

“First Place in *Everything*” //

Colossians 1:15–20 // *FIRST* #1

12 Minute “History of Summit” Video

Well, that was awesome, and a little embarrassing...

Summit Church: *Can you believe what God has done here?!*

You just heard a **little bit of the story** of how this church began. **Here’s the question** I want us to consider in this season:

Does the spirit that characterized that first generation of Summit members still characterize us?

You see, churches, when they get successful, experience a natural inertia—they move from mission to maintenance. And a lot of people start coming who may have never bought into the spirit that initially birthed the place.

- **In churches like ours**, you have a lot of people sitting on the sideline, assuming **someone else is responsible** for all of it.
- I’ve told you before that churches like ours can be a lot like a NC State football game...

Sixteen years ago, Jesus and his kingdom were **first to this church**, and we **expressed that in 2 ways**:

- We were **committed to do** whatever it took to reach the lost.

Works consulted:

Colossians, The Bible Project

“Preeminent,” Joby Martin

“10 Reasons to Put Jesus First in Everything,” James MacDonald

“First,” Julie Bullock

- We were **surrendered to do** whatever we believed the HS said to us.

We are sitting **here now**, a congregation of **more than 11,000**—we’ve seen some amazing things:

- Right at **6000 people**, just like Anna, baptized in the last 16 years;
- We’ve sent out nearly **1100 members** to plant more than 250 churches around the world **because of that group’s faith and commitment**.

But here’s the question: *Does the faith and surrender that characterized the first generation still characterize this one?*

Because I believe the **greatest things God wants to do** through this church are still ahead of us, and the **best is yet to come**.

Intro

We are starting a **5-week series** through the book of Colossians today called **FIRST**.

I chose Colossians because **Paul’s point in this short letter** is that *it ain’t about you or me*. **True, Jesus has done a lot of things for us**—more than anyone else has—but it still ain’t about us.

BIBLE: Colossians 1:15–20 is where we’ll be today, and for the **next 5 weeks** we’re just going to work our way through this great little letter.

Aa few things to know **about the letter itself**:

- First, we know it was **written during one of Paul’s many imprisonments—Paul was jailed** for extensive periods of time

because he refused to stop telling everyone that Jesus was Lord and had risen from the dead.

- Second, Paul had **never met the Colossians**. The church there had been planted by a buddy of his named Epaphras, who had shared with Paul some things about the church that concerned Paul, and so Paul was writing to them to address those concerns.
- Third, it is a **pretty straightforward letter**. The Apostle seems to have **two primary** concerns in mind:
 - He's **concerned (#1) because the believers in Colossae** seem to have been influenced by the culture around them in a way that has warped their understanding of God.
 - Secondly, he's **addressing their concern about why** he's always in prison—"Why," they wondered, "if Paul really was a messenger of God, was he going through all this suffering?"
 - So, **Paul writes this letter (first) to correct their view of God** and (second) to explain to them **why he was willing to suffer and sacrifice** for the gospel and why they should be also.

The city of Colossae was a fascinating place. It was prosperous city tucked into a valley in the middle of modern-day Turkey.

- It was **part of the Roman empire**, and when it came to religion, the Romans had **2 basic guidelines** (1) You can worship any god that you want, just (2) don't say your god is the only god because that might lead to conflict or you thinking that you should be in charge, and Rome was in charge.
- So, **as with many Roman cities** of the day, **Colossae was filled with temples and shrines** to all kinds of gods, and the general mood was "Find the god that works for you. In fact, feel free to sample from the smorgasbord of gods and put together a combo that works for you." What I would call **'Build-a-bear' theology: assemble the deity that makes you feel good**.
 - Well, see that **culture of Colossae** had infiltrated the church, and so, the believers in Jesus had a lot of other rituals they added to their faith in Jesus to ensure peace and prosperity.

- Think of it as a **"Jesus and"** mentality: we worship Jesus AND we embrace these other things to supply whatever Jesus might leave lacking.
- They **never rejected Jesus**, just added to him.

So, here is what Paul says in response: Col 1:15–20 15 He (Jesus) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For everything was created by him, in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through him and for him.

