did the eternal Son of God create something out of nothing but He also sustains all the Universe and everything in it. That is the Jesus who we are now learn...READ Col 1:18. Jesus is to be head of the church and the beginning & first born from the dead so He might have the supremacy – so He might be placed #1. Or to picture it in terms of flying, “If Jesus is your co-pilot, switch seats.” The co-pilot is there to assist the pilot. Some of us live our Christian lives that way. We choose the direction and goals of our life and then we invite Jesus to come with us, so if we have any problems He can bail us out which will then allow us to continue doing what we want to do. I want to challenge that idea this morning. If we are really wise – if we really understand the awesomeness of Jesus then we do NOT want Jesus as our co-pilot – we want Him as OUR PILOT. Or in New Testament terms, we want Jesus to be our Lord.

PROPOSITION: If Jesus is your co-pilot, switch seats! Make Jesus supreme over all!
I. Jesus is supreme over His church

A. The body of Christ is the church

We are given two reasons here why Jesus should be our Lord. Or we are given two areas Jesus needs to be supreme in our lives. Although Jesus is Creator & Sustainer of all, more powerful than anyone or anything else, His Lordship has not been fully manifest over fallen and rebellious creation. In simple terms, we do not yet see all things placed under His feet (1 Cor. 15:25–28; Heb. 2:8; cf. Phil. 2:11) as the Bible says WILL happen. Jesus wants us to WILLINGLY put Him first in our understanding of the church and especially how we approach life & death itself.

READ v 18a. The Son of God, Jesus, is the head. That is Jesus is to be the leader or the pilot of the church. We are to go His direction. We are to take on His work. We are to follow His rules. This image of Jesus being the head to a body also reminds us that Jesus genuinely uses our efforts to bring good into this Universe when we obey Him, serve Him, & magnify Him. Physically our head doesn’t do the actual work, the rest of our body does. The head provides the direction. Jesus isn’t just a co-pilot or helper, He is Lord. He is to be our pilot! And we aren’t passengers on that plane but crew that is serving Jesus’ purpose. Jesus being the Head also reminds us that our unity in the church is in Jesus, not our nationality, our political beliefs, our economic standards, our music preference, our temperament, or anything else. The head brings unity to the body, otherwise each part will just want what is easiest or best for them rather than working together for the greater good.

READ v 18a. Jesus is head of or head over the body. And that body is the church.

- The image of the church as Jesus’ body reminds us of the importance of listening to Him. As moral creatures, there are times when everything feels good to our body, but our minds know there is danger if we keep going. In a similar way, there are times our body just wants to give up, but our minds know if we keep going we will accomplish much.
- The image of the church as Jesus’ body reminds us of the interdependency of our lives with other believers. It is not just you or me and Jesus – but the Lord has chosen to work through us as a group. No individual Christian is complete without the body. Each part of the body has unique abilities, but none can survive or accomplish much by themselves.
- The image of the church as Jesus’ body reminds us of the importance, and necessity, of growth. Every physical body needs to grow or it becomes helpless.
- The image of the church as Jesus’ body reminds us of our responsibility to carry out Jesus’ goals in our everyday actions. The compassion team here often reminds us that we are the hands and feet of Jesus to those around us AND
- The image of the church as Jesus’ body reminds us that much of our blessings, encouragement and real accomplishments in this life come through others we serve Jesus with. We miss out on so much joy in this life if we are unwilling to
rejoice with those who rejoice. And life becomes shallow if we don’t weep with those who weep. And we accomplish so much more when we do it together.

B. The local ‘visible’ church is referred to more times in NT than the ‘universal’ church

**READ v 18a.** The body of Jesus is the church. Here in the letters to Colossians and also Ephesians, the universal church is what is in view – it consists of all true Christians everywhere. What may surprise you is that in the New Testament, the word “church” refers to the local (or visible) church almost twice as much as the universal church. And the local church is NEVER described as a part of the Universal church while individual believers are always considered just part of the church, never complete in themselves. God wants us to see ourselves as part of His group – one that is also visible. Jesus works through His church in special ways despite all our flaws.

