

April 29, 2012 - The Reborn Supremacy

Continuing, with the second lesson in our series this morning. A series entitled The Reborn Anthology and we're looking into what happens when you're reborn. The subtitle of the series is "Everything Changes When You're Reborn." We want to look at, what those changes are and what does that look like in real life. So, we're going to continue on with that this morning.

Have you guys ever watched that show "The Iron Chef"? I kind of prefer the original version, they have a newer version but I like the original, it was a lot more theatrical and entertaining. They have all these guys dressed up in their fancy chef costumes and then they'll bring out a contender chef, someone who is not one of the Iron Chefs. The Chairman, who I always get a kick out of, he'll come out and he'll reveal the secret ingredient for the day and then, one of the Iron Chefs and one of the Contender Chefs have to make their best creations out of this secret ingredient. Then, they have a judging panel and they see whose meal tastes the best. One of the key lines in the show as the episode begins is, I think it's the announcer who kind of cheers out and asks the question "Whose cuisine will reign supreme?" And that was the first thing that came into my mind as I was thinking about "What is supreme in our life?" And "What is it that reigns supreme in our life?" Does anyone know who this is? His name is Ken Jennings and he was a winner on Jeopardy. He wasn't just a winner on Jeopardy, he is the all time-winnigest winner on Jeopardy. He won 74 games on Jeopardy for a total of \$2,522,722 dollars. He won a lot of money playing on Jeopardy, so he would be considered the 'supreme' Jeopardy winner.

When we talk about supremacy, one of the first areas that comes to my mind is 'sports' supremacy. That's one of the few places we actually use that word and in sports, when you reach sports supremacy, it's not actually about winning the most. That's not what it's all about. Winning is kind of a by-product of sports supremacy. What supremacy is about is playing the sport at the very highest possible level. Naturally, when you do that, you win a lot but that's what supremacy is all about.

I tried to think of a good example and I thought "What about the 'Supreme Vacuum'?" What would that look like? And I thought, well, the supreme vacuum, it would be the one that really sucks. It's the one that picks up all the dirt and all the grime and everything that you want it to pick up, it picks up. It's the vacuum that works the best that any vacuum ever could. It's going to have an ergonomic handle that's nice and comfortable to use. It will be light weight. It can go from shag carpet to burber, to hardwood floors and automatically adjusts for the difference of flooring that it comes in contact with. It would have a multitude of attachments. Far more than you know what to do with. It would have a cord that's super-duper long and automatically retracts when you don't need it to be long. Maybe even it would come with a battery pack that you could use when you go out to the car and suck up all the Cheerios and stuff that are in the back seat from the kids and you could use that. That's kind of the supreme vacuum. It's the vacuum that works and functions the best that any vacuum could possible

function. And that's kind of what our definition of supreme is going to be for this morning.

I think in some areas of our life, we all aspire to that kind of level of 'Supreme'. That desire that drives to kind of get to the top. To be Number One. To function at that kind of optimum level. To be the very best that we can be. Now, the problem with that is that supremacy is fallacy because you can never really get to the top. The top cannot be gotten to. You may get close to the top in this or that but getting to the top in one area of life, even if you do that, there's still a gazillion other areas of your life that you're nowhere near the top of. Actually, generally speaking, getting to the top of one area of your life, just kind of necessitates neglecting other areas of your life, just to get there. To get to the top of the corporate ladder often means neglecting family and spending time at home. To get to the top of the sports ladder often requires neglecting or overlooking the health of your body. People who play professional sports, especially these days, we've heard a lot about concussions and head injuries and the long-term effects of that. If you talk to anyone who played professional sports at any time, they will tell you that they have a number of health issues that they carry with them for the rest of their life because they played this high impact professional sport for awhile. There are other people who play professional sports and they sacrifice something, maybe in this case they are taking steroids and so they have to pay for that. That sacrifices not only the health of their body but it also sacrifices their respect and their integrity and some of the records they might have gained kind of don't count as much as they would have because of what they have sacrificed to get there.

If you want to reign supreme in the areas of music and movies and those industries, that ladder is often reached to the top at the expense of maintaining sexual purity and avoiding getting sucked into addictions of all sorts of kinds. How many times have you heard of a celebrity who has just gotten embroiled in all sorts of turmoil and all sorts of scandal because of the life that they have been living.