- **What does it mean when you say that 'all things were created by him and for him?'** That he's God, right?
 - The **only uncreated thing** is God. And if everything that was created was created by Jesus, and Jesus was himself created, then Jesus would have had to create himself which is impossible. **So, the fact that Jesus created everything that was created means Jesus is uncreated**, which means he is God.
 - **Follow that?**
 - Scholars point out **Col 1 parallels Gen 1**: Paul is pointing out that Jesus was the creating force, the WORD, of Gen 1
 - **That word firstborn sometimes throws people off because** they assume it means "Jesus was the first thing God created,"
 - as in **when I say Kharis is my firstborn**, I mean that she was the first human Veronica and I created. In 2002 she didn't exist and then in 2003 she did.
 - **But that word 'firstborn' can also mean "position."** We get the word *prototype* from it. Jesus is the prototype of creation—the template on which all things were created, and the one for whom they were created.
 - **In a couple of verses Paul will say that Jesus was also the firstborn from the dead**. Technically, others had been raised from the dead before Jesus. **But Jesus is called the 'firstborn of resurrection'** because he is prototype of resurrection—the pattern which the rest of us will follow.

- **Muslims, Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and a lot of others teach** that Jesus was a great man, a great moral teacher, but they react strongly—sometimes even violently—when you say Jesus is God.
- **You want to know why? Because there is something inherently threatening about Jesus being divine.** If Jesus is a created being—even a super-strong, super-wise one—then you can look at him as a dispenser of good moral advice that you can put alongside the other great religious leaders. But if he’s **God, then the rules are altogether different.** It means that he’s the center of everything and everything else is measured by him.

You were created **by Jesus and for Jesus.** Let that sink in!

- **I told my kids the other night:** Were you created for mom and dad? Were you created for yourself?
- Were you created for a job? Was I created for the Summit Church? No, I was created for Jesus. Which means my primary purpose is to know, discover his will and live it out, and **I’ll only find fulfillment** when I know him and am living out his purposes!

17 He is before all things, and by him all things hold together.

- **Last year I read a book¹** that explained that many physicists are still confused as to how the atom holds together. You see, the nucleus of the atom contains **positively-charged protons** which should repel each other like two positively charged magnets repel each other), but **something—something mysterious and invisible, physicists say—holds them together.** (Based on all we know right now about electromagnetic energy, every atom should fly apart, but some invisible force stronger than the electromagnetic force literally holds it together.) **Physicists don’t know what to call this force** so they simply refer to it as “*the stronger force.*”²

- **Now, I’m not saying it is the naked hand of God that holds the atom together**—I’ve seen some physicists speculate that, but I’m not saying that. (Maybe God has built into the quarks or gluons or electrons or something else we don’t know about yet some natural force that overcomes the electromagnetic forces and we’ll figure that out some day.) But **the point is that some incredibly strong force holds the nucleus of every atom together even when it looks like** each should fly apart. **In the same way,** God holds all of history (and your life) together, keeping it from unraveling. He sustains creation, keeping natural forces from unraveling everything.

18 He is also the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. 19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, (everything that God was, Jesus was) 20 and through him to reconcile everything to himself, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

Here’s my summation of Paul’s logic here:

- **Jesus is first:** Jesus is the **Creator** of everything, the **template on which** it was made, and the **one for whom** it was made.
 - The point is that **Jesus is not one of many beautiful things** God has created, Jesus is the creating force and purpose behind them all.
- **Secondly, Jesus went first**—This God, Paul says, pursued a relationship with us when we weren’t looking for him! He went to a bloody cross where he experienced torture and humiliation so he could buy us back—voluntarily.
 - **In any other story, who could understand this?**
 - He could have just **wiped the slate clean** and started over and been none the poorer for it.

¹ *Einstein* by Walter Isaacson

² Lee Chestnut, *The Atom Speaks*

- **But he didn't. He pursued you.** When I was 19 years old I got to take a class with Charles Ryrie... one of most famous theologians. When I took the class from him **he was so old.** Retired. He'd written all these theology books; he had the most famous study Bible in the world. (**Varsity**). I remember he got to this section in the Gospel of Matthew...
- Jesus went first. He sought you when a stranger, wandering from the fold of God, he to rescue you from danger, interposed his precious blood...
- Therefore, Paul says, **We should put Jesus first** in our lives.
 - This **kind of God can never be one in a list of gods**; one of many important priorities in your life.
 - He's **not just an important chapter** in the story, he's the book in which all the other chapters are written.
 - He **exists in a class** all by himself.
 - **Pantheon**

Paul is going to say that what is true in their theology should also be true in their lives. **"...that he might come have the first place everything..." vs. 18**), not just in our theology.

- Jesus is **not someone you put on a list of priorities**. He's the page on which all other priorities are written.
- **He's in a class by himself.**
 - I think about this with **my wife**: "You're top of my list of women..."
 - **Even more so with Jesus!** He is **why you exist**. You were created by him and for him. That means he can never be merely an important commitment in your life. He must be first.
 - **Some translations say "preeminent."** That means the foundation, the center of everything.

