

SCANDALOUS LOVE SERIES

The Bridezilla of Christ - 01/15/2012

Greg Boyd

Hello! How are you doing? Well, I am not wearing a Chia Pet plant on my head. No, that didn't happen. I didn't stick my finger in a light socket. This is not a perm. It's not a wig, nor is it a helmet. I told you, I'm a homeless guy in this movie coming up, and we were supposed to shoot it two weeks ago, but it didn't snow, so we're going to have it in another two weeks. So, you have to put up with it another two weeks. What has happened is, I was, for a while, putting a lot of hair product on it and scrunching really tight to make it look short, but that just got too expensive and too hard, so I'm letting it go. This is it. I'm letting it go! So, I feel like I'm back in the 60s; you know, "Peace, Man! Make love, not war!" All right. So, try to get beyond this and, I don't know, we'll see what happens. It's kind of fun, though. It's really kind of fun. You can do a lot more things with longer hair. When you have short hair, you can't do anything with it. It's boring. You should see the shapes I can put this thing in! Ha-ha! All this side, all that side, all up; it's just a lot of fun, lot of fun! Hey, thanks to Steve Wiens for an excellent message last week! Wasn't that fantastic? Love that guy. Yes! That's fantastic. He is from Church of the Open Door, and we have always had kind of a good relationship with them. Dave Johnson and I go way back, and we're looking at doing more of that. I think it's so healthy to hear the message from different perspectives, different voices and people with different hairstyles, you know, and different genders and different ethnicities. You can hear the same thing from two different people, but it lands because one person says it a little bit different. So, we'll be doing more of that here in the future.

Okay. We are going back to the book of Colossians. Yes! We were studying that back in November and then we took a break for a series and then Christmas happened and all that stuff, and now we are going back to the book of Colossians. We are going to take another look at this magnificent hymn that is in Colossians, Chapter 1; this hymn of Christ, the Creator, and having supremacy in all things, and then we'll add a few verses, as well. So, we are actually going to make some progress here. We've already looked at this passage, I think, three or four times, but we're never in a rush around here, so we're going to look at it again. I am going to entitle this message, "The Bridezilla of Christ." Yes. Trevor is so clever with his very expensive art he puts up here. I actually wanted to entitle this – my choice was to say that it should be "The ink stained, fog horn, internal explosion, horse manure, obscenity church." You get all that? I wanted to entitle it, "The ink stained, fog horn, internal explosion, horse manure,

obscurity church." You'll see why. They thought that was a little too long, so we're going to go with "The Bridezilla of Christ" for reasons that, hopefully, become clear here in a second.

Colossians, Chapter 1. Just capture how completely magnificent this hymn is. It's just so exalting.

"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 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. All things have been created for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together." Colossians 1:15-23

All, all, all, all, all - He is straining language to just put Christ in the most exalted position possible.

"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. 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."

This magnificent hymn is so triumphant. It's just incredible. Now, he's going to apply this to the church. He says:

"Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation, if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant."

Good passage! That's good Scripture! Pray with me here for a moment.

Abba Father, thank you, God, for your presence here this morning and your presence in the worship service, that sweetness as we sang about your grace and the power of your name, the shelter that is your name, and the fresh Holy Spirit falling on us. Father, will you take that Spirit now and infuse that with all the freedom and power and fun and electricity that was present before? Lord, infuse this message with that power and authority to write it into our hearts and minds and to build your kingdom. Bring your kingdom. For everyone who is listening through podcast, television, any other way, Lord, we pray for them, Lord, that whatever they are doing that, God, you would capture their

attention and melt their hearts to receive this word. God, for those who need encouragement, let it be a word of encouragement. For those who need hope, let it be a word of hope. For those who need conviction, let it be a word of conviction. We surrender it to you for, in all things, you are supreme. Have your way. Have your way right here, right now. In Jesus' name. And the bridezilla of Christ said Amen. Amen.

This hymn is just so fantastic. It is, as I said, Paul straining language to try to, in some way, express the magnificence of Christ. He is the image of the invisible God. He is before all things, the creator of all things, whether in heaven or on earth, visible or invisible, thrones, powers, dominions, authorities. All things are created by him; all things are created for him. All things are created through him. He holds together all things. He is the first born from among the dead that he can have supremacy in all things, and God was pleased to have his fullness dwell in him.

Everything that makes God God dwells in him, through him, he is reconciling all things to himself, and he is bringing peace to all things. It's just fantastic! This is magnificent! It's God glorifying. It's awe inspiring.