Here's the catch, even if you do make it to the top, you can't stay there. If you make it to the top in one area of your life, it's not long before someone else sneaks up behind you and then surpasses you. Even if that doesn't happen, you just get old and you can't perform at the same level you used to perform at in that area of life.

Ken Jennings we talked about earlier, Ken was on 75 episodes, he won 74 of them but in the 75th episode a lady named Nancy Zurg, defeated him in Final Jeopardy. Now, Nancy Zurg came in third on the next episode following but Ken Jennings reign eventually had to come to an end.

I think of great sports people like Michael Jordan and Wayne Gretzky and even though, while they were playing they were the elite of their field and even though some of their records still remain, there came a time where they just couldn't keep up and perform at that same level and so, they retired. Now, I'm sure if either one of those gentlemen were here today they could probably school all of us in how to play their respective sports, but neither one of them could go

back into their respective sport's field and perform at the level they once did.

Some of you may recognize this guy, he's been all the talk on the sport shows all winter. His name is Payton Manning and he is the franchise quarterback of the Indianapolis Colts. He is their whole world in Indianapolis, until this winter. This winter, he went from being an Indianapolis Colt to being a Denver Bronco. You may ask, why in the world would the Colts take this guy, who is so central to the heart and soul of their organization and ship him off to Denver? Well, that's because this week, in the NFL draft, there was this guy, named Andrew Luck and he is the next big star. Indianapolis said, we're going to draft him and we're going to send Payton down the road because you know, he's getting pretty old. I think he's 36 now. He's had some health problems. So now, Payton Manning, who was everything to that franchise is now sent down the road.

When you talk about movie stars and musicians it doesn't take long for Emmies and Oscars to turn into Infomercials and reality TV shows. It isn't a far walk at all from insane popularity to complete obscurity.

And for most of us, supremacy just isn't reality. And that concept is exactly what Paul was talking about in Eph. 2, 1-10, which is the passage Dave read for us earlier. Let's take another look at it real quickly and I think you may see what I mean. Here's what Paul writes in Eph. 2:1-3:

“You were once dead because of your disobedience and many sins. You used to live in sin and just like the rest of the World, obeying the Devil, the commander of the powers of the unseen World. He is the spirit at work in the heart of those who refuse to obey God. All of us used to live that way, following passion and desires and inclinations of our sinful nature.”

Now, at first glance, you may read through that and say “I don't get the connection. I don't know exactly what that has to do with what you were talking about just a minute ago. But, the key to understanding the connection is in these two words. In this version they are both listed as sins. Sometimes it's sin and trespasses, I think in the NIV which we read earlier, it was 'sin and transgressions' and understanding what is meant by those two words specifically, will help you understand the connection between what we just talked about and what Paul is saying here. The first of the two words there is a word called 'harmartia' and when I was in college and learning Greek, one of the ways I learned some of the words is, I would take the word and kind of translate it into something that was more English and then make a phrase out of it and then I would remember what the word was supposed to mean. For example, the word for slave is 'doulos' and so in my mind, I thought 'Slaves do lots of work' and so that's how I remembered the definition of the word. I had one of those for this word, the word translated sin, 'harmartia' and so, I would always think 'Sin does a lot of harm a to ya'. And that's how I would remember what this word meant. The actual definition actually isn't too far off of that. The official definition of this word means “To fall short” or to “miss the mark”. Lots of times when we think of sin, we think in terms of bad and evil and wrong. And that's kind of where

our mind goes to when we think of the word sin. But harmatia talks about falling short, about missing the mark, about not reaching the goal you were aiming for. It's actually a term that comes from archery. This is kind of the mental picture it's meant to give you when you give this word. It's about missing the target. It's about being off the mark. I remember many years ago, when I was in high school, I was counselor at Clearview Christian Camp and one of the activities there was archery. We would take all of these little kids down to the field and have them shoot archery. And so, I remember the first time we did that, we got a couple of bales and threw a target on it and said "Okay kids, aim for this target". After the first time we did that we realized this was a mistake. What we needed to do was scrounge up every other bale of hay we can find and put a big wall of hay behind this target, because when we give these little kids this bow and arrow, most of those arrows aren't hitting the target. A lot of them are falling down in front and a lot of them, I don't know how these little kids with their skinny little arms would manage it, but they would shoot them way over the target into the tall grass behind in the field and then we would have to go and try to scrounge through the field and find the arrows so the next group coming through had something to shoot. That's the image Paul is working with here. Missing the target when you shoot.

