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An Anatomy of Salvation, Part 3

In 1970, less than one year after Neil Armstrong walked on the moon, Jim Lovell and his crew of Fred Haise and Jack Swigert manned Apollo 13. And what was considered to be a routine mission to the moon became anything but routine. In fact, most of you probably saw the movie *Apollo 13* which detailed this flight.

At one point during the expedition, Jack Swigert attempted to stir the oxygen tanks. But rather than stirring the tanks, the ship malfunctioned and began letting off oxygen. The objective of a Moon-walk was scrubbed, and the next week was spent trying to get Apollo 13 and its crew back to earth alive.

Well, if you saw the movie or remember the flight, you know that NASA was successful in getting the three men back alive. And to me, the most amazing detail of the whole ordeal was the discovery that the "malfunction" was actually a defective coil in an oxygen tank damaged two years before the flight. In essence, because something as seemingly insignificant as a coil didn't work according to its purpose, three men almost lost their lives in space.

Brothers and sisters, whether it is something as insignificant as a \$2.00 part, or as important as a 50 million dollar life support system, we expect the things we depend upon to work according to their purpose. In fact, it is when things don't work according to their purpose that all kinds of difficulty occur.

Take for example, our salvation. Did you know that God saved us with a very specific purpose in mind?

And thus, it is no surprise to discover that when God's children fail to understand this purpose and neglect or ignore this purpose it is then that they suffer the consequences in the form of

- Failed marriages.
- Bitterness. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.
- Jealousy.
- Wounded spirits.
- Crushed souls.

Indeed if we are going to experience the joy of our salvation it behooves us not only to understand God's purpose in saving us but also to live in light of that purpose.

Salvations' Purpose

And what is that purpose? Why did God save us?

Romans 8:29, "For whom he did foreknow, he also did **predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son**, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren."

The first purpose of our salvation is to make us conformed to the image of Christ. We are made to participate in the likeness of Christ. Last time we saw from this that God's purpose for saving us was so that we might be conformed to the image of Christ.

1 Peter 2:21, "For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps."

Philippians 2:5, "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus."

Matthew 16:24, "Then said Jesus unto his disciples, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me."

Hebrew 12:3 "For consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds."

1 John 3:2, "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."

See brothers and sisters, one of the purposes that God has when it comes to our salvation is the fashioning of His people after the likeness of Christ. Truly, Christ is our pattern, standard, prototype. He remains the fullness of what we must be! Thus a purpose of redemption is our restoration whereby we transition from being animals to being humans.

The Exaltation of Christ

And so, the first reason God saved us was so that we might become conformed to the Image of Christ. Now flowing from this is the second and more ultimate purpose of our salvation: the exaltation of Christ. And yet before we examine this in full, I want you to note that each of these "ends" when it

comes to our salvation is not mutually exclusive.

John Piper made this distinction when he commented on the Westminster Shorter Catechism Question #1. It reads, "Man's chief end is to glorify God and to enjoy Him forever." He suggested changing the copula to "by" to reflect the Biblical teaching, "Man's chief end is to glorify God BY enjoying Him forever."

The implication is that the chief end of man as stated in the WSC #1 is not mutually exclusive, but dependent upon one another. Regardless of what you think of Piper's suggestion, such a relationship exists in our text here. The text more literally reads, "For whom He foreknew, He also predestined *to become* conformed to the image of His Son, unto His being the first-born among many brethren."

In the Greek, Paul does not separate the two ends here, but unites them. How is Christ to be exalted in our lives? By our being conformed to His image! You can't have one without the other.

With that, notice the second "End" that Paul posits here for why God saved us the exaltation of Christ.

Romans 8:29, "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, **that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.**"

From this we conclude that all that God is doing in our lives, He is doing for one ultimate purpose: The Exaltation of Christ! Notice the term **firstborn** is a reference to the most important child in the Jewish family. In the context of the Covenantal Community (an institution that traverses all of Biblical history) the firstborn son was the heir of the estate and the future "Head" of the community. He was to be the pastor or shepherd of the family.

As such, he was singled out for special honor. He received a double inheritance. He received the blessing of His father (which represented a transfer of authority). He was charged with carrying on the name of his father.

And so, because the oldest male child in a Jewish family had a privileged status, the title of "firstborn" came to denote the position of Pre-Eminence. And thus, though Israel and Jeremiah were not the first people ever to be born, they nevertheless held first place in God's sight among the nations as they are described as the firstborn of God.¹

Likewise in Psalm 89:27 we see that God says of Messiah, "I also shall make him My firstborn..." Then He defines what He means, "...the highest of the kings of the earth." To be "firstborn" was to enjoy the position of Pre-Eminence!

And thus, when used of Jesus, we conclude, unlike the Jehovah Witnesses and the Arians, that "firstborn" is NOT a description of Christ's origin BUT a designation of His position before God. And so, that we were saved so that Christ might be the "firstborn among many brethren" implies NOT that Christ was created or that simply Christ was the first to rise from the dead and be called God's Son BUT that our salvation is for the exaltation and glory of Christ.

Why did God save us?

God saved us So that Christ might receive the honor of the "Firstborn." He saved us so that Christ might

¹ Compare Exodus 4:22 and Jeremiah 31:9

be the Preeminent One.

Hebrews 1:6, "And again, when he bringeth in the firstbegotten [firstborn] into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him."

In his letter to Philippi, Paul beautifully portrays God's purpose for Christ.

Philippians 2:9-11, "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

And thus we read this of Christ:

Colossians 1:18, "And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence."