But, there is one part of this hymn that we read that doesn't seem to quite fit. You may have noticed I just left that part out. Right in the middle of this; it's been called "The Hymn of the Cosmic Christ," right in the middle of it Paul says, "He is the head of the church." And then he says, "He is the firstborn from among the dead that he might have supremacy in all things." Firstborn or the head of the church. What is that doing there? You have this cosmic Christ with this exalting stuff, and then there's the church. There is the sense in which it fits and a sense in which it doesn't fit. It fits in this sense. It fits Paul's theology of the church because Paul has got an incredible theology of the church; this grand, magnificent, beautiful church. The church is called the bride of Christ. The bride of Christ. The church is construed by Paul and other authors as being the central purpose, for which God created the world; at least, so far as God has revealed it. At the center of creation is this bride. We are to be an expression. This people who say yes to God are an expression of the Father's love for the Son. We talked about that before. So, the mirror is a reflection of God's glory, and we are invited into the fellowship, the magnificent, ecstatic fellowship of the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. We are made participants of the divine nature. It says in I Peter that we partake in the perfect love that God eternally is throughout all eternity, and we'll be dancing with the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit throughout all eternity as the bride of Christ. We'll be the dance partner of God. It's this beautiful, fantastic, grand vision of the church that Paul has.

Then, we're called the body of Christ. He calls us that in his hymn that we read. The body of Christ, which means we are called to do what Christ did in his first body, but we do it in a corporate way. We are to be the hands and feet of Jesus, as we sang about a little bit ago. We are to look like Jesus and love like Jesus and serve like Jesus and spread the Word like Jesus and

love our enemies like Jesus. We are called to be the means by which God brings the gospel into the world and his will is carried out on earth as it is in heaven. We are called to be the means by which he brings reconciliation to all things and by which he brings peace to all things. We are called to be peacemakers. It's a beautiful, magnificent vision of the church and even has a cosmic dimension to it. Paul says in Romans 8 that the entire creation groans like a woman going through labor. This whole creation now is alienated from God and oppressed. It's groaning for the manifestation of the children of God. As the children of God go, so the whole creation goes. There's a cosmic dimension to the vision of the church in the New Testament. We even get that in this hymn here. Paul first talked about the reconciliation of all creation and then he says, "And you also God has reconciled." He portrays the church as sort of a microcosm of what God is doing throughout the cosmos. The whole cosmos was alienated and now is being reconciled; we were alienated, but we've been reconciled. So, the church is called to be the first fruits. We've talked about that a lot around here. We put on the display the coming kingdom. We are to manifest what it looks like when creation is redeemed. We are supposed to be a sneak preview of the coming kingdom. So, there is this grand, magnificent, beautiful, Jesus-looking portrait of the church that we're given in the New Testament. That fits this hymn. That fits. You can make sense out of why the church is in this beautiful, cosmic Christ hymn when you understand Paul's theology of the church.

There is another sense in which the church doesn't seem to fit this hymn. I think there is an incredible, profound truth in thinking about this. When you think of the cosmos, you think of Christ filling the universe, what comes to your mind? Do you think of the galaxies of billions and billions and billions of stars and quasars and black holes and the expanse of the universe, and you realize that Christ created all that and holds all of that in place. When you think about the cosmos, there is this grandness, this magnificence, this awesomeness that we associate that with. But now, think about the church. What comes to your mind when you think about the church? Maybe some people think of a little church in the dale, a little rural church that's kind of quaint and cute. Others might think of sort of a mega church, something that's really slick, a good Jesus-marketing program, not necessarily a positive connotation there, maybe. Others might have an even more negative connotation of the church. You think about the church, you think about Christians, and when you think about Christians, you think about, maybe, judgmental people or intolerant people or people who are trying to control the culture and impose their will on others and maybe unloving people. I don't know. But none of it really seems to fit this cosmic dimension of this hymn. At best, it seems the church seems too small. At worst, the church seems petty and foolish and maybe even evil. It doesn't fit the grandness of this hymn.

I'm going to be real here. Okay? I'm going to be very honest. I've had a covenant with the church that I will speak from my gut and be honest. I'm going to be raw here; real here. Okay? For the

next 10 minutes, some of you may think that I sound like an atheist. You'll think, "Is that a Christian up there on stage talking?" Others may feel a little uncomfortable with what I'm going to say, maybe even a little offended by what I'm going to say. I encourage you to hang in there because I promise you that there will be an edifying word at the end of this whole thing, and I assure you that I'm not an atheist, but it may not sound like it for about 10 minutes. All right? So you cut me slack for 10 minutes.

There is a rule that some people have that they bring into church; and the rule is that the job of preachers is to always make Christians look good or to put a positive spin on things and are sort of selling the Christianity product or the Jesus product, and that's the job of preachers. I just have to tell you that I think that is a real dumb rule, and I'm going to break it. So, if that rule is important to you, well, then prepare, get ready. But, from the gut, the thing is this. In all honesty; I love you guys. I love you guys, and I love Woodland Hills Church, and I love some of the stuff we're doing. I love what we just did in this Making Space Campaign. When we sacrifice our resources, pool it together to see the kingdom grow, I love that! I love that! I love you, I love the church, I love what we stand for. I love some of the distinctives of this church. I love some of the ways that we are not typical. These are the ways that tend to aggravate other people, but I love that. I love that. It costs us a little bit, but I love that we stand for some of this stuff. I love Jesus! Believe me, I love Jesus, and I love the Gospel, and I love the Bible, and I love the kingdom. I wouldn't be standing up here talking to you if I didn't love, with all my heart, that.

