

VOLUME ONE

CHRIST AND SUPREMACY

What Is the Hope We Must Recover?

Joy to the world! the Lord is come; let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare Him room, and heav'n and nature sing.

Joy to the earth! the Savior reigns; let men their songs employ;
While fields and floods, rocks, hills,
and plains repeat the sounding joy.

No more let sins and sorrows grow, nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow far as the curse is found.

He rules the world with truth and grace,
and makes the nations prove
The glories of His righteousness, and wonders of His love.

— *Isaac Watts*

Volume I: CHRIST

1) *The Glory of the Supremacy of God's Son*

2) Christ Supreme: *The Summation of Christian Hope*

3) Christ Supreme: *The Consummation of Christian Hope*

4) Christ Supreme: *The Approximation of Christian Hope*

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Interlude I



I

THE GLORY OF THE SUPREMACY OF GOD'S SON

ALL the Hope We Are Meant to Have

Does God *really* have a son? If so, what do you think about the son God has?

Broadcasting worldwide over CNN, Larry King has been voted “the most remarkable talk-show host on TV ever”. Throughout his five decade career King has interviewed over 40,000 people. Raised in a Brooklyn Jewish home, he remarked once that the one interview he would most like to land is with God Himself. If this happened, he said, he would ask God just one simple question: “Do you really have a son?”

I’m no Larry King! But if I could interview 40,000 *Christians*, I would want to ask them a similar simple question: “What do you *really* think about God’s Son?” If offered a follow-up question, I would add: “What is one word you would use most often to describe the glory of God’s Son?” And, if allowed a final probe, I would continue: “What is the greatest impact the glory of God’s Son brings to your daily walk with Him?”

If you would corner me with those same three questions, here’s how I would answer:

(1) Christ is all.

(2) Therefore, “supreme” is the theme of His glory.

(3) That's why hope defines the scope of His impact on my life.

It's important for you to know this about me. Because essentially this entire *Joyful Manifesto* orbits around these three questions and the implications of my answers to them.

To get us started, this opening chapter will consider:

- **The most significant crisis emerging today among Christians and churches everywhere.**
 - **The profound cure this crisis requires: spreading a more comprehensive vision of Christ's supremacy throughout the Church.**
 - **Broad "brushstroke" definitions for the glory of His supremacy (to be explored in-depth in subsequent chapters).**
 - **How the re-awakening of hope and restoration of passion toward Christ is dynamically tied to our vision for ALL that He is.**
 - **Why our most strategic step for renewing the Church's engagement with Jesus as Lord is to launch a "Campaign of Hope."**
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Stumbling Over His Supremacy

(Luke 23:13-53)

Issuing this *Joyful Manifesto* comes none too soon. It tackles what many Christian leaders consider to be the major crisis of our times.

There is an emergency. As we're about to discover here (and more so in Chapters 6-8), a host of believers are already caught in its grip. Some call it a "crisis of Christology". I prefer calling it a *crisis of supremacy*. Either way, it signals a serious shortfall in how we see, seek and speak about Christ. For many believers it feels like an aching absence of the dynamic relationship with the Lord Jesus God promised us — like a forfeiture of the holy, happy hope in Him we thought we were meant to have.

I imagine this crisis could produce a pretty disappointing interview on the topic of God's Son with not a few members of your own congregation ... even if Larry King conducted it!

THINK WITH ME ...

What are different ways Christian leaders identify the current crisis?

Already, the “crisis of supremacy” lurks in the shadows. One of the foremost evangelical statesmen of our times, Dr. John R.W. Stott, has heard it. Recently he identified the crisis as he surveyed the Church’s battle with religious pluralism. Addressing readers of *Christianity Today*, the Anglican theologian urged them to confront actively all “fuzzy, fallow thinking about our Savior” by insisting at every turn on “the uniqueness of Jesus (he has no competitors) and his finality (he has no successors) because nobody else has his qualifications”.

Dr. Timothy George, dean of Beeson School of Theology, has heard the knock: “The erosion of Christ-centered faith threatens to undermine the identity of evangelical Christianity. Real revival and genuine reformation will not be built on flimsy foundations.” University of Southern California professor, Dr. Dallas Willard, has amplified this concern: “Why is today’s church so weak? Why are Christians indistinguishable from the world? The poor result is not in spite of what we teach and how we teach, but precisely because of it. The power of Jesus and his gospel has been cut off from ordinary human existence.” Could this be one reason an interdenominational national clergy network recently called upon Christians to take all crosses off their churches as

a gesture of reconciliation with other religions, because other faiths regard it as a “symbol of oppression and perceived superiority”?

Former Dallas Seminary president, Dr. Charles Swindoll, identified the wolf-at-the-door another way in his book *The Grace Awakening*. He warned that the greatest heresy shadowing the evangelical movement may be our over-emphasis on what we should be doing for God, rather than on what God has done and is getting ready to do for us in Jesus Christ. Premiere reformed theologian Dr. J.I. Packer has likened the modern Church’s vision of Christ to “Humpty-Dumpty” — broken into a hundred fragments! Everyone has a piece of the picture. But few are trying to put all the pieces

QUOTABLE QUOTE

In the United States, Jesus is widely hailed as the “King of Kings”. But it is a strange sort of sovereign who is so slavishly responsive to his subjects ... The American Jesus is more a pawn than a king, pushed around in a complex game of cultural (and countercultural) chess, sacrificed here for this cause and there for another.

(DR. STEPHEN PROTHERO)

back together so as to give God's people a comprehensive message about His Son sufficient to transform congregations and their mission to the world.

THINK WITH ME ...

How much do we actually talk about God's Son to one another?

Writing out of his own extensive travels in evangelical circles, Jonathan Graf, editor-in-chief of NavPress's popular *PRAY!* magazine, editorialized not long ago that he finds, with rising alarm, the name of Jesus Christ *seldom even mentioned* inside many churches these days. After over 30 years itinerating into various parts of the Body of Christ across the globe, I must admit that often my own experiences have mirrored Graf's.

More than once, I've participated in half hour worship sessions where (unintended, I'm sure) specific references to our Savior were virtually absent in the choruses we sang. More than once, I've listened to widely respected preachers deliver Biblically-grounded messages that barely referenced our Lord Jesus, let alone bring the congregation to bow at the feet of their King. More than once I've monitored the between-session conversations of delegates at major Christian conventions, hoping for even a hint that God's Son was somehow vital to their discussions, only to be disappointed time and time again.

QUOTABLE QUOTE

Anyone who believes that Jesus is Lord can not avoid the implications of such a confession in every sphere of life. This is clearly one reason why the early Christians suffered and died. They dared to challenge the political authority of Rome by saying "Jesus is Lord!" They did not defy Rome's every law, but they did refuse to say anyone but Jesus was Lord.

(DR. JOHN ARMSTRONG)

In all honesty, Sunday after Sunday how much of the general conversation in our churches actually honors Jesus in a manner comparable to how Paul talked? How often do we say to each other words like: "For me to live is *Christ*" (Phil. 2)? Or, "We proclaim *Him*, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we might present everyone perfect in *Christ*"

(Col. 1)? Or again, "For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except *Jesus Christ* and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2)? In our times of fellowship do we seek to "take captive every thought to make it obedient to *Christ*" (2 Cor. 10)?

Recall for a moment a recent exchange you had with a fellow believer.

Taking your cue from 1 John 1, did the time together give both of you a greater vision of the glory of Jesus as “the eternal life which was with the Father and has appeared to us”? Did you try to encourage each other with “what we have seen and heard” of Christ? Was there a shared effort to help each other enter into deeper “fellowship with the Father and with his Son” and, thus, have your joy “made complete” (1 John 1)? If your experience was like most of mine, probably not.

Too many of us, I'm afraid, have become comfortable simply conversing about benign concepts of God. We allow ourselves to sidestep deeper encounters with Jesus as *Lord*. Yet, there's no getting around the fundamental principle of Romans 10:17: “Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of *Christ*.” This process is as equally true of believers — in some ways even more so — as it is of unbelievers. What *Christians* hear about their Savior from one another, as a steady diet, determines a good deal of the depth of hope and passion they express toward Him.