Thus brothers and sisters, when God set His love upon us from the foundation of the world in order to save us He did so with an ultimate purpose in mind: The Glory and Honor of Christ! Indeed, God saved us and made us His family so that Christ might assume the position of Pre-Eminence!

Drink Offering

In the Old Testament Sacrificial system there was what is known as the "Drink Offering." This was a type of Burnt Offering in which a quantity of wine was "poured out" on the altar. As the "Drink Offering" was consumed unto the glory of God, the genuine worshipper understood it to be a symbol of himself: He was expendable for the glory of God.

And it was this desire that captivated the heart of Paul when He wrote toward the end of his life.

2 Timothy 4:6, "For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand."

The greatest desire of Paul in life and in death was to be a "drink offering" a sacrifice of praise to his God! Why?

Paul understood that his calling in life was to live that Christ might be the Pre-Eminent One! And this is the ultimate purpose of salvation.

And yet, this is not a message that we like to hear. We like to think that God saved us because somehow He needs us and that we add to His kingdom. It is too humbling to think that God saved us ultimately to provide the platform on which to glorify and exalt Christ!

And thus, we reject this message and insist on one that says

- God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.
- God exists to make you happy.
- God is the cosmic clown, the court gesture who exists to amuse and entertain you.

And from these suppositions we organize and fashion our ministries.

- We want churches that entertain us.
- We want sermons that tickle our ears.
- We want Bible studies that thrill us.
- We want ministries that fulfill us.

And when OUR plans don't work out and OUR desires are thwarted, we gripe and complain!

Listen! We exist and the kingdom of God exists not to make us happy or to fulfill our desires but so that Christ would be pre-eminent in all things!

John the Baptist

John 3:22-26, "After these things came Jesus and his disciples into the land of Judaea; and there he tarried with them, and baptized. And John also was baptizing in Aenon near to Salim, because there was much water there: and they came, and were baptized. For John was not yet cast into prison. Then there arose a question between some of John's disciples and the Jews about purifying. And they came unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi, he that was with thee beyond Jordan, to whom thou barest witness, behold, the same baptizeth, and all men come to him."

John's disciples were bent out of shape that another "prophet" was getting more business than John. Yet it didn't bother John in the least bit because he knew something that his disciples didn't. John could say what he said because he understood that everything was a stewardship given from God (v. 27), that his ministry was to prepare the way for Christ (v. 28), and that his glory was to see Christ glorified (v. 29). Yet the ultimate reason John could live in a world where all attention and focus was on Christ and not himself was because John understood God's will, (v. 30) "He must increase, but I must decrease."

Truly, this is the focus and calling not just of John, BUT everyone in Christ! If we could just understand this, it would change our lives and our marriages.

If you've heard any teaching on marriage from Ephesians 5, you know that the ultimate purpose behind every marriage is that the Christ-Church relationship might be proclaimed and enjoyed.² John Piper picking up on this truth wrote this:

"Most foundationally, marriage is the *doing* of God. And ultimately, marriage is the *display* of God. It displays the covenant-keeping love between Christ and his people to the world in a way that no other event or institution does. Marriage, therefore, is not mainly about being in love. It's mainly about telling the truth with our lives. And staying married is not about staying in love. It is about keeping covenant and putting the glory of Christ's covenant-keeping love on display."³

Do you see it? Marriage is not about us, but about the pre-eminence of Christ. The same holds true in our jobs! Ultimate employment is NOT about making money or being fulfilled. It is about the proclamation of Christ as we serve as image bearers and not as animals. Accordingly at work we are about putting Christ's Covenant-Keeping love on display! The famous surgeon, Howard A. Kelly who

² Compare Ephesians 5:32

³ John Piper, *This Momentary Marriage*, Good News and Crossway, April 2009, ISBN 1433507129, [promotional literature](#)

wrote, as he graduated from medical school said this:

"Today I dedicate myself, my time, my capabilities, my ambition, everything to Him. Blessed Lord, sanctify me to Thy uses; give me no worldly success which may not lead me nearer to my Savior."

Above the mantel in a home in the South reads this message:

*That in all things
Christ might have the Pre-Eminence!
Colossians 1:18*

We must understand that on the forehead of every Christian God stamps this verse. Truly, life is about Christ receiving the glory! The well-known martyr Jim Elliot who wrote right after college:

"God, I pray thee, light these idle sticks of my life that I may burn for thee. Consume my life, my God, for it is Thine..."

As I close, I want to draw your attention to something utterly amazing. That we have been saved so that Christ might be glorified is not to say that God does not care for us.

Romans 8:28, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose."

Romans 8:29, "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, **that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.**"

In other words, Christ's glory includes the saving of a people whom He loves unto their benefit! Don't miss it:

- That Christ is first implies that we are second!
- That Christ is to be the MOST honored means that we obtain some honor!

Christ's pre-eminence includes the salvation of His people! To put it another way, that I throw a birthday party for my wife where

- Gifts are given to all.
- Fine food is served.
- You are invited.

Is no reason to conclude

- That I don't care about you, or
- That the party's for you.

Both are true: God desires our presence at His party, but the celebration is for Christ!

About Bethel Presbyterian Church

The Bethel Presbyterian Church Ministry of the Word is published regularly.

VISIT US WHEN IN Broomfield, COLORADO

Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10th Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

All our sermons can be accessed via the World Wide Web. The recording for this sermon and these notes can be found at [Exalting Christ](#). The web address for all sermons at Bethel Presbyterian Church can be found out as follows: <http://bethelpresbyterian.sermonaudio.com>

About the Preacher

Greg Thurston preached this sermon on November 16, 2008. Greg is the preacher at Bethel Presbyterian Church