Having said that, I have never really been a fan of the church, the church at large. It has never really grabbed me. I never can get excited about that. Just being honest here. About 30 years ago, I was in seminary at Yale and attending this church and the pastor asked me to be an associate pastor, and I said yes. So, I was associate pastor of this church and everything was going well for about one year. Then, he left. He left me with this church. As soon as he left me with this church, and I'm just doing this part time, I'm a seminary student, you know, this is a side job for me, but now this church is in my charge. As soon as he leaves, I find out that there's been a war going on in this church for the last 50 years, mainly between two powerful families, but they all had their little alliances built. They have, over the last 50 years, taken turns fighting one another and getting in charge. Everyone wants to be on the board so they can run the church, and there's this power struggle. It was the ugliest thing I've ever seen in my life. It was grotesque. I had never seen such hatred. I had never seen such venom, such unforgiveness. People just holding on to things that were said 35 years ago and the anger, it was just grotesque and putrid. Gaah! I'd never seen anything like it. It was – aggh! I had to deal with this. There was one service where it kind of all came to a head. When the pastor left, okay, there is now this leadership vacuum, so everyone was vying for power. So, the power struggle begins. Ugly! This one service, I was actually the song leader of this church. "By and by when

the morning comes." So, I'm leading the song thing and, in between hymns, we finish one hymn, and I'm looking for the next hymn, a lady stands up. Now, this was a Pentecostal church and, therefore, it was permissible to do this. She stood up and gave this prophesy. She was on the side of the group that was not in power, so her prophesy was that the board should resign. Whoo-whee! So, this is why--I believe the gifts of the Spirit, I work in the gifts of the Spirit; but I think they work best in a small context like the New Testament church was. You get a group like this; no one knows who the person is, and anything can happen, and that's why we say if anyone has got a word that they think is for the whole church, you submit it to leadership because it's got to be censored before it goes to press. That's our policy here. So, this lady stands up. "Thus, says the Lord! The board should resign!" Immediately, somebody on the other side of the auditorium stands up and says, "Thus, says the Lord; you are a false prophet! The board is not supposed to resign." Then, somebody else over here says, "Thus, says the Lord, no, that was a true prophet! You're a false prophet! The board should resign!" Then another person stands up and says, "No! You're a false prophet! You're a false prophet! But, you're a true prophet and the board should stay!" Then, BOOM! Like dropping a match into a tank of gasoline, this church explodes into their counter prophesies. I'm still looking for the next hymn that we're supposed to sing. Where's that stupid hymn? Hymn number 666, that's where! It's like -- it was nuts! It was crazy! I tell you. All over, people were screaming counter prophesies, pointing their fingers, "Thus, says the Lord..." Then, we had just converted this tribe of gypsies, God bless them, they were just the most wonderful people. They were very demonstrative, very emotional. They, all of a sudden, stood up. There were about 30 of them. They stood up, and it's like it happened yesterday. They were right over there. I'm still looking for the next hymn to sing. They stand up, and they start marching around the church -- screaming and hollering and wailing, and I don't know whose side they were on, if they were on anyone's side. I don't know what they were doing, but one lady was saying, "They're squelching the Spirit! They're squelching the Spirit!" And, I'm going, "You got that right! Something's going on here." So, people are screaming at one another, they are marching around. I look up, and I see in the foyer of the church, the vestibule, they called it, a fight breaking out. People were hitting one another! It's like, what is going on here?! I'm just a seminary student looking for a stupid hymn to sing, and there's this craziness. Now, we were looking for a senior pastor, and we had a guy candidating that day. This is wonderful! It gets better! So he, to show his authority as a possible senior pastor, comes up and he grabs the microphone from me, tells the organist to crank it up, and he starts trying to lead us in a hymn. I'm, like, frozen up there. I'm, like, "What's going on? I don't know what to do!" So, he starts singing, "Peace, peace, wonderful peace coming down from the Father above." It's, like, the song doesn't quite fit the circumstances here. But, about 10 people are singing it while the others are giving counter prophesies or fighting out in the foyer or marching around the church; and, at this point, I start laughing. I just started laughing. I just backed up, and I just started laughing. After that, I did not want to go to church again ever.

I was done. I was done. This carnival! My job was, after the song service, to welcome all the newcomers. That was awkward. I told them, I said, "You know, I doubt you want to come back, but then, again, I think you've never been to a church that's this interesting!" Ha-ha. What a show. I didn't want anything to do with church. I was done.

