

Will you reign with Christ?

Bryn Jones

God's purpose in calling us to be labourers together with Him during this present age is not simply that the apparent work that he sets before us may be accomplished. It is rather, that, in the accomplishment of this work, we may be prepared for our chief and ultimate service in the age to come.

Dr F L Chapell, 'First Born Sons' by G H Lang, (Schoettle Publishing Company Inc. Hayesville, NC, 28904, 1997)

Looking back through the years to my early days as a Christian, I am amazed at how shallow the teaching was in many churches, much of it quite unbiblical. Nowhere was this more evident than on the issues of the kingdom of God and the afterlife. The only thing I was taught about the kingdom of God was that I would go there (place) when I died, that it was the same as the kingdom of heaven, which was a wonderful place with streets paved with gold.

When I asked, 'What will I do there?' I received such vague responses as 'Well...uh...worship and fellowship I suppose!'

This did not excite me, as I tended already to get bored with repetitive choruses. Furthermore their equating the kingdom of God with a place we would enter when we died left me intellectually and emotionally unfulfilled. It did not make sense to pray, 'Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven', if we did not enter His kingdom until we had died and gone to heaven.

I became frustrated at God's apparent lack of a well thought through plan for the future. I was angered by my world-view of injustice, poverty, racism, and international business hegemony upon the developing world; politics appeared all promise and no delivery on these issues. Most Christians I knew had opted out, exchanging responsibility for 'pie in the sky in the sweet bye and bye!' I wanted to shout aloud in every church, 'Get real will you!'

However, as I got into the scriptures the Holy Spirit began to lead me into the truth. O how wonderful it has become to see that God has a glorious purpose which is not waiting to be outworked in the future age but is already being worked out here and now. He has a plan that deals with poverty, sickness, crime, violence, substance abuse and all forms of injustice such as racism, ageism and gender inequality. Also I

am excited by participation in this universal programme of spiritual, moral, economic and social restoration. As co-heirs with Christ we are called to share His glorious supremacy over all things in a new heavens and earth (Col 1:18).

The reason most Christians are not able to share their hope of the ages to come is they do not know what lies beyond the grave. Jesus said 'you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free'. This knowledge of which he spoke is not mere information knowledge but experiential knowledge.

We need to firmly grasp the scope of God's dynamic plan for universal rule. Christ understandably is the key to it all, since He first brought everything into existence. It is all His, first by creation then by redemption.

17He was there before any of it came into existence and holds it all together right up to this moment. 18And when it comes to the church, he organizes and holds it together, like a head does a body. He was 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. (Col 1: 17,18 - The Message)
9God's secret plan has now been revealed to us; it is a plan centred on Christ, designed long ago according to his good pleasure. 10And this is his plan: At the right time he will bring everything together under the authority of Christ--everything in heaven and on earth. (Eph 1: 9,10 - NLT)

The biblical perspective of Christ ruling supreme over all things shows Him doing this in conjunction with those his sons who are qualified to reign with Him. The Christ that will rule over everything will be the corporate Christ; this includes the many sons he is bringing to glory (Heb 2:10). These sons will operate with the exact same authority that He does.

26To him who overcomes and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations--27'He will rule them with an iron sceptre; he will dash them to pieces like pottery' -- 28just as I have received authority from my Father. I will also give him the morning star. (Rev 2: 26-28)

21To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne. (Rev 3:21)

What does it mean to be 'In Christ'?

One of Paul's favourite expressions for believers is to refer to us as being "in Christ". When Paul refers to us in this way he does not simply mean 'in Jesus' as a person, but in all that Christ encompasses. As the 'Word made flesh', the son is the full disclosure of God's mind and heart for man. He is the invisible God made visible; man as God intended man to be.

What dignity God has bestowed on man, that following the resurrection He received Jesus the God-man to sit with Him in His throne in the heavens. Everything God has planned for this age and the ages yet to come is under His oversight.

15We look at this Son and see the God who cannot be seen. We look at this Son and see God's original purpose in everything created. 16For everything, absolutely everything, above and below, visible and invisible, rank after rank after rank of angels--everything got started in him and finds its purpose in him. 17He was there before any of it came into existence and holds it all together right up to this moment. 18And when it comes to the church, he organizes and holds it together, like a head does a body.