THINK WITH ME ...

In what sense is Jesus *missing* in the evangelical movement today?

Incidentally, this quietly persistent diminishment of Christ's preeminence in our churches has not gone unnoticed by secular society around us. For example, in its wrap-up issue for 2003, *U.S. News and World Report* ran a front cover story titled: “*The New Evangelicals: Their Bold Take On Christianity Is Changing America*”. What their research uncovered, and how they interpreted it, should give all Christians pause.

The editors employed quite a constellation of descriptive words and phrases to identify the evangelical movement which, they said, includes four out of ten Americans. Here is a sampling:

- Serious about religion
- Diverse and complex
- Spiritually accessible to all
- Experientially and emotionally engaging
- Therapeutic in its impact
- Vigorous in its propagation

- Faith-based in its social initiatives
- Pro-Life and Pro-Family
- Pro-America and its manifest destiny
- Entrepreneurial and improvisational
- Market-savvy in its expansionism
- Theologically fuzzy and ambivalent

U.S. News reported that much of what it saw was positive. The movement has caused America to become the most religious of all modern industrial nations. But what should have thundered at any thoughtful reader — conspicuous by its absence — was this: There wasn't *any* suggestion, anywhere in the five-page report, that giving Christ primacy was the (or even "a") predominant distinctive of evangelical faith. In fact, apart from one phrase referencing "Christ's redemptive role" as a long-held doctrine, the entire article never even mentioned His name!

Shouldn't this raise red flags for us? How could such a report contain this profound oversight? Where has the Church failed to make our Lord the preeminent definition of our identity before others? Must not evangelicals accept major responsibility for what is missing in our testimony — for *Who* is missing?

Not long ago a brochure landed on my desk that troubled me a good deal. It was produced by a major national evangelical ministry. The large, colorful eight panel promotional piece invited Christians to an event that anticipated tens of thousands of participants. It billed itself as a "motivational conference", full of "humorous and dramatically engaging presentations" by powerful "motivational speakers". The event's theme, splashed across the front panel, consisted of a phrase taken from a popular verse of Scripture. But, unfortunately the phrase was quoted out of context, neglecting the portion of the sentence that referred to Christ's matchless role for the Church at the Throne of God. Even more astounding was this: *Nowhere* on any of the eight panels was the Lord Jesus even mentioned. Not one time! A few uses of "God" were the extent of references to deity.

Please don't misunderstand. I know for a fact this national conference was convened by leaders who dearly love our Savior with all their hearts. Which is what leaves me even more dumbfounded: Why was the name of Jesus abandoned in their promotional effort? At the very least, why was He not given a visibility comparable to that provided for each of the ten major

speakers whose faces and “bio’s” were featured? Why was only a generic “God” used in a brochure about a decidedly Christian event?

And why over the years, visiting in many nations, have I seen a similar pattern repeated in not a few public relations pieces produced for various evangelical causes? Why is that?

In a *People* magazine cover story on “religion in Hollywood”, TV and movie actress Patricia Heaton (herself an evangelical Presbyterian) suggested one answer: “Most people have some kind of faith. However, I think Jesus is a scary subject. ‘God’ you can make into anything you want. But confronted with Jesus you have to say I believe that or I don’t. That’s very powerful.” Sadly, this avoidance can be seen too often *inside* our churches. We talk *around* Jesus more than we talk *about* Him.

I’m not surprised Graf concluded his editorial with this plea, one we all need to heed: “As people of prayer we must pray fervently that the head, the Lord Jesus Christ, would be lifted up again in our churches; that the Lord Jesus Christ, the Beginning, would once again be proclaimed from our pulpits; that publishers, pastors and prophets would not be afraid to point directly to the supremacy of the Lord Jesus Christ, no matter what it does to their popularity.”

I agree. The time has come to pray for the Holy Spirit to restore to the Church a “*Person-driven*” walk with the everlasting Son of the Father. What would this look like if God answered? And how might it make things different for us?

THINK WITH ME ...

How does one demonstrate a “Person-driven” approach to discipleship?

Lately, mega-church pastor Rick Warren has introduced into Christian vernacular the helpful phrase “the purpose-driven church” and “the purpose-driven life” (selling over 20 million books on the topic). These are great concepts! But, let me ask: How many of us have discovered, first of all, what it means to be *Person-driven* in our churches and lives? How many of us are drawn into the prior issue, a passion for the *person* of the supreme, sovereign and all-sufficient Son of God — for whom the *purpose* for our churches and our lives exists to begin with?

Let me ask this in some other ways: How many of us possess a deepening sense of the imminent consummation of all things in Christ, in which we

have a strategic part? Do we long to be a part of a movement toward the glorious climax of history in Him? Do we sense that we're on a mission that even now tastes of the powers of the Age to Come because Jesus Christ is in our midst? Who among us ties our true destiny directly to the Hour when

QUOTABLE QUOTE

He is indeed proved to be the Son of His Father. But He is found to be both Lord and God of all else. All things are put under Him and delivered to Him. For He is God, and all things are subjected to Him. Nevertheless, the Son refers all that He has received to the Father. The Father is the source of His Son Himself, whom He begot as Lord.

(NOVATIAN [C. 235], A ROMAN ELDER
AND THEOLOGIAN.)

heaven and earth will be “summed up” in God’s all-consuming Son (Eph. 1 and Col. 1)? And, how often do we Christians ever share such a vision among ourselves?

Let’s be candid: When all is said and done, evangelicals may not be the *Person*-driven people we thought we were. For example: How many of us follow Jesus daily with the exciting conviction that what He will be Lord of *ultimately* He is Lord of *even now*; that every believer is being led by Him in triumphal procession today toward the Grand Finale over which He will fully triumph at The End? How often do we *say so* to each other, and with boldness?

We talk *around* Jesus more than we talk *about* Him.

Tragically, for multitudes of Christians there appears to be little of a compelling, *Person*-driven core to their sense of God’s purpose. Motivation based on Christ for ALL that He is, remains marginal. Relatively few of us are propelled with a hope and passion worthy of God’s Firstborn and ignited by Scripture’s teachings on His Lordship in everything. Instead, far too often we find ourselves stumbling over His supremacy.

We talk *around* Jesus more than we talk *about* Him.

Without a doubt, Christ fulfills our everlasting future. He embodies our blessed hope. He provides the guarantee for all we could ever become or do for God. And, He offers to be this for us in Himself alone (1 Tim. 1 and Titus 2). But I ask you: Is this normally, consistently, how we talk about Him with each other? Are we *driven* by this Person and the promises He encompasses? Do we find it impossible to be silent about Him, most of all with believers?

What if the Savior whom Christians bank on appears, instead, to be almost the opposite? *What If*— what if He usually seems to be indifferent to securing meaningful solutions for the struggles of our lives? What if He

comes across to us as offering little immediate hope for broken relationships, or financially besieged families, or bungled battles with addictions, or our beaten-up sense of self-worth, or the breathless bustling of our churchly activities, or the moral bankruptcy of our communities? What if the Jesus we call Lord is *perceived* frequently as incapably involved with us when we are drowning in dark moments of despair? Why would we want to make Him a major topic of conversation when we gather together? Why would we rather not talk around Him instead of about Him?

Is our most pressing spiritual ambition simply to “flee the wrath to come” (Lk. 3)? Or is it much more? Is it also to seek the glory of the One who is to come (1 Thess. 1)? If mostly the former, then why should we be surprised that Sunday schools, for example, are far more intent on discussing Biblical solutions to day-to-day survival issues than exposing students to the successes of a Sovereign who, right now, is saturating the nations with the triumphs of His grace?

THINK WITH ME ...

In what other ways does our stumbling over supremacy show itself among us?