God had to really deal with me for a period of time after that. It really showed me that opting out was not an option. I had to just deal with my heart on this whole thing. I came to the conclusion that I've got a lot of good reasons for believing in Jesus. I reviewed all those reasons, why I believe in Jesus. I know I believe in Jesus. You see, Jesus is the one who died for the church, his body. So, if I'm going to follow him, I have to be part of the body. So, I made the commitment, "Lord, I'll continue to serve you in whatever capacity you put me in, and I'll stay involved in the church, but I want you to know that I don't like it. I don't like it at all. I'll do it in spite of the church, but I don't like it." I stuck with that commitment. Things have gotten better since then, for sure, but I still find that when it comes to the church at large, I just don't groove with it. I don't fit with it. To this day, when I hear evangelical Christians on television or on radio, what they say just makes me cringe. Not all, but some of it's, like, ahhh, ahhh! Or, if I see debates between Christians and non-Christians on television, especially during election seasons, I've got to just turn that off. It's not good for my soul. I find more often than not I'm agreeing with the non-Christians. I'm just being honest here. Okay? I find myself agreeing with the non-Christian. The purpose for which God created the world, the church. The purpose for which God created the world, the center of God's creation. What's it doing in this hymn? It just doesn't seem to fit. I've just never been a fan of this church at large. Yet, you go back a little ways and look at history, and it's even worse, honestly. I'm just being real here. If you look at history, now you don't read the white-washed histories that sugar coat everything in the past that you get in some of our high school history textbooks or that come out of Christian publishing houses, look at real history, some academic histories, and you'll find that throughout history the church has done some nasty stuff. It's done a lot of good stuff. I don't want to minimize that. It's done a lot of good stuff. Yay! But, there has been a lot of nasty stuff. This is stuff I have just had to struggle with. It's, like, this is the center of God's purpose for creation? I don't think so.

From the fifteenth to the seventeenth century when the Conquistadors came over here in Jesus' name to conquer this land, they brought with them the smallpox. Now, over in Europe we had the smallpox for quite a while, so we had an immunity system against it. It wasn't usually very lethal, but the Native Americans over here, they had never seen smallpox, so they had no immunity to it. So 40% of the people who got smallpox died just from contact with us. Now, in the early seventeenth century, someone developed some inoculation to it, a way of immunizing people from that. But the church leadership said, "No, don't administer that to the natives." They said, "Well, because this is clearly a judgment of God, we don't want to get

involved or interfere with God's judgment. Besides," some said, "this is proof that it's manifest destiny that God wants us to take over this land. Look it, he's slaughtering them all." Forget the fact that we're the ones doing it because we won't give them the immunization shot. See, you see, stuff like that, and you wonder – the church, the central purpose for God's creating the world? Not so much. In the fifteenth and sixteenth century, they began to develop some pain-relieving medicine that they would give to women during child labor. A lot of church leaders said, "No, don't relieve their pain because that's God's judgment on them. They were the ones who seduced Adam," all right, so, they were supposed to experience pain during child birth. Don't relieve that pain. King James IV, the one who the King James Bible is named after, because he authorized it, the King James Bible, this guy found out about a lady who had taken some of that pain medication during childbirth, and he had her burned alive at the stake. Hallelujah...ha. The church? The bride of Christ? The center of God's creation? When anesthesia was first developed in the nineteenth century, that wonderful medicine that allows you, if you go under, and you're getting your leg cut off, you don't have to experience it all. We so appreciate when we go in for our root canals; the Christians said, "No!" They pushed the administering of that back a long while because they said, "We're supposed to experience pain. This is God's judgment for sin." The church has often found its side on the wrong side of things throughout history. What is that church doing in the middle of this beautiful, beautiful hymn? It's a stain. It doesn't belong there. You go back earlier, it's even worse! I'm almost done, just bear with me here. We have got to be real about this. The church of the first four centuries was pretty good, not perfect, but it looked like Jesus to a large degree. They were out there rescuing kids that were abandoned by fathers, unwanted kids, and they were out there helping the poor, and serving the sick when plagues would come in. They would stick around and often give their lives ministering to the folks who had gotten the plague. They were a God-glorifying group of people. When they were being put to death, fed to lions, burned alive, they would often bless the crowds as they were being slaughtered. In fact, it was largely the beauty of the way that they died that spread the gospel. People would see that and then they would join the tribe of these wonderful Christians. That's when the word "martyr" became synonymous with dying for a cause. It, literally, means, "to witness" and that's how they witnessed. So, the church grew. The more you tried to oppress it, the more it grew. It was beautiful.