C. How is Jesus the Head of the church?

**So how is Jesus head of the church?** Does He send down details each week of what we are specifically to do – the songs to sing at worship, the topics to be studied in the Bible, the ministries we should do and the times & places we are to show up at? Jesus’ headship is different than this because He isn’t just trying to accomplish a task, but He is maturing us. So Jesus gives us values, boundaries, goals, responsibilities and resources which we are to use for His purposes. He is not a boss that tells us what to do each moment which we are to respond to as a robot. There is a growth, a maturity, Jesus is trying to develop in us as individuals and as a group which can only come by being given responsibilities. With Jesus as pilot, we aren’t just passengers safely sitting in our seats, amusing ourselves until we get to our heavenly destination. We are crew, given important responsibilities & opportunities so together we can make a genuine difference in the advancement of His work in this world.

This image of the church (literally “the gathered ones”) warns us against pursuing our picture of the Christian life too far towards individualism. It is not just you or I and Jesus. In America it is common for some Christians to see little use for the local church. The only important thing is that Jesus is their head – individually or as a family. We are all incomplete without being part of a local church.

This image of Jesus as the Head of the church also reminds us not to put too high a place on human leaders or organizational hierarchy. Now God has specifically gifted and established leaders for His church – leaders to teach, leaders to guide, leaders to protect, leaders to coordinate, and leaders to speak to the culture as a whole. But over emphasis on human leaders can lead to those leaders taking the place of God or the Holy Spirit’s work in our life. Take the Sheparding Movement or Discipleship Movement that grew out of the Charismatic movement in the 1970s and reached its greatest popularity in the 1980’s. You see remnants with concepts like “spiritual covering”. Many of the early leaders have all backed away and said it was an error. The basic idea of the Shepherding Movement is one of submission to authority – something the Bible encourages. Basically you are in a small group for mutual
accountability, encouragement and keeping on track with "covenant relationships". So there is a submitting to the group. Then each person in that group (and the group as a whole) is also under another person - a shepherd. You were to commit to the absolute authority of that human person - no major decision, including who to marry or what job to take, was to be taken without consulting with one’s shepherd. This became a substitute for the church, the Holy Spirit was displaced in individual lives & spiritual growth was greatly hindered because important decisions were made by someone else.

D. How do we try to keep Jesus the Head of the Barre EFC
So how do we try to keep Jesus as Head of the Barre EFC rather than the individualism of just wanting things our way on one hand or putting a human or small group of humans too high on the other hand?

One thing we do different is long term planning. Companies and our culture spend a lot of time and money on five & ten year plans which, if you have ever studied them, rarely come out as planned or don’t make much of a difference. That’s because no human knows the future, only God does. So we do long term planning by taking Jesus’ calls to us and picturing more specific visionary prayer requests out of that. A visionary prayer request is something we cannot do in the next 18 months by our current or expected resources. We pray these and watch for God to move in one or more of these areas, then we apply our planning & strategizing to what we can do in that area in the next couple years. We seek to join God in His work rather than think up things to do for God that He will be proud of us for. Jesus is the Head.

We also try to tackle projects differently. In government, schools and social organizations, one often tries to get something done by convincing the leaders they should do “such and such” - something we are convinced will bring better results. But there are over 1,000 different ways of serving, witnessing, encouraging and discipling that God is using in our world today. God has not gifted any group to do even a majority of those - but only a small percentage. So instead of just relying on human leaders to know ahead of time what should work best, we encourage pilot projects that allow God to confirm if this is the right approach at this time or not.

Third, we seek to do the best with the giftedness & people God has entrusted to us, rather than try to force everyone into pre-determined molds or wish we had others to fit our desired plans. If God hasn’t provided a leader or workers in an area, then we aren’t going to artificially keep that ministry going. And those ministry leaders are given authority within wider boundaries so they aren’t just doing what other humans think, but allowing God to direct them in ways others may not see without evidence.