Such confusion about Jesus forms a major part of the crisis of supremacy. It helps explain the worrisome spiritual malaise that plagues many of our congregations. It provides one solid insight into the various deep-seated disappointments with Christ that eat away at passion for His Kingdom in so many of our people. It is a prime source of growing despair over endless battles with sin and evil. It reinforces our persistent suspicion that even if Christ is on the move, most of us will still be left behind when He acts.

Without an adequate view of the incomparable majesty of our Redeemer King, Christians quickly revert to the role of spiritual “couch potatoes”. We survey God’s purposes in Christ *remotely*. We’re involved with Him at arm’s length, at best. Jaded by the immensities and complexities of modern society, we forfeit expectations of being “surprised by joy” again (as C.S. Lewis described the affect of encountering Christ). For many of us “amazing grace” has ceased to be genuinely amazing because, for many of us, our vision of God’s Son is no longer genuinely amazing.

George Barna, respected demographer of American Christianity, concluded extensive research a short time back with this troubling summary: “Overall, Christian ministry is stuck in a deep rut. Too many

Christians and churches in America have traded in spiritual passion for empty rituals, clever methods and mindless practices. The challenge to today's Church is not methodological. *It is a challenge to resuscitate the spiritual passion and fervor of the nation's Christians.*"

Why would there ever be a need for spiritual "resuscitation" if Christians were truly following Jesus as nothing-less-than the King of Glory, the Lord of the Universe, the Hope of the Nations? Could it be that our affections languish because Christ is not preached *inside* our churches for ALL that He is? Are we "stuck in a rut" (to use Barna's phrase) because we've stumbled over the issue of His supremacy? Some, I'm sure, would challenge that last statement. They would insist that in most evangelical churches today "Christ is preached".

But is He? A closer look may reveal that our messages, more often than not, are about how Christ fits into who we are, where we are headed, what we are doing and how we are blessed. That's important, of course. But is that adequate? As the rest of *Joyful Manifesto* will argue, to "preach Christ" — in the full view of His supremacy — is something else altogether. It involves helping Christians discover how they fit into who *Christ* is, where *Christ* is headed, what *Christ* is doing and how *Christ* is blessed.

THINK WITH ME ...

In what sense do we view Jesus as a mascot more than a monarch?

I attended a high school that is football-crazy. It boasted a stadium seating 20,000. This Ohio institution has produced nearly twenty-five state championship teams. Voted national champions more than once, our team was recently given a full page story in the *New York Times* along with a two-hour special on ESPN. The team is called the Massillon Tigers. Our mascot requires a taller student to dress up like a tiger — I mean, wearing a *real* tiger skin! He inherits a name of affection: Obie the Tiger.

Here's how a mascot works. At times, in the midst of a game, if we're falling behind, the coach signals time-out. Because the crowd needs to be stirred to cheer more enthusiastically for the team's victory, the uniformed tiger runs his stripes onto the field. Seeing Obie doubles the crowd's determination to celebrate the champions we hope to be. After all, we are the Massillon Tigers! In turn, this reinforces the team's confidence in itself. They charge back to the scrimmage line ready to put bold plays into action,

to redouble the struggle, to win the game on their terms. At every succeeding time-out, the mascot reappears, paws lifted triumphantly toward the skies. The roar of the crowd goes up once more. The team regains courage and resolve.

But at each appearance, interestingly, Obie's performance is very brief. Then he disappears, sent to the sidelines, put on hold until the next setback. He has served his useful purpose well. We're so proud of him. Everyone feels better now. The game can proceed with new momentum.

Still in the final analysis, the tiger never really gets involved beyond re-igniting cries of confidence, beyond giving us an identity to boast about. To be sure, Obie stirs up a certain kind of passion. But it is not really about him. It's really about the team, and even more about the fans. The team designs the plays, runs the patterns, throws the blocks, reaches the goal, claims the credit. The fans jump with joy, declare their superior skills over the losers, and boast that *they* are "the Massillon Tigers". Then we all go home satisfied.

Now, here's the kicker: What happens the moment our team hits a losing season? What good is the mascot then? The zeal it inspires suddenly feels hollow, even foolish. We are left with little else but embarrassing thoughts of our team's helplessness and hopelessness. Then, how quickly passion heads south — for Obie, for our team, for our future, for the game itself.

In so many of our churches, I fear, Jesus is regularly deployed as our mascot. Once a week on Sunday, for example, we "trot Him out" to cheer us up, to give us new vigor and vision, to reassure us that we are "somebodies". We invite Him to reinforce for us the great things we want to do for God. We look to Him to reinvigorate our celebration of victories we think we're destined to win. He lifts our spirits. He resuscitates our souls. He rebuilds our confidence. He gives us reasons to cheer. He confirms for us over and over that all must be well. We're so proud of Him! We're so happy to be identified with His name. Enthusiasm for Him energizes us — for awhile.

But then, for the rest of the week He is pretty much relegated to the sidelines. For all practical purposes we are the ones who call the shots. We implement the plays, scramble for first downs, and improvise in a pinch. Even if we do it in His name, we do it with little reliance on His person. There's scant evidence that we think of ourselves as somehow utterly incapable of doing anything of eternal consequence apart from Him.

Promises of fuller displays of His dominion leave our daily discipleship un-phased. We evidence little desperation for increased manifestations of His majesty among us.

As contradictory as it may seem, many of us have redefined Jesus into someone we can both admire *and* ignore at the same time! To be our *mascot*, we've re-designed Him to be reasonably convenient — someone praiseworthy, to be sure, but overall kept in reserve, useful, “on call” as required.

Without promoting an overriding passion for Christ as our Monarch — as our *everything* — why would we ever openly celebrate Him as anything other than our mascot? The truth is, Jesus' claims to the Monarchy make Him the opposite of an Obie character. Instead, He encompasses *in Himself* the coach, quarterback, playbook, team, uniforms, cheerleader, goal post and final championship — the “whole nine yards” (as we say) — wrapped up in one person alone. Does our vision of His lordship take on such exalted dimensions *inside* the Church? Does it express such grand themes? Does it promote an exclusive love for Him — an enthusiasm not unlike what rises from thousands at a Super Bowl — a zeal for His glory evident in our daily routines in the marketplace as much as in our churchly schedules on weekends? Is the Spirit truly having *His* way with us?

I suspect we have found far more fascination with the evangelical game itself — with how *we* are playing it and whether *we* are winning — than we have with the One in whose name, and for whose sake, the “game” exists at all. Which may explain the reports: The membership in 80% of U.S. churches is either stagnant or dying. Tens of thousands of congregations are wrestling with a leveling off of financial giving, with a growing shortfall of laborers, and with an atmosphere of apathy toward evangelism, compassion ministries and the global mission of Christ's Kingdom that seems endemic.

THINK WITH ME ...

How might we begin to recover a vision for the supremacy of God's Son?

But the good news is this: If we turn back to exalt once again in our Savior as the Monarch He is — if we spread this grander message about God's Son to God's people, inviting them to re-discover in His reign all the hope we are meant to have — we can create a life-saving paradigm shift inside the Church. We can trigger a re-ignition of our passion for Him as Lord of all. This effort

can help bring an end to our scandalous stumblings over Christ's supremacy. It can return us to the dynamics of a *Person*-driven discipleship.

Recently, a Florida pastor attempted to stir up a national movement that he called "America Say Jesus". His goal? To get every Christian in the U.S. to say the name of Jesus three to five times daily. Said he, "Just think what a revival would break loose if Christians all across America started saying the name of Jesus to their friends, family and neighbors. The name of Jesus is so often shunned, even ridiculed. I believe God would honor the Lord Jesus in our nation and send us a spiritual awakening if we took up this effort, even beginning among ourselves as believers."

As a strategy for revival, repeating the name of Jesus throughout the day may seem a little far-fetched to some. But, I suggest to you, the crisis we've just begun to explore *does* require a campaign of similar vein. We *do* need fresh initiatives to expand how most Christians view and value God's Son. We need to summon fellow believers to embrace the full scope of the hope of His supremacy. We need to make His glory the dominating theme in everything we do together as the Body of Christ, not only in how we seek Him but also in how we speak of Him.