Then, around the fifth century, Satan came up with a better idea. Since you can't eradicate this thing by trying to squish it, well, let's give it power. And, he did. And, it worked like a charm. In the fifth century, the church acquires all this political power and now the mindset completely changes. Instead of serving the world humbly and doing what Jesus did, now, "We're going to conquer the world. We've got the power of the sword." So, now we have the birth of the church militant and triumphant; and now, in Jesus' name, we're going to conquer the world, and anyone who gets in our way, well, we'll just slaughter them because God has given us the power of the sword. So, after the fifth century, we see a history here that is just tragic, full of

blood and demonic as the church, in Jesus' name, begins to execute heretics and witches and Jews. Then, through the Crusades, coming against the Muslims, and then when that fun dried up, we started turning on one another. So, you've got centuries of Christian-on-Christian violence all throughout Europe; the Hundred Years' War and the Thirty Years' War and on and on and on. Christians fighting Christians, and they were all doing it in the name of God and country and the name of the cross that's going to conquer the world. It was with that mindset that the Conquistadors came over here to conquer this land in Jesus' name and slaughtered millions of natives in the process. That same mindset was involved in the American Revolution, as we had thousands and thousands of Christians killing one another over who is going to rule this country. That holiday that we celebrate every Fourth of July, it was that same mindset that led 700,000 Christians to slaughter one another during the Civil War; and it goes on and on and on and on. The center of God's purpose for creation? The bride of Christ? The innocent bride of Christ; ah! If you get real about the history here, and a lot of which still goes on today, while putting that in the middle of this glorious hymn, it just doesn't fit. It's full of discord. I mean, Christ, the Image of God, the Firstborn of all creation, before all things, created all things in heaven and earth, visible and invisible, thrones, powers, rulers and authorities, all these are created by Christ; all these are created for Christ; all these are created through Christ. Christ holds all things together, and he is the Firstborn from among the dead so that he could have supremacy in all things and the fullness of the Godhead dwells in him. By him, all things are being reconciled, and he's bringing peace to all things. So glorious and wonderful and magnificent; and he's the Head of the church. Are you proud of that? It's like an ink stain; a big, black ink stain on an all-white, beautiful wedding gown. It's like blowing a foghorn in the middle of a wonderful orchestral piece like Handel's Messiah. It's like burping or having some other intestinal explosion in the middle of a beautiful quiet piece like Claude Debussy's "Clair de Lune." It's like putting a piece of horse manure in the middle of a beautiful painting, like Vincent Van Gogh's "Starry Night." It just doesn't fit. You're ruining it! It's like putting an obscenity in the middle of the "Sermon on the Mount." It doesn't belong there. You're ruining it. The church in the middle of this beautiful hymn, it just doesn't fit. It's incongruous. What is it doing there?

Now, maybe you'd say, "Well, Greg, the church that did those things was not the true church." I would totally agree with you. I would totally agree with you. The church that killed people, slaughtered people, tried to rule the world is still trying to rule the world; that is not what Jesus did. That's not the body of Christ. We're the body of Christ. We are supposed to be exactly what Jesus was; loving like Jesus, serving like Jesus, being humble like Jesus, blessing our enemies, not calling on legions of angels to squish them but, rather, blessing them; that's what Jesus did as an example for us. That's the body of Christ! That's the true church; and any church that doesn't look like that is simply another religion; simply another religion. I totally agree with that. Then, ask yourself the question, "Where is the true church?" Now, you can find throughout history a thin strand of folks, almost unbroken throughout history, while the church

is doing a militant and triumphant, “We’re going to conquer the world, slaughter whoever gets in our way,” there has always been a strand of people who did look like Jesus and love like Jesus. Now, usually they were slaughtered by the institutional church, but you do find a small strand. The best example of it is, I think, the Anabaptists in the fifteenth and sixteenth century. These are the forefathers of the Mennonites. These folks got it; they got it. Christianity is not just about what you believe; it’s about living a certain way that looks like Jesus. So, for that reason, these folks were persecuted by the church triumphant, the Catholics and the Anglicans and the Calvinists and the Lutherans; they all slaughtered the Anabaptists, but the Anabaptists refused to return the favor because they were living like Jesus, and they almost were all exterminated. See, that’s the one church tradition that has no blood on its hands, and that’s why that’s the church tradition I align most with. I think in my heart of hearts I’m a Mennonite because I love that. But see, that strand, this true church, is small; it’s rare, you’ve got to look for it. So, even that doesn’t quite fit the majesty, the magnificence and the grandeur of this hymn.