Here's my question for you in this season—Does Jesus hold that position in life, or is he simply one of your many priorities?

IOW, **is he important to you, or is he first?**

Sixteen years ago, at this church there was a group of people who said, "Jesus and his mission will be first." That was expressed in 2 primary ways: We'll do whatever it takes to reach the lost (even if uncomfortable) we'll do whatever the HS says.

- **But here's what happens.** When churches like ours get big, and settled so to speak, they experience a natural inertia. They move from **mission to maintenance**.³
- They go from being **reckless in the mission** to being comfortable in the institution.

I **saw a chart** recently that really disturbed me about our church. It explained the difference in **1st vs. 2nd Generation Comparison**

1st Generation	2nd Generation
Does "whatever it takes"	Does "only what I'm asked to do"
Assumes personal responsibility	Assumes someone else will do it
Expects personal sacrifice	Expects personal comfort
Sees problems and seeks solutions	Sees problems and complains
Sees possibilities and dreams about what could be	Sees barriers and reasons to quit
Hears the voice of God firsthand and owns the vision	Inherits the vision secondhand and questions every decision
Steps out with bold, reckless trust in God	Sits satisfied in the stability of the institution

³ "Don't ever build a building like this one..." Defining moment for me. We don't have a building that seats 10,000, but we do have a big, accomplished church. Does

the faith and sacrifice that characterized us at the beginning still do so? Or is it all about preserving the institution for us?

Fears holding anything back from God	Fears commitment
Feels privileged to be a part of the movement	Feels entitled to the benefits of the institution

- **Which are you?**
 - Here's an example of 1st Gen: DB and Antwan. **That's an example of 1st generation** (*expects personal sacrifice; whatever it takes; feels privileged to be a part of the movement*).
 - **I have a number of emails on file** from the last few years that would pretty thoroughly represent 2nd generation
 - Listen—**you are experiencing the fruits of the bold, reckless, hear-from-God-and-put-his-kingdom-first faith** of others! *You* are the fruit of their audacious faith.
- It is **time for us to regain first generation faith!**
 - I've been leading our staff through this and **one of our pastors said**, 'I realize that all I enjoy here is because of someone else's bold, audacious faith...' He said, "But I was reading how when Moses passed leadership on to Joshua, Joshua had to make his own faith... I want to be like Joshua, who inherited the accomplishments of the previous generation but showed his own faith in going after the Promised Land. **"Our Promised Land are the people we are supposed to reach, and we can't take possession of it through Moses's—the first generation's—faith. *We need to be the 2nd wave of the 1st generation, showing the same 1st generation faith.*"**
- **Listen: I believe this is a matter of life and death for this church.** God is not done.
- There are new people to reach. New families. Another generation of children. A whole generation of college students, prisoners. New nations to impact through church planting.
- The **faith of the previous generation** was awesome, but it's not enough to take us there.

So, let me ask you to consider personally: *I. "What gets my first and best?"

Remember, Paul says, "He should have the *first place in everything*." That means he should have the **first place in your heart—your affections**. He should be the one you love the most—more than everything.

First place in in your obedience: what he wants should be the first consideration in anything you do.

First place in your priorities: His agenda should rule your life. At this church, we say that will express itself in 3 main areas:

- **In your time:** Does God get the first and best of your time?
 - Do you spend more time teaching your kids how to throw a slider than you do teaching them about Jesus? Do you spend more time worrying about climbing the workplace ladder than you do seeking Jesus?
 - **Of all your weekly commitments**, are your commitments to the Kingdom of God: small group, ministry, volunteering, are these the first to go?
- **In your talents:** **When you think about your talent and** career, does the kingdom of God get the 1st consideration?
 - God **gave you a talent** for a reason. Your workplace is a mission field. You should see your job as a means to get into place to bring the gospel to people. And to use the financial benefits of it **first and foremost** for his kingdom.
 - *Which leads me to...*
- Lastly, **in your treasure:** For the **next few weeks** we are going to ask the question about our treasures. **Who (or what) gets the first and best of your treasures?**
 - Think of **what you do with your money in two categories:** "first and best" category and a "good enough" category. Some things you really want to strive for the best in, and sometimes

you are willing to live with “good enough” in order to get the first and best of something.