Volume Two explores the crisis of supremacy in much more depth, exposing it fully for what it is: the greatest crisis of our times. But I chose to at least touch on it at the outset in order to set the stage. The preceding pages have hung a backdrop for the decisive drama about Jesus' dominion waiting to unfold throughout the remainder of **Volume One**.

So now, let the drama begin! Let it unfold, beginning with the rest of this chapter. Here the Holy Spirit can help you re-discover a greater vision of Jesus' everlasting praise so you might speak of Him to each other in more powerful ways. Here you'll thumb through stirring "snapshots" of the Lord Jesus Christ that you could start sharing with other believers right now. Then in chapters 2-5 we'll go back through the "photo album" more carefully, taking time to enjoy all the beauty that we find in the Son of God.

QUOTABLE QUOTE

It pleased God, in His eternal purpose, to choose and ordain the Lord Jesus, His only begotten Son, to be Mediator between God and man, the Prophet, Priest and King, the Head and Savior of His Church, the Heir of all things, the Judge of the world; unto whom He did from all eternity give a people, to be His seed, and to be by Him in time redeemed, called, justified, sanctified, and glorified.

(FROM THE WESTMINSTER
CONFESSION OF FAITH)

Snapshots of His Supremacy

(1 John 4:1-3; 5:6-11)

A leading U.S. cereal company recently championed their primary product, available in grocery stores everywhere for over one hundred years, with a catchy new slogan. It sent sales through the roof:

“CORNFLAKES: Taste them again, for the first time.”

Not to be trite, but many in our churches today need to be similarly called back to the foundation of our faith. We might say it this way:

“JESUS CHRIST: Meet Him again, for the first time.”

To be blunt: Many Christians need to meet God’s Son again. As we do, it may feel as if it were happening for the first time, because of how far from His glory we have wandered. However, as a result the crux of our crisis — the magnitude of what’s missing in the message of Christ heard *inside* the Church — will become unavoidably apparent.

THINK WITH ME ...

How would *you* define a Biblical vision of the supremacy of Christ?

Within the Trinity, the Father Himself is so thoroughly consumed with the primacy of His Son that He insists, throughout the New Testament, on being known as “the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”. Can we choose to be any less passionate about this same Person? Should we not be inspired by how the Father both exalts His Son and exults in His Son?

QUOTABLE QUOTE

For nothing counts with God, except His beloved Son, Jesus Christ, who is completely pure and holy before Him. Where He is, there God looks and has His pleasure.

(MARTIN LUTHER)

Colossians 1:18 reports that for God the bottom line of every constellation He’s created — the stunning climax of every facet of salvation He offers — comes down to this: “... *that in everything Christ might have the supremacy*”. If securing Christ’s reputation is such a big deal to Heaven, should it not be equally a big deal for all of Heaven’s citizens? Should we not eagerly join with the Spirit in His role to promote Christ’s preeminence in all things? Jesus explained it this way: “The Spirit will bring glory to me by taking

from what is mine and making it known to you. All that belongs to the Father is mine. That's why I said the Spirit will take what is mine and make it known to you" (Jn. 16).

Surely it is in order, therefore, to revisit the one word Paul uses to gather up the whole panorama of Christ's glory: "*supremacy*". I wonder: How would *you* define "supremacy" to encompass all it includes? Maybe you'd like to try this easy-to-remember sentence on for size. This definition has proved quite helpful to me over time:

***The SUPREMACY of Christ includes
Who He IS as the Son of God,
Where He LEADS in the Purposes of God,
How He IMPARTS the Resources of God,
What He RECEIVES from the People of God.***

When you get right down to it, the supremacy of Christ is really not as complicated as one might suspect. Though profound in its implications, the concept can be shared initially in just these few words. This one sentence alerts us to four major themes that summarize virtually all that the Bible teaches us about our Lord Jesus Christ. (And we're talking about thousands of verses here.) To review: Who Christ **is**, where He **leads**, how He **imparts**, what He **receives**.

The personal implications of this definition are unavoidable, as well. In His supremacy, God's Son wants us to know Him directly — even intimately — through four life-changing encounters with Him: with the glory of His person (**Son**); with the thrill of His mission (**Purpose**); with the wonders of His grace (**Resources**); and with the significance of His service (**People**).

THINK WITH ME ...

**What are the four dimensions
of a "wide-angled vision" of Christ?**

But there's more to add to this definition. I've learned to take my thinking on supremacy one additional step. I turn to what I call the **Four F's**. They make the meaning of His majesty even more manageable. They give us a second handle on it:

- **Focus**
- **Fulfillment**
- **Fullness**
- **Fervency**

Here's how the Four F's work: The **focus** of Christ's supremacy for His Church consists, above all, of our preoccupation with who He IS, for time and eternity, as God's Son. The **fulfillment** of everything His supremacy guarantees to His church flows from where He LEADS us in God's purposes. The **fullness** of His supremacy results from how He IMPARTS to His Church all of God's resources. The **fervency** of His supremacy springs from the ways His people respond to him with loving, even passionate, surrender and service.

Now, let's put together all these "snapshots". When we do, our definition of supremacy expands to say this:

Who Christ **IS** as the Son of God

defines the FOCUS of His supremacy.

Where Christ **LEADS** in the Purposes of God

defines the FULFILLMENT of His supremacy.

How Christ **IMPARTS** the Resources of God

defines the FULLNESS of His supremacy.

What Christ **RECEIVES** from the People of God

defines the FERVENCY of His supremacy.

Based on these four themes it is clear that supremacy is fundamentally about Jesus' **rights**:

As the Son of God (that is, being the One who is in eternal union with the Father and the Spirit) He has the *right* to occupy our full attention and keep it fixed on Him, exclusively as Lord. He's the *focus* for our lives.

In the Purposes of God (that is, in the Father's plan to sum up everything in Heaven and among the nations under the Son's everlasting dominion) He has the *right* to keep us involved with the advance of His mission, exclusively as Lord. He's the *fulfillment* of our calling.

Owning the Resources of God (that is, being the Supreme Ruler over the outpouring of God's triumphant grace) He has the *right* to

keep our full dependence on Him, exclusively as Lord. He's the *fullness* in our fellowship.

As the One who dominates the People of God (that is, being the Regent of God to whom the affection and allegiance of every subject belongs) He has the *right* to gather up the devotion of His servants for His everlasting glory, exclusively as Lord. He's the *fergency* of our labors.

Don't you find that just a little bit thrilling when you stop to think about it? *Our Redeemer is all those things, wrapped into one Person!* Therefore, in the hands of the Holy Spirit each phrase can enrich, at very practical levels, the meaning Christ brings to your daily walk with God? (You'll see how well this works in **Volume Three**).

It is a little like what former Senator John Ashcroft (subsequently Attorney General) once called "the basketball approach to life". Great NBA stars, he noted, develop a "wide-angled vision". They are able to see the whole court at once so they can exploit, at a moment's notice, every option available to them. Ashcroft remarked that as soon as great players like a Michael Jordan spring into mid-air toward the basket, success no longer depends on his coach or his shoes or his other teammates. It depends on his ability to see the larger picture and make instant moves that put the ball in the hoop.

Similarly for all of us, catching a wider vision of Christ's supremacy increases our options for achieving a victorious Christian life. It helps us start "playing the game" in view of *everything* Christ brings to the "court" as Son, and Leader, and Resource, and Heir. The implications of this outlook are extraordinarily life-giving. "Wide angle vision" enlarges the content of worship. It empowers moral perseverance within a decadent culture. It inspires renewed efforts at racial reconciliation, at reaching and serving the poor, at rearing godly children, at setting Biblical priorities in our spending, at performing with excellence on the job, or at spreading the Gospel among the nations. It fills us with abounding hope in God even in the darkest moments of the daily battle we all face.

THINK WITH ME ...

How can snapshots of supremacy ever capture the "mystery of God"?