But, even more importantly, we’ve got to ask this question, “Where is the true church today?” Let’s get really raw. Are we the true church? Am I part of the true church? Do I look like Jesus? Am I living like Jesus? Are we living like Jesus, loving like Jesus? Here’s the thing; by the grace of God and the power of God, I think we are moving in the right direction. I think I’m moving in the right direction, slowly but surely; sometimes two steps forward, three steps backwards, but there is movement. I thank God for that. I think when we pool our resources like we did recently and sacrifice to have this Making Space to serve the poor and turn this place into a homeless shelter, I think that’s exactly what the body of Christ should do. I love it when I hear about the coin dropping in people’s slots where they get it, and they start changing their lives, and they are moving in a different direction, going counter culture. We’ve got a bunch of people around here who are sacrificing one of their kidneys because there are people who don’t have any kidneys. I’ve got two; well, then I’ll share one, even if they are a total stranger. That’s the kind of thing the body of Christ does. I thank God for that. But, if we are real, we also have to confess that we are not there yet. I’m not there yet. I fall short. I sin. I can sometimes be very petty. We’ve got a long way to go. We’ve got a long way to go.

So, at best, we might say, well, it’s a little bit smaller ink stain. The foghorn isn’t quite as loud. It’s less offensive of an intestinal explosion in the middle of “Clair de Lune.” It’s a little smaller piece of horse manure, and maybe a little less offensive obscenity, but it still doesn’t fit the hymn. It still doesn’t fit the hymn. Okay. So what is that doing there? Now, I want to take a totally different approach here. Maybe we’re asking the wrong question. Maybe we’re thinking along the wrong path.

Let's go back to that ink stain in the middle of this magnificent, white gown and read it. Paul says this:

"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."

Colossians 1: 18

Okay. Notice this. Christ has supremacy in all things. Not the church. The church has supremacy in nothing. Christ has supremacy in all things. In fact, the passage says that Christ is the head of the church so that in all things he would have supremacy. Not the church. Now, follow this here. It's very important. C.S. Lewis said, I think it was in his book on miracles; he said, "A mark of greatness is that you have the capacity and the willingness to enter into the small." He used an example of a human playing with a kitten. A human being can stoop and enter into the world of the kitten and play the kitten's games, but the kitten can't return the favor. It's the mark of greatness. It's the mark of superior maturity in an adult that the adult can enter into the world of the child but the child can't enter into the world of the adult. C.S. Lewis saw this everywhere. The mark of greatness is that you can take something insignificant and do something very significant with it. You can take something that's totally worthless and do something worthwhile with it. You can make yourself small. It's a sign of greatness. See, I think he was nailing it on the head because this is what we see God doing throughout the Bible. He's a God who shows his greatness by becoming small. Paul says this in I Corinthians.

"But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things and the things that are not to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him." I Corinthians 1:27-29

God is a God who shows his greatness by becoming small. He shows his wisdom by using foolishness. He shows his strength by working through weakness. You see this throughout the Bible. For example, he chooses Abraham. He works through Abraham. Father Abraham had many sons, many sons had Father Abraham. We go "Yay" when we hear Abraham, the father of all who believe. He's a great guy. But, let's not forget that this guy pawned his wife off two times and had other guys sleep with her saying that she was his sister to save his own skin; not exactly heroic, godly behavior. Then there's David, wonderful David, King David, man after God's own heart; hallelujah! But, let's not forget that David got a guy's wife pregnant and then had the guy killed to cover up for it. Not exactly the greatest godly behavior. See, God works through Abraham and God works through David. At one point in the Biblical narrative, we read about how God used a mule, a donkey. He spoke through a donkey, and he was speaking to this pagan sorcerer, and then God used the pagan sorcerer. The message that he gave to the pagan sorcerer through the donkey, to further his purposes with Israel. This is a God who showed how

great he is by stooping to the level of a donkey and a pagan sorcerer. See, God shows his greatness by becoming small and using the weak and the despised things, even things that don't exist, to bring about his purposes in this world. We see this most clearly in Jesus Christ because Jesus is the definitive revelation of God. He's the image of the invisible God. You want to know what God looks like? Look at Jesus. The reason is because in Jesus we see the supreme, quintessential example of God showing his greatness by becoming small. God shows his bigness, the character of his bigness by becoming a human being. The God who fills the expanse of space and infinitely beyond that, who holds all the cosmos together, all the galaxies and every molecule on every planet together, this God, this grand God transformed himself into a microscopic zygote and was implanted in the womb of an unwed Jewish peasant girl in the first century, and that shows the kind of greatness he has. This is a God who shows his beauty, his magnificent, unfathomable beauty by letting himself get beaten to a pulp beyond recognition as Jesus was being crucified. This is a God who shows his omnipotent strength by letting himself be crucified out of love for his enemies. This is a God who shows his exaltation by becoming despised. He shows his incredible glory by taking on our shame. He shows his incredible wisdom by looking like a total fool. He shows his power by becoming weak. He shows us that he's the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords by becoming a humble servant. This is a God who shows his unsurpassable holiness by becoming our sin; II Corinthians 5: 21. This is wild! This is a God who shows how great he is by doing the opposite. He becomes the opposite of himself. He shows his holiness by becoming our sin. This is a God, a great God, and incredible God, a mind-blowing God where everything is upside down. His ways are not our ways. It just blows your brain when you think about it; a God who achieves his purposes by every means other than what you would expect him to do. Blows your mind! That's why my hair is so crazy! It's been blowing my mind! Nuts! See, he works through the weak and the despised and the lowly and now, now we can begin to see, maybe, why that church is in the middle of this magnificent hymn. Because, if God can achieve his cosmic purposes through the church, then you know God is great! Then you know God is God! You know Christ is supreme! You know no one has got any reason to boast, no cause to boast. God can use any means possible. He uses the church. He uses the church to achieve his will. Now we can begin to understand why there is this ink stain in the middle of this beautiful, white dress and this foghorn in "Handel's Messiah," and this intestinal explosion in Claude Debussy's "Clair de Lune," and the horse manure on Van Gogh's "Starry Night," and this obscenity in the middle of the "Sermon on the Mount," because God is showing that he can create a beautiful, white gown out of an ink blot. He's showing that he can create a "Handel's Messiah" out of a foghorn. He's showing he can create a beautiful sun and a "Clair de Lune" out of an intestinal explosion. He's showing he can create a Vincent Van Gogh magnificent portrait of the whole cosmos using a piece of horse crap. He's showing he can create a "Sermon on the Mount" out of an obscenity. Folks, guess what? We're the ink stain! We're the obscenity! We're the intestinal explosion, and God is choosing to use this foolish,