- **For example:**
 - **House mortgage:** Couple in their early 30’s...
 - Or, trying to **send your kid to college:** “We can do this... but things are going to have to change.”
 - **Hear me:** *There’s nothing wrong with putting some things first in your family, but my question is why we rarely ask this question in light of our giving.* We **never seem to have** the conversation: “We can do this in our giving... but some things are going to have change if we do.” **Instead, we ask, “How much can we afford to give after all these other commitments are fulfilled?**
 - **AFTER** we get the kind of house we want to live in;
 - **AFTER** we go on the vacations we think our family would enjoy;
 - **AFTER** we drive the kind of cars we want and wear the kinds of clothes we want;
 - **AFTER** we achieve the lifestyle we want; and after we send our kids to the colleges we want them to go to...
 - **AFTER all these things**, what can we **afford from the leftover to give to God?**
- **JESUS does not deserve your leftovers!** He deserves the 1st place in everything.
 - **Have you ever been invited to someone’s house** and they served you leftovers? Mashed potatoes; that morning’s bacon; limp French fries.... **How would that make you feel?**
 - (you know) *The food just ain't no good? I mean the macaroni's soggy, the peas are mushed / And the chicken tastes like wood?*⁴ Little **Rapper’s Delight** anyone? 80’s rap
 - **How would that make you feel? You’d feel a little insulted** because you’d know this this meal was originally prepared for someone else.
 - **Or, imagine some dignitary came over to your house—I asked my kids the other night who was the biggest celebrity we could imagine coming to our house.** I, of course said Nicolas Cage. They said...
 - **Jesus not does deserve your leftovers. He is FIRST;** he went first, and he should be first in our lives.
- **Let me be clear:** I don’t think this season is about us getting to respectable, ‘good enough’ percentage. Instead, I want you to ask before God: What is that level of giving that declares unequivocally Jesus’s ‘FIRSTNESS’ in your life? His preeminence?
 - **Let me make it really personal: For my wife and I, we realize our giving has become “good enough.”** (Not embarrassed, it’s good enough—but **I want it to unequivocally declares**, *‘You are the reason I exist! You’re my point of living! And if you hadn’t reached out first, and gone to the cross to save me, I’d be lost. JESUS PAID IT ALL... WERE THE WHOLE REALM...!’* I want something that says that, and I want my kids to see that because I want them to see that Jesus is **not just important to us**, he’s absolutely FIRST.
 - **Or I’ve used this analogy I have used:** When you sit down to a **breakfast of bacon and eggs**, both the chicken and pig had a part in bringing it to you.
 - The chicken made a contribution. The **pig went all-in.**
 - The **chicken is not really changed** for the experience. It’s more of a transaction. **The pig, however, is fundamentally changed** for the experience.
 - **My wife and I don’t want to be chickens in our giving.** We want to be pigs. We don’t want merely to make a

⁴ Rapper’s Delight, The Sugar Hill Gang

generous contribution; we want to be fundamentally changed for the experience because we establish God as the unchallenged first and best in our lives, getting the first and best of our finances.

- **We want to come up with a number** that unequivocally and definitively declares that Jesus is FIRST in our lives. That says, “**You’re** the most important; YOU are why we exist; YOU have first place in our thoughts, our affections, and our priorities.”

Here’s my challenge to you in this season: Does your giving say “leftovers” or “Lord”?

Now, maybe you say, “J.D., I’m in a different place. I’m not thinking about nice clothes and new cars. I can barely afford to pay the bills. I eat **cereal with a fork** to save milk. When I go to the park, ducks throw bread at me.” Or, “I just lost my job.”

- For you, also, there is a place to put Jesus first. God says unequivocally in his word to give him the first and best, and all the rest he will give to you. **Matt 6:33**
- **Best illustration** I’ve heard of this (David Jeremiah). “Put in this envelope what represents your 1st and best (for them I think it was 10% because they’d never done it before).”

First question: **I. “What gets my first and best?”**

Second question, **II. “Am I listening to the Holy Spirit and obeying him?”**

- In the book of Acts, when the church was growing explosively, what you had was a group of people simply listening to the HS.
- **The HS shows up 59 times the HS shows up in Acts.** And what you’re seeing is that with one simple act of obedience God can accomplish more than all the talent in all the world.
 - **One illustration.** Jesus clearly told the Apostles in the 1st chapter of Acts that he wanted the gospel to be preached in

Jerusalem, Judaea, Samaria... but by Acts 8 they still haven’t managed to be able to get the gospel out of Jerusalem. **That all changes with the story of Philip...**

Are you hearing from him? You say, “I don’t have much money.” It doesn’t matter. **It’s surrender** and obedience. This is **what characterized those 1st 300** and most characterize us as well.