He was 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. 19So spacious is he, so roomy, that everything of God finds its proper place in him without crowding. (Col 1:15-19 - The Message)

Sharing Christ's Rule

Jesus told His disciples that He wanted them to fully share His rule. Then the apostle John while exiled on the island of Patmos received Christ's message to the churches, and was told this privilege was open to all God's overcoming sons. 28You are those who have stood by me in my trials. 29And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, 30so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. (Lk 22:28-30)

21To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne. (Rev 3:21)

To share His Rule is not hard work or great pressure. This is confirmed to us in the words 'He sat down in the place and posture of full rule and rest.' He who sat on God's throne had also said 'take my yoke upon you and learn from me, my yoke is easy and my burden is light.'

This glorious prospect of co-rule with Christ shows the extensive reach of God's grace. How great is the wisdom of God that he has used the fall of earth-tied Adam to raise man to the highest place in the highest heaven. In Christ (corporate new man) God has given humanity a new beginning with a destiny beyond that of Adam (corporate fallen humanity) and this was just the beginning of everything being made new. Such wisdom controls the meticulous order of the divine administration down to the finest detail of God's plan for the ages to come.

9And he made known to us the mystery of his will according to his good pleasure, which he purposed in Christ, 10to be put into effect when the times will have reached their fulfilment--to bring all things in heaven and on earth together under one head, even Christ. 11In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will, 12in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. 13And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession--to the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:9-14)

Who Rules the Present Age?

When God created the original order of heavens and earth they were in perfect harmony and an expression of His will and nature. God had given Adam, the first man, authority to rule on the earth on God's behalf. He would however keep one command God gave of not eating from the tree of good and evil. Adam however rebelled against this command and submitted to the word of God's archenemy, Satan. Through this disobedience Adam lost his likeness to God in nature, lost his sense of creative purpose, which was to fill the whole earth with God's likeness and image and rule as lord of the earth. Now Adam had surrendered to Satan who became the administrative and religious head of this age. In this capacity Satan has kept mankind in blindness to the gospel of Christ ever since. (2 Cor 4:4)

This does not mean however, that God has given unchecked rule in the earth to Satan and his demonic hosts; although it may appear that way sometimes. God continued His rule of this earth by giving power and authority to unfallen angels to restrain and restrict the ungodly intentions and activities of Satan and his minions. 13 But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia. (Dan 10: 13)

Paul saw, that under Christ's rule there would emerge a new heavens and a new earth, the present heaven and earth having been thoroughly purged of all evil. A new order of things will emerge, which will be so wonderful that the righteous inhabitants (glorified saints) will not even remember the previous times (of evil and darkness (Is 65:17).

What happens to the old creation?

The existing creation, the present heavens and earth have been corrupted and devastated by untold evils and judgement and are consequently incompatible with both the will and nature of God. God presents us with a biblical picture of the

existing creation being totally destroyed by fire and the earth thoroughly purged of the consequences of sin and judgement. (2Pet 3: 12,13)

*7By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. (2 Pet 3:7)
12 That day will bring `about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. 13But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. (2 Pet 3:12, 13)*

This destruction of existing heavens and earth is not to be taken literally but as imagery of the purging judgements of God on all its evils. Remember, symbolic Bible language must be consistently interpreted. It must not alternate between having a spiritual meaning and then, because it fits our predetermined belief-system, changed to being a literal physical thing. For example, the fires here mentioned are symbolic of God's purging judgements, not literal flames, anymore than, 'you shall be baptised with the Holy Spirit and with fire', meant we would be burned up!

Rulers in Training

Have you ever wondered why you are going through the setbacks and difficulties you are currently facing? It is because we, His sons, are destined to share Christ's glorious reign that we experience the testing, disciplines, training and chastisement that we do. All things are developing our character, so that we are being changed into His image and likeness. Not all setbacks, difficulties, pressures and problems should be read as signs of God's disfavour. They are a mix of those God has ordained and prepared for us to go through and those the enemy intended to weaken or even destroy us by, but even those God in His sovereignty has taken hold of and made them work together for our good. All of them should be seen as God's means of producing in us an enlargement of faith through becoming overcomers in every sphere of life. They are His way of training us so that we come to full maturity in Christ. They are God's 'ways and means committee' to equip us for our role alongside Christ in restoring all things into his divine purpose and plan. These are also the means by which God is honing our skills for the responsibilities that we are destined to undertake in the ages to come.