Fourth, we partner with other Bible-believing churches to do ministries where we aren’t the leaders. We have 2 this week - "Go Week" which has placed in the hearts of several in this area headed by Pastor Christ of Faith Community and the concluding
**Back to School Bash** at the Granite Museum on Saturday starting at 10 am headed by Connecting Hope leaders. I do encourage you take part in some aspect of this week.

II. Jesus is **supreme** over life/death

A. Refers to Jesus’ resurrection

Life goes much better when we are part of God’s church and we let Jesus be supreme. Life also goes better when Jesus is supreme over our understanding of life & death.

**READ v 18.** Jesus is the beginning and the firstborn – both concepts we’ve looked at in the preceding verses – but this time the contrast and superiority is not over creation but specifically **over death.** Jesus is the beginning (or the founder of a new way) and the firstborn from among the dead. This refers to what has happened through Jesus’ actual, bodily, resurrection from the dead. Jesus, out of love, willing died on the cross to pay the penalty of our sins. But Jesus also bodily rose from the dead. It is why our symbols of the cross are empty – He’s **alive!** It is the reason the early church moved their worship day from Saturday to Sunday calling Sunday “the Lord’s Day” – because that is the day Jesus rose from the dead. **He’s alive! He’s Alive!**

Those descriptions, “the beginning” and “the first born of the dead”, are not two separate thoughts as we might think from our English word “and”. That word “and” is not in the original; instead the original text just places these two descriptions side by side: “the beginning, the firstborn born of the dead”. The second description interprets and clarifies the first by restating it. Jesus *is the beginning, that is the first born out of the dead.*

B. Jesus resurrection is unique

So what is Jesus the beginning and firstborn of? **New life – eternal life – life no longer enslaved to the curse or brokenness of sin.** Jesus’ resurrection is **unique.**

Although very uncommon, humans have been brought back from the dead before Jesus’ resurrection – in fact, Jesus raised several people from the dead Himself including Lazarus. But all of those people died again. Jesus isn’t the first person that God the Father has raised from the dead – Jesus is the first person God the Father has raised from the dead **and given a new resurrection body which is not infected in any way by sin, the curse or control by the demonic!** All true believers who have died are now waiting in heaven for that glorious resurrection body. Jesus defeated death.

C. Death is defeated by resurrection, not immortality

Notice that Jesus defeats death by resurrection, not immortality. **What does that mean Neal?** We live in a country that unconsciously believes death is defeated by immorality – that is we defeat death simply by never dying. We defeat sickness by never getting sick in the first place. We have a meaningful life by never having bad circumstances. **But Jesus defeated death by actually going through death and then rising again to a new & richer life.** Jesus doesn’t keep us from all pain & problems when we put our faith & trust in Him – many times He brings us through serious
sickness, serious relationship problems, serious problems then brings this incredible good out of that for us & others for eternity. Jesus resurrects, revives, & renews through difficulty, not just by avoiding it.

III. Let Jesus be supreme in ALL areas of your life.

Is Jesus supreme in your view of life and death? Do we believe Jesus’ words that whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for Jesus and gospel will save it? The way to overcome death is through resurrection. Do we rejoice in our sufferings because they can produce perseverance, character and hope? God regularly brings new life out of suffering for His children. Do we sacrifice freely for Jesus even though we will have less now because we know God will richly reward for eternity. Walking through sickness, walking through strained relationships, walking through hard situations or lack of money is not a defeat – it is often a path to newness in life. I was blind, but now I see; I was lost but now am found. How many of the most profound times of life come out of a seemingly hopeless or terrible situation which God transforms. We go through the difficulty, loss or death, but then Jesus resurrects lost hope, weak faith, discouraged love, & lost courage.

Two simple challenges today: First, let Jesus be supreme in ALL areas of your life especially your view of the church. It is not about what we want or how we think things should go – we want Jesus to be the Head. Second, let Jesus be supreme in ALL areas of your life especially how you view life & death. When difficult times come, are we willing to go through those and let God resurrect or will we just complain that God & others around us are not doing enough for us. The difference is night and day. Let’s continue to overcome in Jesus’ power.