Truly, if the term "Christology" means "the study of Christ", then what a rich study He provides! What a rigorous pursuit He rightfully deserves! What a

marvelous cure for our crisis awaits us as we meet Him like this ... again ... for the first time!

Please don't misunderstand, however. Even with all of these beautiful words and phrases, so logically organized, we've just begun to unveil the full extent of who He is. These snapshots are really little more than *signposts*. They help us get better bearings on what Scripture teaches about God's Son. In no way am I suggesting this resumé comes close to exhausting all we can know of Him. In fact, if we were to research the nearly 17,000 books on Jesus housed in the Library of Congress — more than any other historical person — we would still be only at the threshold of defining the glory of His supremacy.

Let's not forget how pointedly Paul tells the Colossians that Christ is the "*mystery* of God". In Colossians 1 he writes about "the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you". In Colossians 2 he speaks of "the mystery of God, namely Christ in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge". Without question the Lord of Eternity, though plainly revealed in time-and-space-and-history, remains at the same time profoundly inexhaustible, incomprehensible, uncontainable as well as thoroughly unsearchable (as Paul specifically tells us in Ephesians 3). In other words, being supreme in Heaven and earth means there will always be "an air of mystery" about Him. There will always be so much more of Him to know than anyone can completely fathom. No set of categories will ever fully encompass the one "in whom all the fullness of the Godhead dwells in bodily form" (Col. 2). In that sense, He will always be a "magnificent mystery".

Yet on the other hand, I do believe simple tools (such as the four phrases discussed above) can equip us to explore more effectively the brilliance with which Scripture presents Him from cover to cover. Applied to the promises and prophecies of God's Word, such tools can reveal much of what our souls are desperate to re-discover of Him (longings we may not yet have the courage to admit). By them the Holy Spirit can help us capture Grand Canyon-style vistas on King Jesus. This will become increasingly evident as we break down our four-part definition over the next four chapters.

THINK WITH ME ...**Where does the *suffering* of Jesus fit into the supremacy of Jesus?**

At this point, some readers may question (and properly so): Where does the *Cross* come into this enthusiastic emphasis on glory, and hope, and supremacy? Is not the Lion exalted foremost as a *Lamb* (Rev. 5)? After all, didn't Paul protest to the Corinthians that he wanted to know nothing among believers except "Jesus Christ and Him *crucified*" (1 Cor. 2)? If those six hours of incomparable suffering form the pinnacle of our Lord's ministry for us all (and they do), shouldn't His holy humiliation predominate in any emphasis on His regency?

Good questions. We will return to them more than once in coming chapters. But for now please note: The Cross, in fact, was the *definitive display* of Christ's eternal dominion. It was the *supreme* revelation of His sovereignty. Because of it, slaves of the Fall are liberated. Because of it, Satan's minions are bound. Because of it, death is destroyed, sin is demolished, judgment is absorbed and fear is banished. Because of it, all who believe are conquered by grace and transferred into the Empire of the Son. If the fruits of the Tree do not magnify the full extent of Christ's Kingship, then surely nothing else does. Nothing else *can*.

As to Paul's statement to the Corinthians, remember: He committed himself to proclaim both the *Christ* ("anointed one" referring to His divine appointment as Master of the Universe) as well as His *Cross* (the fundamental foundation undergirding His victorious throne). In point of fact, both parts of Paul's message were really about the supremacy of God's Son! As he amplifies in 1 Corinthians 2:8, it was no less than "the Lord of glory" who was crucified. Centuries later, his outlook was accurately reflected in the preaching of the Puritans who, as J.I. Packer puts it, "measured Christ's mercy by His majesty. They magnified the love of the cross by dwelling on the greatness of the glory He left for it." And, I would

QUOTABLE QUOTE

***Tetlesthai* — it is finished! The most significant single word in the Greek New Testament translates to the most triumphant declaration! It contains both a prophecy and a verdict. On the cross Jesus, the Son, anticipated the Father's verdict and His ultimate intervention. The dawn of the world's redemption had broken, and with it the chains of human slavery to sin, shame and condemnation were shattered.**

(DR. JACK HAYFORD)

add, by dwelling on the greatness of the glory He *inherited* because of it.

It is hard to deny a double meaning in Jesus' promise in John 12: "And I, if I am lifted up, will draw all people to myself." When He promises to "draw all to Me", He's talking supremacy — how the redeemed of all the ages will marshal to Him as willing subjects. When He refers to being "lifted up" He not only pictured hanging on the Cross (as John notes). He also spoke of His resurrection and ascension and coronation, when the Father invited Him up to assume the position He now holds in the universe (Acts 1). Forever, He is the One lifted up to the right hand of God — precisely because of the victory of the Cross — to reign in life over all who surrender to His cleansing blood and saving power. Forever, He is exalted as salvation's all-sufficient sacrificial offering, the precious Lamb of Glory, whose glorified body still bears the marks of His sufferings.

Even a cursory reading of the passion passages, such as Luke 23, reveals that supremacy comprised a central theme. Re-read sometime Luke's account of Jesus' farewell words about the Kingdom in the Upper Room, or the Sanhedrin's charges based on His claims of authority, or His own brief defense predicting His return in clouds of glory, as well as the thief's desire for the Kingdom that Jesus answered with dying breath. Or read the very words placed above His head as He hung between Heaven and earth proclaiming Him to be "King of the Jews". Throughout the whole chapter, Luke was careful to ensure that his readers never viewed the Cross apart from the Ascension.

THINK WITH ME ...

How does the supremacy of Christ take us beyond the *centrality* of Christ?

It should be obvious by now that expanding our definition of supremacy like this — including how we look at the Cross — may require a significant shift in how Jesus is viewed by many followers. The Scripture points toward much more than what we commonly refer to as the *centrality* of God's Son. Does that insight surprise you?

Of course, "centrality" remains an important Biblical concept. It characterizes a whole set of Jesus' lordship claims. It affirms Him as the center of everything, meant to be in the middle of everything, surrounded by everything. And, *that* He is! As Dietrich Bonhoeffer named Him, He is by nature "Christ, the Center". We must never cease to sound this note loud and clear.

But “supremacy” takes our vision of Him to a whole new level. Similar to “centrality”, His claims to “supremacy” rise from His very nature as God’s Son. This dimension gives our Redeemer even higher homage. To worship Him as supreme in the universe moves beyond centrality. As supreme, our Lord is not only surrounded by everything, but He also *surrounds* everything with Himself. As Lord, He *encompasses* all of us within His rule.

Of course, Christians properly profess (as you and I have often said) that “Jesus is the center of my life”. And that’s true! But *which* Jesus is at the center of my life? — that’s the issue. Is it the one whose glory *enfolds* my life, and *consumes* my life, and *defines* my life because He alone thoroughly *sums up* my life — both its meaning and its destiny — and sums it up in Himself?

Here’s how Eugene Peterson pictures “supremacy” in his rendering of Colossians 1:17 in *The Message*:

He is supreme in the beginning, and
— leading the resurrection parade —

He is supreme in the end.

From beginning to end he’s there,
towering far above everything, everyone.

So spacious is he, so roomy,
that everything of God finds its proper place in him
without crowding.

The Messiah that Christians follow is one who is both central *and* supreme, both intimate *and* infinite — a Sovereign who is wholly *above* us while at the same time wholly *among* us. This is how the Church today must see and seek Him once again. This is how we must speak of Him once again. If we’re ever to recover fully all that His *centrality* holds for us, it will be necessary to increase our emphasis on the place of His *supremacy*. Given the current crisis in our Christology, we must do so without delay. The effort must receive our highest priority.

QUOTABLE QUOTE

In 1737 I had a view, that for me was extraordinary, of the glory of the Son of God as Mediator between God and man and His wonderful, great, full, pure and sweet grace and love, and meek and gentle condescension. This grace appeared ineffably excellent with an excellency great enough to swallow up all thought and conception ... I felt an ardency of soul to be, what I know not otherwise how to express, emptied and annihilated; to lie in the dust and to be full of Christ alone.