5And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, 6because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son."7Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? 8If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. (Heb 12: 5-8)

All this is the prelude to unfolding the developing plan of God for the world and man throughout ages yet to come, ages that God has subjected to man's authority, not that of angels. (Heb 2:5)

Our maturity is not a sudden 'happening' or 'quantum leap' but rather a progressive experience as we pursue our destiny. Paul likens it to the process of the development of a child in passage to adulthood. (1Cor 13:11; 14:20)

Jesus exemplified this in the progress of his life and ministry, that he had one desire, and in pursuit of this had developed keen discernment and sound judgement in religious, social, economic and political issues. (John 4:34)

It was Paul's similar desire that pressed him to strenuously engage in efforts to help the early Christians under his ministry, attain maturity in readiness to be presented by Christ as His Bride before God and the heavenly hosts. (Col 1:28,29; Eph 5: 25-27; Rev 21: 1, 2)

The Challenge of This Present Age

Today the challenge to the whole body of Christ is to 'flesh out' our sonship, that we walk as sons of God in our generation; that Jesus Christ is seen in our streets and neighbourhoods, universities and colleges, nurseries and schools, in the home and commercial world, in the 'market place' of life. When this is seen in the church globally then the nations will come to us seeking to learn the ways of the Lord. The consequence of which will be the end of all war, the transference of vast sums of money from military defence and arms procurement to the economic and social development of every nation on earth. (Is 2:2-4 Mic 4:1-5; Rom 5:17)

The School of the Spirit

Jesus made clear when speaking of His Father's house that there are different spheres or places to live. God's pleasure is in those whose obedience of faith in pursuit of purpose is reflected in these places. (John 14:2; cf 14:23)

In anticipation of His sons becoming overcomers, God honours them by rewarding them with universal rule with Christ.

This is why the New Testament does not portray the church as a motley group of people, a 'rag-bag' of dependent people who have escaped hell, but rather as those He has 'pre-destined to sonship'. It is not what we were but what we are becoming, not where we were but where we are heading that God emphasises. We are in the 'school of the Spirit' being spiritually educated to bring us all to the level essential to reigning with Christ over His universal kingdom. (Eph 1:5; 4:11-13; Rev 3:21)

At the same time we are not meant to wait to be found worthy to start reigning in the next age. We should live this way here and now since we are already sitting alongside Christ in the heavenly places, and have already tasted the power of the coming age. (Eph 2:4-6; Heb 6: 4,5)

God's ultimate administration is prefigured in this age, through human agencies throughout the world, even though their function is impaired by sin.

1Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. 2Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. 3For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you. 4For he is God's servant to do you good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword for nothing. He is God's servant, an agent of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. 5Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. 6This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. 7Give everyone what you owe him: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honour, then honour. Rom 13: 1-7

Human government has been ordained to serve God's interests in securing a well ordered society for the enactment of God's will on earth. Although presently warped and corrupted it will, when restored, be a perfect ordered world of men with heaven and earth harmonised.

War in the Heavens

Severe disruption occurred in the heavens when Satan drew a third of the angels into his rebellion against God. It was such a major disruption of the universal administration of God that it necessitated an entire restoration of heavenly government. We know God is omniscient, that is 'all seeing', therefore we know that the subtle and devious method of intrigue by Satan to provoke rebellion amongst the angels in the heavens was known to God. Then you ask, 'Why did God not do something about it and head it off?' It was because God's greater plan had already taken it into account and God allowed it because He intended using the rebellion in the angelic world to make room in His heavenly administration for man. This was in God's pre-determined plan. He had decided His unique son Jesus Christ would have many co-heirs with Him.

Inheriting the Kingdom: Gift or Reward?

It is gloriously true that the forgiveness of sins and the receiving of eternal salvation in Christ are free gifts. (Rom 3:24; 6:23)

But, inheriting the kingdom requires more than our receiving it as free gift. We have to prove our worthiness to share with Christ in the rule of his kingdom. Multitudes followed Christ. They loved His teaching, were excited by the miracles, but it was only to the inner core that followed him wholly did Christ say.

“You are those who have stood by me in my trials. And I confer on you a kingdom, just as my Father conferred one on me, so that you may eat and drink at my table in my kingdom and sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” (Luke 22: 28-30)

It is clear from these scriptures that the authority of the kingdom, the honour and dignity of sitting with him at the chief table in the day of feasting is reward for a superior life of devotion. Such reward excited the disciples but at the same time Christ reminded them that this promise would only find its fulfilment as they overcame the enemy in the same way that he has. There will be no shortcuts; we have to prove ourselves worthy as He has. (Matt 10:24,25; Rev 3:21)

We have to exercise authority and overcome the powers of darkness in the heavenly places. Paul was deeply aware of the invisible opposing forces that he and others were facing. There were times when it seemed that hell threatened to overwhelm him, but he laid hold of the power of the name of Jesus and overcame the enemy assaults. Have you not felt the intensifying of conflict in our times with unseen forces assaulting your health, finances, family and job all at one time? Why is this happening?