stupid, dumb, crazy stuff to achieve great stuff and that shows his greatness and shows his magnificence and shows that he's the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords. It shows that all glory goes to him. He reigns supreme in all things, and no one, no one, not one has any grounds to boast. Praise God. What a God! What a Creator! What a Saviour!

Tell the Children's Church that we're going to go over three minutes.

Okay. How does this apply to us? Really quickly here; really brief. Three things. Make it practical here. How does it apply to us?

1. It means we can have hope. Oh, yes, we can have hope. We are called to strive with all of our might by the grace of God and the power of God to strive to be the true church, to strive to be the tribe, that thin line of tradition that you see running throughout church history that looks like Jesus and loves like Jesus and serves like Jesus. We're called to seek first the kingdom of God and passionately put out of our lives everything that's inconsistent with the character of God and to be the first fruits. We're called to do that, but we're not called to put our hope in how good we do that. Don't put your hope in how you are doing. Our hope is to be rooted in Jesus Christ. Paul said this. We read this earlier. Paul said to continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. Where's the hope? It's in the gospel, and the gospel is the good news of Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ has supremacy in all things. Put your hope in that. Put your hope in that. Don't move one inch, Paul is saying, not one inch from having that hope. Put all your eggs in that basket; all your hope in that basket. Don't let yourself be seduced into putting hope in anything else. Don't put your hope in how you're doing. Strive to do your best, but don't put your hope in how you are doing. Don't put your hope in how the church is doing. For goodness sake, don't put your hope on how some candidate is doing, please. Don't put your hope in how America is doing. Don't put your hope on how the economy is doing. Don't put your hope in how the world is doing. Don't put your hope on what Iran is doing. Don't put your hope on anything other than Jesus Christ, the King of Kings, the Lord of Lords, the Rock of Ages, the one who never changes, the one who is the same yesterday, today, and forever; he never changes! You put your hope on anything else, and it's going to go up, and it's going to go down. If I take my eyes off of Jesus Christ for a nanosecond, I get cynical. I just get cynical. You know, look at this world! Someone said, life is a tragedy to those who feel and a comedy to those who think. So, if you are a thinking, feeling person, that means that life is a tragic comedy. Ha-ha. It is! It is! You look around, and it's, like, hopeless, but, you know what, that's fine because, as a matter of fact, it is hopeless outside of Jesus Christ. That's a very appropriate thing to feel, which is just one more reason to keep your eyes fixed on Jesus Christ; all your hope on Jesus Christ. I look around the world, and I can get very cynical. But, you know what, I'm a very optimistic person. The future looks very, very bright. Thank you! Because Christ reigns supreme. I don't know what's going to go on with Iran, and I

don't know what's going to go on with Palestine; I don't know about all that, and I care about that stuff. We want to be peace makers, but I'm not going to lose sleep over anything because Jesus Christ reigns supreme always, forever, and ever and ever, amen. Put all your hope in Jesus Christ.