(JONATHAN EDWARDS)

THINK WITH ME ...**In what sense does Jesus' supremacy make Him the *circumference* of our lives?**

Let me put this distinctive in the form of a metaphor. Christians, we might say, are like an uncapped bottle cast into the ocean. Once the bottle (the believer) is in the ocean (Christ), the ocean can begin to fill the bottle (representing the idea of *centrality*). But that's just the beginning of the adventure. There's still the whole Atlantic to explore, into which to plunge, through which to navigate. This represents our pursuit of fuller dimensions of Christ's *supremacy* for our lives (just as the ocean ultimately surrounds the bottle).

Full of water, the bottle can still be swept by currents out to sea. This pictures a Christian who puts his or her eyes on Christ, seeking His glory and pursuing the manifestation of His kingship in all things, among all peoples. Colossians 1:27 combines both aspects: Christ not only dwells in us (just as the ocean gets into the bottle — *centrality*) but Christ is also “the hope of glory” for us (just as the bottle flows out to sea — *supremacy*). Not only does the Holy Spirit want to *fill* our souls with the Living Water, but He also wants to *compel* our souls to venture forth into the Great Deep of God's eternal purposes in Jesus.

To put it another way: There's a world of difference between saying “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life”, and saying “God has a wonderful plan for the nations, to sum up everything in Heaven and earth under Jesus as Lord, and He loves you enough to give you a strategic place in it.” The first promise is about centrality, the second is about supremacy. The second, unfortunately, is woefully neglected among far too many Christians.

In *The Emerging Church* California church planter Dan Kimball agreed. For many Christians, he observed, the gospel they've heard has essentially told them that Jesus died for their sins so that they could go to Heaven when they die. This is, of course, true. It reflects some of the “centrality” perspective. Consider, however, the way Kimball would re-phrase the full scope of God's call: “Jesus died for your sins so that you can be His redeemed coworker *now* in what He is doing in this world, and then spend eternity in Heaven with the one you are giving your life to now.” This is one way to give the “supremacy” dimension of the Gospel the priority it warrants.

Missionary statesman E. Stanley Jones understood this larger perspective on Jesus well. Reflecting on how He proclaimed the Savior throughout India for 40 years in the 1900's — doing so among multitudes of devotees to thousands of Hindu deities — Jones found it necessary to remind Indian Christians that Christ was simultaneously their center and their *circumference* (or, to use our terms here, both central and supreme). That was something no village idol could claim. Start with Christ as our center, Jones argued, but then keep moving toward the circumference. However, do so knowing that because He is God and Lord no one should ever expect to reach the “end point” of His reign. “Christ is all infinite and boundless,” he declared. That’s the language of “supremacy”. It is similar to the language of God’s Messianic-era promise to Jerusalem in Zechariah 2:5: “I myself will be a wall of fire around it [circumference] and I will be its glory within [center]”.

On one hand, centrality calls us to let our lives be *wrapped around* who Jesus is. On the other hand, supremacy requires that our lives also be *wrapped up into* who Jesus is. Without question, there is a delightful difference between these two complementary positions! As one of the opening pages of our *Joyful Manifesto* suggests:

Centrality is about Christ’s right to be kept at the center of who *we* are, where *we* are headed, all *we* are doing and how *we* are blessed.

Supremacy speaks of so much more.

It proclaims Christ’s right to keep us at the center of who *He* is (focus), where *He* is headed (fulfillment), what *He* is imparting (fullness) and how *He* is blessed (fergency).

Watch how this distinction emerges in five familiar New Testament texts (and there are many more like them): “Christ is all [supremacy], and in all [centrality]” (Col. 3). “For us there is one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom are all things [supremacy] and through whom we exist [centrality]” (1 Cor. 8). “Therefore, I press on to take hold of that [centrality] for which

QUOTABLE QUOTE

The riches of Christ are unsearchable (Eph. 3:8). Like the earth, they are too vast to explore, like the sea too deep to fathom. They are untraceable, inexhaustible, illimitable, inscrutable and incalculable. What is certain about the wealth Christ has and gives is that we shall never come to an end of it.

(J.R.W. STOTT)

Christ has taken hold of me [supremacy]" (Phil. 3). "If a man remains in me [supremacy] and I in him [centrality], he will bear much fruit" (Jn. 15). "His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness [centrality] through our knowledge of Jesus our Lord who called us by his own glory and goodness [supremacy]" (2 Pet. 1).

Centrality and supremacy — center and circumference. Any recovery of hope in our churches will begin as we're re-introduced to our Savior as *both*. However, if vast numbers of Christians are to be re-awakened to Christ for ALL that He is, our word to one another must retain its strongest emphasis on His *supremacy*. To paraphrase II Corinthians 3:17: "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is supremacy" (which always leads us into genuine "liberty"!).

QUOTABLE QUOTE

The hope of glory within us reminds us that we have a destiny — that time is marching toward a moment when every knee will bow before the beauty of this One who has saved our souls. This is the culmination of every longing we've ever known, the promise for every death we've endured, the wonder that wakes us each morning with expectation and yes, hope, even amidst the darkest hours of our humanity. Because Jesus is our destiny, once we taste of Him, the hope of glory that lies ahead becomes for us the real life.

(TRICIA RHODES)

THINK WITH ME ...

How does Colossians picture the pinnacle of Jesus' preeminence?

Quite a few times already I've referred to Paul's teachings in the book of Colossians. As I bring this section to a close, it might be helpful to turn briefly to the "snapshots of supremacy" presented there.

First, some background: The little church in Colossae was caught in its own outbreak of the crisis of supremacy! False teachers were attacking their vision of Christ, each insisting that the Savior was not sufficient for their spiritual needs. By implication, however, this meant He was not supreme.

Some of these troublemakers we call *Gnostics*. They boasted deeper spiritual realities that might start with Christ but extend far beyond Christ. Others we call *Judaizers* who taught that it was good to come to Christ, but that there were many prior steps to be taken before Christ would do them any good. Both teachings called into question various aspects of Jesus' lordship over

all things. In both cases, Paul knew they must hold to the grand theme of vs. 27 ("*Christ is in you, the hope of glory*"), without compromise, in order to confront these conflicting teachings.

However, the truth of vs. 27 didn't stand in isolation. Behind it resided the reinforcement of Paul's entire first chapter. Throughout he presented a major briefing on the Person of Promise. The snapshots in Colossians 1 were posted to give these new Christians (and us) increased assurance that everything the Father had prepared for His people could be found, in totality, in His dear Son. Christ was sufficient. He was enough. He was all (Col. 3:11).

As Colossians confirms, when God's full glory is finally revealed — in the consummation of everything — we will discover, to our great joy, that all Divine magnificence dwelt in Jesus all along. In fact, Paul reminds us in verse 4 of Col. 3: "When Christ, who is your life, appears then you also will appear with Him in glory". The glory for which we hope is inherent in the Son *now*. That's what makes Him our "all in all" *right now!*

The implications of the Colossian vision are absolutely thrilling. Christ Himself, at this very moment, encompasses the *future* of God's triumphs. Furthermore, He does so as He comes among us, ministering to us foretastes of ultimate victories. What He will be Lord of *ultimately*, He is Lord of *already*. Ten thousand years from today, who He is as the Son of God — as well as where He leads, how He imparts and what He receives — will remain exactly the same as it is today. His glory will be no different at *that* point than what is true of our Savior at *this* point.

Accordingly, as Colossians 1:18 claims, supremacy belongs to Him alone. Nor does this supremacy develop in degrees or go through stages. Our Lord's supremacy displays a sovereignty and sufficiency without exceptions. He is our all, now, because He is all supreme now. That makes Him our one great hope — *now* — just as fully as He will be at the End. To our happy surprise, the everlasting destination of our lives throughout all the ages to come is linked inseparably to the very Person who actively reigns in our lives *today*. (I like Phillips' paraphrase for Paul's message in Col. 1:27: "Christ is in you, the assurance of all the glorious things to come.")