It is because Satan is aware that his time is short, that Christ will soon return to reign in glory in His sons. Satan knows that we are amongst those determined to be ready when Jesus Christ comes, that is why we are the focal point of the enemy assault. Satan relies heavily on Christians not knowing who they are in Christ, what they have received in Christ and what they can do in Christ. It is the lack of knowledge of these things that leave Christians vulnerable to defeat, despair, with their dreams destroyed. In Christ we have all that it takes to be overcomers in Christ. (Rom 8:14; 2 Pet 1:3, 4; Phil 4:13)

The Role of Suffering in the Life of Faith

In this present generation, suffering^[1] is being quietly removed by some from the life of faith and the emphasis placed entirely on receiving God's covenant blessings. We need to be re-awakened to the cost of discipleship in the Kingdom. To respond positively to the challenge of suffering which cannot compare with the honour and privilege of our place alongside Christ in glory. (Rom 8: 17,18)

It was Jesus himself that linked suffering with glory. One cannot share His glory unless one is willing to share His suffering. (Heb 2:10; 2 Thess 1:5; 2 Cor 1:5) When two of His disciples asked that they might have a place on his right and left hands in the future kingdom, he replied, 'you know not what you ask.' It wasn't that they did not realise the important role or the great honour they were requesting, but what they were ignorant of was the price that had to be paid in suffering with him. That is why Jesus used this situation to press the thought of their undergoing suffering. (Mark 10: 37-40)

The authority to rule the nations of the world and to share the glory of Christ throughout the universe are promised to the overcomers. Christ anticipated his people attaining the honour of reigning with him on the same conditions as he. The many sons must come the same way as the Christ-son to the throne.

21 To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne. (Rev 3: 21)

This means we face up to our difficulties not run from them. We refuse to consider escapism as our way out of pressure. We will not compromise to maintain our 'comfort zones'. We will keep on 'keeping on'; we will press forward into all we know to be the will of God. We will not succumb to mediocrity to secure a dead end lifestyle. We will passionately pursue His calling on our lives, doing the works we are predestined to do, proving by His grace to be overcomers. We can never be overcomers unless there is something to overcome. Those who do overcome in this age will, at its close, hear His voice saying:

21... 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' (Matt 25:21)

It is important that you do not misunderstand me, I am not referring to our redemption through the forgiveness of sins and our being made righteous by faith alone which justifies us in God's eyes. No works on our part can have the slightest influence on that which is a free gift from God. Mercy and grace alone are the divine means of our salvation. (Eph 2:8)

However there is something higher and more wonderful in our salvation than escaping God's wrath, it is attaining to His good pleasure in Christ. It was for this Paul was prepared to suffer the loss of everything that men see as important and meritorious. (Phil 3:7,8; 2Cor 4: 10-15)

These are some of the most important and revealing passages of scripture concerning the issue of qualifying for reign with Christ. They show Paul's attitude to the best the world could offer in status. He saw it all as 'rubbish' when compared with Christ.

The First Resurrection

For Paul, to attain to the first resurrection was the great longing of his heart. He wanted to gain a place in the glorious heavenly city where God will live and from where he will rule over the universal order His creation. In writing to the Philippians, Paul's use of the phrase, 'the resurrection out from among the dead' is a repetition of something Christ had previously said concerning the resurrection, referring to those who would be 'accounted worthy' to attain to that age and the resurrection out from among the dead. (Lk 20:35)

Paul provocatively inspired the Christian community at Philippi to keep advancing so that they, like him, would also receive the reward. In 'street talk' Paul was saying, the reward is not to those who 'talk the talk' but to those who 'walk the talk'. The scriptures clearly show that sharing with Christ and His reign in the kingdom, to which God has called us, is 'the reward' for those 'accounted worthy'. This is also stated by Christ himself. (Matt 10: 24; 37, 38; Lk 9: 62)

This has nothing to do, as I have already stated, with saving our soul from hell, for we cannot gain any merit by any act of obedience that would earn 'eternal salvation', that is something Christ alone secured for us. What this passage is referring to is the reward for those who make the kingdom priority over all else in their lives. (Matt 6:33)

This applies to the whole human race, but Paul explains this does not mean all people at the same time, but each in his own turn. (1 Cor 15: 21-24)

In the future administration of Gods kingdom, it is the overcoming sons who will share universal rule with Christ the King of Glory. This explains a great deal of our present day experience of life. We are being trained in readiness for the coming age, God is enlarging our capacity in mind, emotions and faith for what is before us. It is time to discover this as often the psalmists did. (Ps 18:28; 112:4; 139: 12)

The Church of the Firstborn

Under the law, the first-born son inherited twice as much of the father's estate as any other child. It was to the firstborn son that the privilege and legal right of control in the family was given, subject to the father, and also it was the firstborn son that acted as the family priest.