It's what he says in Romans, Chapter 3, 22-24, he says:

"There is no difference between any of us. There is no difference for all have sinned, all have missed the target and fallen short of the Glory of God and are justified freely through His grace, through the redemption which came through Christ Jesus."

Paul is saying "All of us have fallen short of that supreme ideal that we're aspiring to. All of us have missed that mark that we were aiming for.

The second word in there is 'Paratoma' and it has a slightly different meaning. It comes with the meaning of 'to slip or to fall or to take the wrong road'. Some versions translate this as "trespasses" and this is the word that we eventually get our word 'trespassing' from. And that's the kind of connotations that this word has. It means that you have slipped or you have fallen or you have somehow ended up on the wrong road. Whether by bad luck or defective directions, or by faulty navigating, somehow you've ended up where you did not intend to go. Have you ever ended up on the wrong road? I imagine most of us have at one point or another. And so that's how Paul describes the state that most of us find ourselves in, most of the time when we are left to fend for ourselves. Falling short. Off target. Slipping. Falling. Going down the wrong road. Does any of that resonate with any of you? It does with me and so, I ask this question: "What context is it that Paul is saying this in? What is the bigger picture that Paul is painting when he gives us this message? And so, I backed up several verses and read, in Ephesians, Chapter 1, starting in verse 18, Paul says:

"I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the competent hope that he has given those He has called. His holy people, our rich and glorious inheritance. I also pray that you will understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe

in Him. This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead and seated Him in the place of honour at God's right hand in the Heavenly Realm. Now he is far above any authority, or ruler or power or leader or anything else, not only in this World but also, in the World to come. God has put all things under the authority of Christ and has made Him head over all things for the benefit of the Church."

Listen to some of the things Paul writes in there. He talks about Jesus being seated at the place of honour at the right hand of God. He talks about him being far above any ruler or power or authority, not just here in this world but also, in the world to come. He says "God has put everything under the authority of Jesus and made him head over all things."

He kind of says some of the same thoughts in Colossians Chapter 1, we won't go there this morning but if you want to look at that later it's Chapter 1:5-20. Your Bible probably even has the subtitle "The Supremacy of Christ" over this section of text. In that, he talks about Christ's supremacy over everything.

You may be familiar with Philippians, 2:1-11, and in that passage Paul ends with the phrase: "God has given Jesus the name that is above every name so that at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus is Lord."

Paul is painting for us, a picture of Jesus who is above all things; who is supreme above all things and if you believe the Bible, you have to accept what Paul is saying here. If you don't believe the Bible or if you're not sure if you believe the Bible, that is a great conversation that we should get into sometime, and we'd love to talk about that. But if you do believe the Bible, you must accept God's word that Jesus is the authority above all authorities, that Jesus has supremacy over everything. That Jesus is far above anyone else both in the physical world and in spiritual world and in the world that comes after this world. Now, I'm guessing most of you aren't surprised by that statement, or at least, you're not surprised that I made that statement, after all, I am the preacher and I'm supposed to stand up here and talk about how Jesus is supreme over everything else. But, if you believe that Christ is above everyone and everything else, that belief becomes incredibly important when you recall what we talked about last week.

Last week we talked about how, as Christians, our identity is redefined, as children of God. As Christians we have become co-heirs with Christ and that ties you directly to the One who is above everything. Now here is the big twist. Here is the surprise ending that you might not have seen coming. Paul follows his discussion in Colossians 1 with this statement in vs. 15-20:

"This includes you who were once far away from God. You who were His enemies, separated from Him by your evil thoughts and actions, yet, now He has reconciled you to Himself through the death of Christ and His physical body. As a result, He has brought you into His own presence and you are holy and blameless as you stand before Him without a single fault."