Thus, the Apostle exclaims in Colossians 1: "*Him* we proclaim" (vs. 28). Heralding Christ to *Christians*, as God's all-encompassing hope for them, was Paul's priority ministry with believers everywhere (in vs. 24-26 he calls it his "commission"). Of one thing he was convinced: The strongest evidence Christians could provide, to show they had thoroughly engaged with Christ as Lord of all, was the prevalence in their hearts of *an abounding hope* toward Him (see also Romans 15:13). From the outset, Paul preached hope

in Christ not only to pagans but to every *Christian* he met (as his other epistles verify).

But, Paul was not content to just *preach* Christ. He wanted more for his hearers. He wanted believers to become *complete* in Christ (vs. 28). He wrote to the Colossians: “Him we proclaim, teaching every person and warning every person, that we might present every person complete in Christ” (vs. 28). What did that mean? Paul realized that for Christians to impact their cities and their world for the Kingdom, they must be fully engaged with the Lord of their lives in the light of His unfailing reign — in other words, be wrapped up *in* Him as well as wrapped *around* Him! No mission to the nations could be *completed*, he knew, unless those sent to the nations were themselves, first of all, *completed* in Christ.

But, what did the phrase actually imply? Again, Colossians 1 gives the answer. Primarily, Christians become complete (or mature) to the degree they are possessed of (and obedient to) a comprehensive vision of Christ and His supremacy (vs. 18), with eyes fixed on the glorious destiny He offers them (vs. 27). Whenever convictions concerning Christ’s preeminence produce in Christians eager expectations for Kingdom advance, along with the passion to pursue that agenda, those disciples have become “complete in Christ”. They aren’t perfect, or sinless, or infallible, but they are *complete*.

Paul concludes Colossians 1 by rejoicing in how the Spirit energized him daily for this one specific objective: to bring believers to a decisive devotion to their King (vs. 29). The same joy can be yours, as well. Experiencing that is what I call a “Campaign of Hope”. I can’t imagine anything the Holy Spirit would rather lead us into in this moment of need and possibilities for a pervasive Christ awakening throughout the Church.

Creating a “Campaign of Hope”

(Romans 9:1-5; 9:30-10:17)

“Everyone’s nerves are on edge,” remarked a leading cancer surgeon. “No matter where we turn, we’re reading about something killing us prematurely.” As *The Wall Street Journal* reported, thanks to research labs, tort laws and media hype, danger does seem to “lurk around every corner of life” from children’s toys to anthrax to secondhand smoke to AIDS. “Faced with a barrage of warnings — including the color-coded

caveats from the new Homeland Security department,” concluded the *Journal*, “it’s not surprising that in contemporary America, the safest society in recorded history, many people feel as though they have never been more at risk.”

Thankfully, despair does not hold the final word for believers in America (or anywhere else), or for America (or any other peoples). The final word — about history, humanity, destiny, eternity, mystery — belongs to God’s Son. As we saw in Colossians 1, that final word is forever a word of *hope*. It is an assurance that even *more* of God’s glory is waiting to be revealed “in the face of Jesus Christ” (2 Cor. 4). Our message of hope must begin and end by proclaiming *Him* — by pointing to Him as the One to see, seek and speak about for ALL that He is.

Without question, America is fertile ground for a movement toward the *recovery* of hope — we are poised for a *reformation* of hope, if you will. The Church is primed for a major *campaign* to help spread Biblical hope everywhere, first of all by confronting and curing the crisis of supremacy *inside* the Church.

THINK WITH ME ...

Why does a vision of Christ’s supremacy always cause hope to grow?

So, maybe we should ask: Why is *hope* so often a chief hallmark of a life or congregation where Christ is worshipped as “all in all”? Why does *hope* rise among those saturated with the truth of Christ’s supremacy in everything? It is because Biblical hope is more than a verb (as in “I hope so”). Biblical hope is ultimately a *person* (as in “my hope is in the Lord”).

British poet Alexander Pope coined the familiar proverb: “Hope springs eternal in the human breast.” Well, hope *does* spring eternal from the breast of God. Romans 15 names Him “the God of hope.” Biblical hope gets very personal, when you think about it. Every promise of Scripture is, by nature, eternally *Trinitarian*: Designed by the Father, quickened by the Spirit, and focused on the Son. True hope has the Father as its source, the Son as its

QUOTABLE QUOTE

The whole Bible is focused on Jesus Christ, from Genesis to Revelation. Revival will come only when we as God’s people return to the centrality of Jesus Christ. Recovering the wonders of “Christ alone” is not merely an antiquated slogan of the 16th century Reformation. It is the flame which will ignite a new reformation today.

(DR. JOHN ARMSTRONG)

 QUOTABLE QUOTE

There is only One Being who can satisfy the last aching abyss of the human heart, and that is the Lord Jesus Christ.

(OSWALD CHAMBERS)

theme and the Spirit as its witness. Scripture reminds us that He is not only the God who is and was, but the God who is to come (Rev. 1:8).

Within the Triune God, however, the Son defines the *substance* of all eternal prospects. Only in Him can God's Kingdom purposes be fully understood, measured and entered into. More specifically it is by His supremacy that the future obtains any meaning or holds out any possibilities. His glorious greatness gives us hope because in Him what should be, will be. In Him,

healing, reconciliation, justice, holiness, happiness and all goodness will prevail — ultimately supplanting dominions of death and Hades. Put simply: Christ's *person* guarantees His *position* to marshal His *promises*. That's why every promise of God remains forever "Yes!" to us in Christ Jesus (2 Cor. 1).

It is estimated that there are over 7000 separate promises recorded in Old and New Testaments. Assuming that's so, let me ask you three fascinating questions:

- Can you think of any promise God has made in Scripture, based on the person and ministry of His Son, which does not fit naturally into our overall definition of Christ's supremacy?
- Further, can you point to a single promise which does not also require a demonstration of His supremacy to fulfill it?
- Similarly, can you recall any promise which would not make the supremacy of Christ manifestly more obvious and wonderful, to us or to the nations, as God brings it to pass?

There should be little surprise, therefore, that *Joyful Manifesto* makes a "Campaign of Hope" the primary antidote for the crisis of supremacy. One of the greatest benefits derived from reclaiming for Christians an exalted outlook on the Son of God is that the Church regains a strong taste for the promises of God. Let it be stated unequivocally: *Kingdom-shaped hope is always the first evidence of, as well as the premiere blessing from, a re-awakening among God's people to the supremacy of God's Son.*

THINK WITH ME ...**How could a *campaign* to recover hope become the antidote to the crisis of supremacy?**

Why have I chosen to capitalize on the concept of a *campaign*? Let me tell you a story. A few years back, a U.S. presidential campaign took as its motto: “Hope Is Back!” For months its promoters presented platforms and promises designed to convince countless citizens to swing away from previous political leanings. They urged them to cast their lot with a very charismatic leader. He claimed to offer the finest prospects for securing a prosperous future for America. In the end, *hope* — a political hope based on the credibility, expertise and star-power of one politician — summoned millions to turn and follow. In November, the “Hope Is Back!” campaign triumphed convincingly at the hands of enthusiastic voters.

In a way faintly reminiscent of a run for the White House, this *Joyful Manifesto* summons Christians everywhere to help confront the crisis of supremacy through a *Campaign of Hope*. To be sure, this is quite *unlike* any general election you’ve ever seen. Our Lord is not a “candidate”! He doesn’t need to be “elected” as our Monarch. He already *is* the “Wonderful Counselor, Prince of Peace, Mighty God”. Already, the government of the universe is “upon His shoulders”, the increase of which “there shall be no end” (Isa. 9).