17 He must acknowledge the son of his unloved wife as the firstborn by giving him a double share of all he has. That son is the first sign of his father's strength. The right of the firstborn belongs to him. (Deut 21: 17)

What is being said here is that, on the wider universal stage where God enlarges His family to embrace the entire universal order of beings that He has created,

there will be one company who will be to the rest what the 'firstborn' was to the individual family. This company, are the sons of God, the church of the firstborn.

22But you have come to Mount Zion, to the heavenly Jerusalem, the city of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, 23to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, (Heb 12: 22, 23)

The noun here is plural and therefore can't refer to Christ alone, which is further emphasised by the plural verb 'who are enrolled'. What a glorious prospect; what a wonderful promise; what reward lies before us; what a great prize! We now thoroughly understand why any persecution, any suffering for righteousness that we experience here, can only be viewed as 'this light affliction'. (2 Cor 4:17; Rom 8:18)

You Determine Your Future

There are many Christians who wrongly assume that, irrespective of their lifestyle, they will rule with Christ. This is not so, there are qualifications relevant to the kingdom, not only to its entry, but also to its reward.

21"Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. (Matt 7:21)

62Jesus replied, "No one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God." (Lk 9:62)

It may shock us but it is nevertheless true that Paul discovered that many Christians in the churches were living like unbelievers and he found it necessary to warn the Christians also that to live this way meant that they would forfeit their inheritance in the Kingdom of God.

21and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God. (Gal 5:21)

3But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. 5For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person--such a man is an idolater--has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. (Eph 5:3, 5)

Not all Christians will come into the fullness of the blessings of the kingdom of God in the future age; on the contrary many will miss this because of their lifestyle. (1 Cor 6: 9)

I know this sounds strange to those Christians who have been taught that by their initial act of faith in Christ they were guaranteed the same degree of future bliss and responsibility as anyone else, irrespective of their life thereafter...this is not so. Any lifestyle filled with dead works, that is, not motivated by love and faith, but springing from personal agendas or selfish ambition, can jeopardise our eternal future in glory. The rewards for overcoming are only given to those who overcome. It is time for Christians to awake to the hour, the signs of our time are telling us it will not be long before the end of the age.

The question then arises, 'What happens to those believers who live like unbelievers, after the way of the flesh, when Jesus returns?' Whereas they receive a place in the eternal kingdom through the mercy and grace of God, they do not receive the reward of inheriting the kingdom, that is, sharing in rule with Christ.

Paul inferred this when calling on the Corinthians to exercise godly judgement on the man who called himself a brother, but was living immorally with his stepmother. Paul urged the Corinthian church to:

Hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord. (1 Cor 5: 5)

This was only done in extreme circumstances where persons, despite warning, persisted unrepentantly in their wrongdoing They forfeit their reward and inheritance in the kingdom of the coming age. (1 Cor 6: 9,10)

Paul was frustrated and appalled by people who after everything had been prepared for their advance to mature sonship, chose to engage in things contrary to true spiritual life. He warned the Christians to avoid such people. 11But now I am writing you that you must not associate with anyone who calls himself a brother but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or a slanderer, a drunkard or a swindler. With such a man do not even eat. (1 Cor 5:11)

Receiving salvation from the wrath of God is not the same as being resurrected in glory to rule in the kingdom. The first is based on mercy the latter on merit, the first we receive, the second we attain.

What a thrilling thing it is to know we are not going to spend eternity walking about streets of gold, nor singing choruses all day. We have the glorious prospect of sharing with Christ in the achieving of God's restoration purpose universally. We will ever thank Him for saving us, and making us His sons. There is every reason for us to pursue passionately the purpose of God and thus attain our destiny as co-heirs with Christ in all things.

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17He was there before any of it came into existence and holds it all together right up to this moment. 18And when it comes to the church, he organizes and holds it together, like a head does a body. He was 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. (Col 1: 15-18 - The Message)

[1] Editors note: Suffering here can be defined loosely as the suffering of persecution, the suffering of resisting the flesh in order to obey God, the suffering to refuse to quit, but to overcome no matter what trouble we have in this life. Suffering cannot possibly be defined as suffering sickness for Jesus or putting up with circumstances that are thrown at us by the Enemy. Suffering is a vital part of the life of faith, but to misunderstand suffering can be very destructive.