I believe the very future and life of our church depends on it. I believe the future of our community depends on what happens in this season. And I believe your spiritual walk depends on this.

So, on your way out, **you’re going to receive a couple of things today—**

- **One is a presentation (BOOKLET)** of what we believe—after prayer and seeking God)—what we believe God is calling us to over the next two years. We’ll discuss it more in weeks to come.
 - It’s the **core vision** that God has given us for the next two years. It includes space for you to take sermon notes over the next 5 weeks, so keep it with you and bring it back each week. It contains the SG material you’ll be engaging with over the next five weeks. **We’ve made this a resource to guide you** as we seek the Holy Spirit during this season—**so hold on to it, use it, engage with it.**
- The **other is a tool** (COMMITMENT CARD) that will help ask you some questions about what it looks like for the kingdom of God to get your first and best!
 - Yes, **in a few weeks we will be asking you to fill this out.** So, look at it.
 - Ask questions about it. Seek God in prayer on it.
- **And yes, there’s a number goal in it, but I don’t want you to get fixated on it,** because that is not what this is primarily about. We’re doing this **because Jesus deserves our first and best** and for many of us that is no longer the case.

- **Put it this way:** If someone wrote me a check for the full amount we need—80 million—we’d still do this, because this is not about meeting God’s financial needs; it is **about us having Jesus** in the first place in our lives.
- **I want you to come up with a number that definitively demonstrates** that Jesus and his kingdom is really first in your life.
 - **That of all your priorities and commitments**, your biggest and most important one is to him.
- **You say, “I don’t like it when churches talk about money.”** I want you to listen: **God doesn’t want your money.** He wants a whole lot more! He wants everything... and that includes your money.
- **God is not short on money.** He’s not sitting in heaven with hat in hand needing what you have. But **God wants (and deserves)** the first place in your heart, and that is certainly reflected in your money.

Conclusion

I look back with a lot of affection toward that group of 300. They were courageous. They were selfless. But **in large part, their day has past.** Some are still here, some have gone on to be with Jesus. This is **a new generation**; a new wave in our church.

- **Look around!** Will this generation—will the **people who are seated** around you, and those you **see up here on the stage**—will they **offer themselves anew and afresh** to God for what he wants to do *next*? I **don’t believe God is done!** I believe there is **still more joy in heaven** over 1 sinner (out there) that repents than the 99 (in here) who are already his.
- **The Triangle is growing rapidly—Conservatively, 100K** a year. He put us here to reach them.
- **Will our church rise up to say ‘yes’** to what God wants to do in this next wave, to reach people for Jesus in this generation?
- There are **so many stories yet to be written**; so many lives that need to be impacted. It all has to do with whether we embrace first generation faith and hear from and respond to God!

Now, maybe this **your first time here**, and you’re thinking, *“I picked a weird weekend to come visit.”* Yeah, but maybe God brought you here to join us. Maybe you coming this week wasn’t an accident. God wants you to join this movement and jump in and be a part of it!

For all of you, come back for the next 4 weeks... as we unpack this. All sermon series are important, but this one is especially so, so I want to ask you, if at all possible, that you prioritize being here every single week. This is a pivotal, defining moment in the future of our church that has the potential to reshape our future for the next 2 decades. And I want you to be a part of it!

BTW, our leaders and volunteers have already begun this journey. If that’s you, I want to remind you that next Sunday evening, **October 28** we are having **Advance Commitment Night** at the Apex Campus. Our leaders are going to go first in committing themselves to this. **If you want to join us, you still can, but you have to RSVP at summitrdu.com/first.**

Now, here’s what I want all of us to do from here:

First Move

- 1) Engage with this booklet in your small group. Go through it. Wrestle with it. Use it. Let it guide you.
- 2) If you’re not in a SG you can get connected to one today. At all of our locations you can go straight to the Next Steps area to find out more about getting connected to one.

***MUSIC

I want to end by asking the question I asked at the beginning: *Does the spirit that characterized that first generation of Summit members still characterize us?*

16 years ago, I asked them to stand. I **want you to do the same**:

You are saying, “My yes is on the table... I’m ready to put Jesus first. The particulars of that I may not know yet, but I’m willing to put my yes on the table and listen.”

If that’s you, in just a minute, I want you **to stand**. Some were here... stand again.

PRAYER: YOU ARE SENT!

Question for small groups:

Discuss the differences in 1st generation and 2nd generation. Do you see yourself acting more like 1st generation or 2nd generation?

