

**Gospel Ambition**  
**Who Is the Jesus We Are Ambitious to Know?**  
**Philippians 3:8-11, Colossians 1:1-29**  
**Sermon Outline**

**Introduction:** Paul's deep ambition to know Jesus troubles us sometimes. We have a hard time seeing how it fits with all the other ambitions and achievements of this life. The reason for the problem is that our version of Jesus is too small.

**I) Who is the Jesus whom we should be ambitious to know?**

**A) The man we have been waiting for**

**B) The Creator and Sustainer of everything**

**C) The Reconciler of everything**

**II) What bearing should knowing this Jesus have on all the other ambitions of life?**

**A) Humble dependence**

**B) Healthy fear lest we ignore or misrepresent him in whatever we do**

- Contextualizing
- Getting help from each other

**C) Hope**

**Questions for Reflection this Week**

- 1) Look at Philippians 3:8-14. Paul here says that his one great ambition in life is to know Christ. Does this make you feel uncomfortable? How does it make sense of all the legitimate things you fill your life with—work, study, the arts, sports, raising kids, helping to make the world a better place?
- 2) Look at Colossians 1:15-20—what many scholars have called a hymn of Christ. List all the things that it declares about Jesus Christ. Take careful note of every phrase. What notions are confusing? Which are new? Which stir your heart to praise?
- 3) When Paul speaks of “thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities” he is referring not only to political rulers—but spiritual beings and to underlying structures of the cosmos. Some of the latter are structures of thought that underlie reason, structures of authority that underlie governance wherever it occurs (from the home to the state), structures of relationship that underlie all social and economic exchange, structures of physics that underlie what we call laws and theories, structures of human existence that underlie human flourishing. Have you thought of Jesus being the creator and sustainer of these structures? What impact does thinking this way have on you?

- 4) Colossians 1:20 reads that “through Jesus God has reconciled all things to himself.” This statement implies that all things—reality in its totality (not just people)—requires reconciling to God. What does this mean? Where do you see the absence of reconciliation?
- 5) Reflect on the following: “The reason we can and should relax about ‘being first’ is that we are not and never will be first in anything. God has appointed someone else—another human being—to be first (‘pre-eminent’). We must like John the Baptist cry, ‘He must be greater and I must be smaller.’ Whenever God brings another human being into your life whose gifts or success eclipse you own (even if the person is a jerk), God is saying, ‘Dear one, I love you. But you must give way in your ambition to be at the top. Another man, my beloved Son Jesus, must be first. Your greatness will be found in him.’”
- 6) If Jesus is the Lord of every time and place, then we must learn to contextualize him. To contextualize him is to translate his into a particular situation without changing him. Blacks need to discover, for example, that he is not white. Business people, for another example, need to see that he is as likely to ‘wear’ a business suit as he is to ‘wear’ a robe and sandals. What are the contextualizing issues that you face in your workplace, school, or neighborhood? Remember as you answer that Jesus does not mean simply to rule the people and relationships at work, but he means to rule the work itself.
- 7) Make a plan to talk and pray with a Christian in your neighborhood or in your line of work about contextualizing Jesus in that neighborhood or line of work.
- 8) Colossians 1 rings with a sense of hope. What is the content of the hope Paul describes? How does that hope affect you as you seek to know Christ and to make him known in all of your life?