2. Secondly, opting out is not an option. Listen up. Opting out is not an option. I hear this all the time; you probably do, too, where people say, "You know what, I quit. I'm not going to go to church. I still believe in Jesus, of course. I still believe in God. But, the church is foolish. The church is shallow. The church is full of hypocrites. The church is dumb. The church is..." yeah, blah-blah-blah-blah-blah-blah. Got that. I'm not going to fight you on that. Been there, done that. I understand that. People even feel, and I get this, they feel superior because they don't go to church. Like, "My god is too big to have anything to do with that," so you feel like you are shallow just by participating in it. I really understand that. But, if you are a Jesus follower, you submit to Jesus, and Jesus was the one who died for this bozo thing called the church. Jesus is the one who gave his life for this silly, foolish, stupid thing full of hypocrites. Therefore, opting out is not an option. I'm sorry. We are all called to be part of the church, the body of Christ. It doesn't mean that you've got to come to a weekend service and listen to a sermon and worship with a bunch of other people in a large auditorium, but it does mean that everyone who follows Christ is called to be in community with others where you serve together and love one another and grow together and study together and spread the Gospel together and minister together. We're all called to do that in some capacity, however it looks. Everybody, everybody, everybody is called to be a part of that. Opting out simply isn't an option. There is no concept of a solo Christian in the New Testament. You know, it's foolish, it's foolish, but God uses that. God uses things like this so that he'll have supremacy in all things. It's not about the church; it's about Christ. So, for Christ's sake, for Christ's sake, get yourself into church. Podrisioners, for Christ's sake, listen to me here. If you are in an area where you don't have a church, I'm talking to our wonderful podrisioners, we've got thousands of them out there, Woodland Hills extension, I love you guys out there. I get great testimonies out there. Podrisioners, if you are in a locale where you can't, there's no church around you, or maybe there is a church but it's not one that will feed your soul or maybe it would damage your soul, I get this a lot where they go to church and it makes you want to become a Buddhist every Sunday, yeah, I got that, but, you know what, start one! Be the church. Just invite a person over and share the Gospel with them. And, when they get converted, you worship together and study together and then you spread the Word more. That's church! That's church right there. Where two or three are gathered together, Jesus is in the midst of them. You got yourself church right there. So, I encourage you podrisioners to be a church planter. We at Woodland Hills Church right now, all together, we commission you to be our church planters. Hallelujah. You are our church planters. Let it begin. All right. You don't have to go to seminary to do it, either. Just start.

3. Finally, the final word is this: It means that God can use you. If you got this message, it means that God can use you. No ifs, ands, or buts. If God can use an Abraham and God can use a David, God can use a mule, and God can use a pagan sorcerer, God can use you. If God can use a Greg Boyd or a Karl or a Jim or a Betty or any other person up here, then God can use you. There is not much difference between the Greg Boyd and the mule. God is stooping about equally as much in both cases. You see, it doesn't matter what you've done, what you've been, what crimes you've committed, what struggles you've been through, all the heinous things you've done; don't let the devil take you out again for those stupid, silly reasons as though your sin can compete with Jesus in terms of his forgiveness and righteousness. It doesn't stand a chance. Don't let that take you out of the game. It doesn't matter what's gone on. It doesn't matter what your present struggles are. You can be an ink stain on an all-white dress. You can be a foghorn in the middle of "Handel's Messiah." You can be the intestinal explosion in the middle of "Clair de Lune." Maybe your life is nothing but one big horse pile in the middle of Van Gogh's beautiful painting. Maybe you are an obscenity on the "Sermon on the Mount." Well, welcome to the club! This is where we are. You belong here. Amen. God can use you. God can use you.

Now, ascribe to be all you can be in growing in Christ, but also know that God uses you as you are. Right here and right now. Right here and right now. We are the bride of Christ, and let's be honest; sometimes, we look like the bridezilla of Christ. When we surrender everything we have, including the ink stain and the fog horn and the crap and the burp and the obscenity, when we surrender to him, he can make something beautiful out of it, he can make something beautiful in it, and he starts to do something beautiful through you; and you've been using all your stuff to do it, and he starts to do something beautiful through you. Why? It's because you can't boast, and he has supremacy in all things. He has supremacy in all things. Surrender your life to him. He reigns supreme. Hallelujah. What a God! What a God! I'm just blown away. Woo! A mind-blowing, beautiful, unexpected, crazy, odd god. But, thank God for that.

I'm going to close in a little prayer, and as I do, I want to ask the prayer teams to come forward. If you are here this morning and have anything on your heart, any burden that you are carrying, whatever it may be about, come forward and receive prayer from these folks, and everything you share will be held in confidence, so don't worry about that. I encourage you not to take that care out with you.

Father, Abba Father, Abba Father, you are beautiful beyond description, and you blow us away. Thank you, God, for being a god who stoops to magnificent depths to show forth your greatness. As we leave this place, I pray, Lord God, that your Spirit would be motivating us and moving us and encouraging us to belong to that tribe of the true church that puts on display the beauty of Christ. Also, a people, Lord God, who

surrender our yucky stuff over to you knowing that you are so wise, so supreme that you can use that, as well, to further your purposes in this world. We live to glorify you and show forth your supremacy in how we love ourselves and how we love others, how we treat our neighbors. Holy Spirit, be on us, work through us as we leave this place to further your kingdom. In Jesus' name; and the bridezilla of Christ said amen! God bless you guys! Go out and spread the good word.