Notice the present tense in this passage. Notice how he is saying, this is not the future, this is not someday, this is not in the next life, he says "It is NOW". And Paul says the same thing in our passage out of Ephesians. When we continue on from the verses we read earlier, this is what he goes on to say: Eph. 2:4-10

"God is so rich in mercy and He loved us so much, that even though we were dead because of our sins," (because of our missing the mark, because of our falling and slipping and going off target and taking the wrong road) he said "he has given us life by raising Christ from the dead. It is only by grace you have been saved, for He raised us from the dead along with Christ and seated us with Him, in the Heavenly Realms, because we are united with Christ."

He says that God has seated us with Jesus in the Heavenly Realms because we are united with Christ, not that He will, but that He did. Remember, just a few verses earlier, in Eph. 1, Paul writes that it is God's power that raised Christ from the dead and seated Christ at the place of honour in the Heavenly Realms, and now he's saying, guess what, you have been brought along too because you are with Christ. He goes on to say "God saved you by His grace when you believe" and you can't take credit for this, it's a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.

Again, God saved you by grace when you believed, when you came to Jesus, when you became a Christian. God has saved you and put you in this new place. And the final verse is perhaps the most amazing of them all, he says:

"For we are God's masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do good things He has planned for us long ago."

This is again present tense, this isn't future tense, this isn't God will make you a masterpiece someday...this is, you ARE God's masterpiece, right here, right now. We are seated with Christ. We are saved by God's grace. We are God's masterpiece. It doesn't say "When you get to Heaven you will be. After you work hard for a lifetime and put all your effort into it, you could, become. If you get yourself fixed up, you might, be. He says "This is what you are. Right here, right now, you are God's masterpiece. Not because of anything you have done, but purely based on the Supremacy of Christ, to whom you belong.

Now, that sounds great, but some of you may be thinking "My life doesn't look much like a masterpiece. My relationships don't really look like a masterpiece. My spiritual walk doesn't always look like a masterpiece, and so, how do I reconcile what I read in the Book with what I see in the mirror? What good does it do me to know that in God's eyes, I am a masterpiece, when all that I can see is a train wreck? Well perhaps, the good that it does is that, it can shift our paradigm ever so slightly. Let me share with you the tale of two vacuums.

Our first vacuum is the one that we already talked about earlier. Our supreme vacuum, with all

of its bells and whistles and it is by design, flawless. It is both a work of art and a marvel of engineering. It is everything a vacuum should be, could be, or ever would want to be. That is our supreme vacuum.

Our second vacuum is a beat up old lemon, of a vacuum. It is missing parts. It has bare wires and jammed gears. It has cracks in the hose that let the air out. It has clogs in it from decades ago, with who knows what, in there. These are our two vacuums.

Vacuum number one, despite its superior design and top-notch condition, still will, on occasion short out, clog up, or malfunction in some way. It's just the reality of being used in a dirty house. These things happen. But when that does happen, it's always restored back to its optimum design and condition.

Vacuum number two is beat up and broken down. It also shorts out and clogs up and malfunctions on a regular basis, and when it does the vacuum must do what it can to repair itself. To patch itself together and hope that it holds. To muster up from within, the power to continue to run. To try and against all rational thought, hold on to the belief that someday, it will get itself all fixed up and be as good as new. Someday.

Which of these two vacuums would you rather be? I suspect that there are many days when many of us feel like that junky old vacuum. We're doing what we can to hold things together. Trying to muster the power from within. Trying to hold on to the belief that if we just try hard enough, eventually we can make our lives and ourselves better. Perhaps taking some solace in the fact that, in Heaven, we will be the person that we are continually failing to be here on earth. But wishing there was more hope for the here and now.

But what if you could be the other vacuum? What if, you could view your life from God's perspective? What if you considered yourself a 'supreme model', an ideal design, an ultimate in functionality? What if you saw the best as the norm and the worst as an anomaly? What if you viewed the things that go wrong in your life, whatever causes them, not as inherent flaws, but as glitches already being worked on and repaired? What if you saw yourself as a masterpiece? Would that change the way your week went? I challenge you to see yourself as that, this week. I challenge you to see yourself through God's eyes. I challenge you to see yourself as a Masterpiece. Because, according to the One who has authority over everything....that is who you are.