On the other hand, this campaign is not totally dissimilar to a political endeavor. It too may trumpet gladly that “hope is back” for Christians everywhere. This campaign has the potential of re-igniting ardent zeal for the names and claims and gains of the King of Kings. This campaign can recruit citizens in the Empire of the Son to re-engage with Him — with *His* cause, *His* platform, *His* policies, *His* promises, *His* credibility, *His* administration, *His* eternally supreme star-power — fanning into flame (both in lips and lives) fresh fervor for His Royal Majesty

Those involved in a *Campaign of Hope* will set out to convince fellow believers there is so much *more* — more that Christ deserves, more that He desires, more that He has designed and more that He has decreed — and then get others praying and acting like it, filled with renewed anticipation! Surely, this makes abundant sense. *Hope* is — and always has been — one of the most marvelous manifestations of Christ’s reign within any context, for a Christian or a congregation, or for a whole nation.

THINK WITH ME ...**Is the Holy Spirit calling *you* to move forward with such a campaign?**

You need to know: I'm convinced a Campaign of Hope is already rising in today's Church! And I pray that you, my reader, will eventually choose to become part of it (if you haven't already). How should you respond to that invitation? Let me answer with another story.

For many years I resided in Madison, the capital of the state of Wisconsin. Center-city Madison is dominated by the state Capital building, with its magnificent rotunda and massive white dome. On the dome's very top stands a golden figure, a woman gilded in robes of antiquity, with her right arm outstretched and finger boldly pointing. She's affectionately referred to as "Miss Forward" because the motto of Wisconsin is one word: *Forward!* Day in and day out, in the midst of commercial activities she seems to stand forth charging us to keep looking ahead, to be full of hope, to advance into the future with courage and expectation — to go *forward*.

When I think of this Campaign of Hope, I'm reminded of her. What a graphic symbol of how the Lord Jesus is rising up in the midst of His church at this very hour, to reveal Himself afresh as our one and only Champion! He's calling us to go *forward*. He wants us to recover the marvelous prospects secured by His reign over Heaven and earth. His message of hope summons us into a future forever sealed in His blood.

At the same time, I foresee an army of proclaimers joining their voices with His, to amplify "*Forward!*" I see them inviting fellow Christians to wake up to Him, to re-discover an abounding hope in Him, and then to move out as captives to His victorious purposes.

Forward! Have you heard Christ's summons?

In the past 20 years, unprecedented numbers of Christians around the world have. They've been faithfully praying for a Christ-exalting explosion in the Church. I've met with thousands of them in my travels, interceding for a spiritual awakening to Jesus within their congregations. Already for *them* the Campaign of Hope has begun. They are already moving forward every time they enter the Throne Room in prayer. The hour is at hand for this army of *seekers* to become an army of *speakers!* They need to infect fellow Christians with the hope in Christ that stirred them to pray in the first place.

What I'm proposing is that a Campaign of Hope could become the culmination to years of intercession for the renewal of our churches.

Doesn't it make sense for all who care enough to *pray* the vision to now step forth to *say* the vision at every opportunity? Who wouldn't want to bear witness to Christ's supremacy among the very Christians for whom they've been faithfully praying, petitioning the Father to re-awaken His children to His Son for ALL that He is? Once those prayers are coupled with a movement of messengers, I suggest to you that millions of petitions will be answered in short order. Would you like to become a Christ-proclaimer to God's people, too? Are you willing to cultivate a Campaign of Hope as a follow up to many prayers? Would you like to move forward with God's Spirit in a ministry that changes strategically the Christian movement for a whole generation? If so, *Joyful Manifesto* exists especially for you!

Fresnel's Fascination

(1 John 1:1-7)

In 1822 the French scientist Augustin Fresnel revolutionized the impact of lighthouses all over the world. For 2500 years, attempts to improve safety for ships at sea focused on increasing fire-power to intensify lighthouse beams. But Fresnel took a totally different tactic. *He studied the characteristics of light itself.* It wasn't long before he discovered light waves. Subsequently, he manufactured glass domes that incorporated several prisms compatible with these waves, refracting them with incomparable brilliance. Known as the Fresnel lens, for the next two centuries his invention was used in lighthouses on every ocean.

What better strategy for the Church in this hour? Call it "*Fresnel's Fascination*". It's about Christians giving priority to the study of the Light-of-the-World as our Light. It's about ceasing exhausting efforts to fuel spiritual fire in our churches with home-made plans and programs and personalities — ceasing long enough to take stock of the glory of the One we're called to share with the nations. Instead of focusing so much of our attention on Christian revival and missions, the "*Fresnel's Fascination*" encourages us to work, first of all, at enlarging our vision of the Revive-er and Sender Himself.

To revitalize “the whole Church to take the whole Gospel to the whole world” (words from the Lausanne Covenant) we must restore the *whole vision* of God’s Son among God’s people. We must strive to proclaim a message that “re-converts” Christians back to Christ for ALL that He is — transforming many, once again, into *Person-driven* disciples. In turn, such a campaign can help believers become the *purpose-driven* people we long to be, for the completion of the Great Commission and the consummation of the ages. That’s why the next four chapters remain, unapologetically, fascinated with the Light Himself. (I think Fresnel would be pleased.)

The rest of **Volume One** serves you as a “laboratory” for studying the Light. It can help you get “traction” on a stronger sense of Jesus’ supremacy. These chapters are far more than academic, however. They also offer the opportunity of a *life-changing* experience with Jesus, as well. Notice how the chapter titles follow quite closely the preliminary definition for supremacy laid out in chapter 1:

- *Christ Supreme: The SUMMATION of Christian Hope* (chapter 2) — What can we expect to find if we’re living according to the FOCUS of His supremacy? We’ll detail many exciting answers rarely mentioned among Christians today.
- *Christ Supreme: The CONSUMMATION of Christian Hope* (chapter 3) — Why should the FULFILLMENT of His supremacy be the greatest single motivation in a Christian’s walk with the Savior? We’ll find out and put it in terms you can talk about with others.
- *Christ Supreme: The APPROXIMATION of Christian Hope* (chapter 4) — How does experiencing the FULLNESS of His supremacy involve preliminary expressions of the consummation of His reign released into every day life? We’ll look at major areas capable of radically changing your approach to ordinary Christian living.
- *Christ Supreme: The CONSUMING PASSION of Christian Hope* (chapter 5) — What does the FERVOR of His supremacy look like in those who pursue Him for ALL that He is? We’ll define some of the deepest affections possible in a dynamic Christian experience.

Let me restate my initial invitation: At the end of the Introduction (*Look Beyond the Threshold*), I invited you to skip around. I suggested you do not need to take the remaining chapters in sequence. For example, the first thing you may want to do now is dig a little deeper into the crisis itself. In that case, go straight to chapter 6. On the other hand, you may be anxious to let your vision of the Lord Jesus expand its borders. In that case, chapter 2 is your best choice. It all depends on your personal needs and interests.

Whatever chapter you decide to read next, however, remember that throughout this manifesto we must never cease to “... *fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith*” (Heb. 12).

That’s precisely the goal of the Triune God for each of us as expressed in Revelation 5, where the seven lamps (the Seven-fold Spirit) cast their inexhaustible and inescapable glow on the Lamb who stands at the center of the Father’s throne – before whom all Heaven and earth falls prostrate with hymns of salvation.

QUOTABLE QUOTE

Thus all the way from creation at the beginning, through the incarnation at the centre, to final redemption at the end, God speaks and acts through Jesus Christ. The *love of God* is not any ideal of love, it is that love that in the specific grace of Jesus Christ comes to seek and to save what was lost, to establish at great cost fellowship with those who never had and could not ever have any kind of claim upon it. The *power of God* is not any kind of sovereign omnipotence, it is that specific power by which the Son became man, and which he used with compassion to heal the sick and endure the cross; it is the power by which he rose from the dead. The *truth of God* is not the content of any philosophical world-vision, or mystic communication or charismatic insight; the truth of God is the person and action of his Son who is both Messiah of Israel and Lord of the Church, to whose coming prophets bore witness before, and apostles after, and that witness is interpreted out of scripture by the Spirit in the Church. The *commandment of God* is not an ethical action or religious discipline, it is the commandment of the Father that is defined in this gospel by this Son. The Father has committed all things to the Son and nobody knows the Father except the Son and those to whom he chooses to reveal him.

– DR. THOMAS SMAIL
