Jesus, The Head of the Church

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Preacher: Dr. Michael Staton

[0:00] This is the First Mustang Pulpit Podcast. A podcast of the weekly preaching and teaching at First Mustang.! Thank you for joining us. We are beginning on Sunday morning today for the next number of weeks.

It's going to look at the church. It is our desire that we would be well grounded in what the Bible says about who we are and the work that we are to do.
And so I want us to take some time on Sunday mornings and just focus on the church. Because it's critically important that we don't simply gather here, but that what we do when we gather is what the Lord wants us to do.
I love the church. I've always loved the church. By God's grace, I never had to be drugged to church. I always loved gathering on Sundays.
Even as a little kid, I loved getting to be at church, to sing and to be a part of what the church does. And today, all these years later, I still find myself every Saturday evening getting a little antsy, excited to be here, to be with you, to serve with you, to worship with you, to engage with you.
[1:27] And it's not just this local church, as much as I love our local church, it's not just our local church I'm thankful for. I'm thankful for every faithful church. There are good churches in our city, good churches across our state, and all across our country, and around the world.

We thank the Lord for that. And as I think we all understand, there is no faithful church that is ever our competition. If there's any part of that in your mind, just get rid of that.
Any church that proclaims Christ, that preaches the Gospel, that makes much of Jesus, that seeks to follow the Word of God, that church, they are our brothers and sisters.
They're not our competitors. We're not fighting with them over members. We are co-laborers together in the work that the Lord has called us to do.
There is a danger in our part of the nation, though. My wife and I were on vacation a couple of weeks ago, and we were in a very large city in the northwest, and we noticed that as we walked around the streets of that city, there were very few churches.
[2:41] Very hard to find any. And I would ask people that we met in a store, or waiters in a restaurant that we were at, I would ask them about what church they attend, and what they know about churches around, and they would just look at me like I had lost my mind.

In fact, a couple of occasions, they actually got quite upset and frustrated, just noticeably frustrated that I would even bring that up. But when you walk around our state, in our city, you see churches everywhere.
And while there's much of that to be thankful for, there is a danger, and the danger is that just because an organization calls themselves a church does not mean that they are doing what the Lord would want them to do.
I'm thankful. I'm thankful. We've got so many great churches around us. I'm thankful for every church, and every faithful pastor, every faithful member of a good, true, biblical church, wherever they may be.
I praise the Lord for that. But, just because someone calls themselves a church does not mean that they are a biblical church. Just because a group of people meet together, and they've done the same thing for a long time, that by itself does not mean that the Lord is pleased with that.
[4:05] Our church, by God's grace, has been around for 123 years. But just the fact that we've been here a long time, by itself, does not mean that God would be pleased with what we do.

If what we do is faithful, and biblical, and obedient, then the Lord is honored. If what we were to do is to meet, and to gather faithfully for years, and decades, and even more than a century, but not do what God has called to do through His Word, then we would be missing the point.

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And so the goal is not just to get to church. The goal is just not to make sure your kids go to a church. The goal is to make sure that we are understanding what a biblical church is.
And over the next number of weeks, as we look at some of these themes and topics, by no means am I in any way claiming that we've got it figured out, or that our church is the only one that has it figured out, neither of those are where my heart is.
I do want us to make sure that we understand what we do, and why we do it. I do want to make sure we understand what the biblical foundation is, for what we believe, and how we organize, and the way that we do ministry.
[5:24] But also, there may be some areas that we come across where we say, you know what, we need to get better at this. Or there may be some things we see this semester in the New Testament that we say, we ought to have some conversations about how we can be more biblical in this way.

This is not designed to be a few weeks where we just talk about, look what we've done, look how great we are. This is for us to say, this is the mirror of God's Word, and where we are doing it right, let's persevere in faithfulness.
And where we need to adjust anyway, let's be willing to do that individually, as families, as a collection, as a church family. We want to make sure, not just that we're being consistent, but that we are doing things the right way.
In my former life, I used to love to play golf. It's been years and years, but I used to love to play golf, and I would go to the driving range all the time, and I would just hit ball after ball after ball after ball after ball.
The problem was, I didn't have a clue how to swing. I could play well enough to have fun with my buddies, but I never really knew what I was doing. And I soon realized that I can go hit practice shot after practice shot, but if I'm not doing it right, all I'm doing would be getting bad habits even more ingrained into what I'm doing.
[6:56] That same thing happens in churches all the time. Where you have churches who meet week after week, if they're not biblical, if they don't do what the Scripture calls them to do, all they're doing is getting those man-made traditions or ideas or preferences ingrained even deeper into the heart and DNA of that organization, and it becomes harder to change.

And so we want to look for these next number of weeks at what the Bible says a church should do. How do we worship? What should we do when we gather? What's our mission?
What's our message? What is church membership all about? What is church discipline about? How can we keep the body of Christ pure? What should pastors and elders and shepherds, what's their biblical New Testament role?
But we start today where I think we need to start. And that's at the top. Who's at the top of the organizational chart for a true church?
Who's the leader? Who's the boss? Who ultimately needs to be in charge of everything that happens and who is it that we all are to submit to ultimately?
[8:22] The answer, of course, and the only answer is Jesus Christ, the head of the church. And so I want us to consider that truth today.

When that question comes to your mind, who is the head of the church? Who runs the church? Who ultimately leads the church? Depending on your background, depending on the churches you've been a part of, some, the first thought that comes to your mind might be, well, it's the senior pastor.
He leads the church. Or maybe you come from a different church background. You would say, well, it's the deacons. They're the bosses. They lead. They run the church. Or maybe from your experience, you would say, well, it's the church member with the most influence in the church.
Or it's the wealthiest church members. Or it's the church members who are the most influential in the community. But let's be clear. The only answer to the question of who is the head of the church is the Lord Jesus Christ.
It's not the pastor. It's not the group of pastors. It's not a group of leaders. It's not a group of teachers. It's not a group of deacons.
[9:44] It's not a group of long-term members. The only answer to who is the head of the church is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, most, not all, but most churches would nod in affirmation of what I've just said.

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Most churches would at least give a tip of the hat to that belief that the Lord is the head of the church.
And yet, when it comes down to their preference versus Scripture, if preference wins out, they've made themselves the Lord of the church.
They may say Christ is the head of the church, but if there is a difference in what the Bible says they should think and act and do, and what their tradition says, if tradition wins out, then in that place, their love of tradition is the true head of the church.
[10:53] But my concern, at least in these weeks, is not first for other churches. My concern is first for us.

We should not assume that just because our church has been here a long time that we do everything right. We should not assume that just because there is peace and unity among us that we do everything right.
If there is anything that we think, believe, practice, or do that does not line up with the Bible, then we should not first be pointing fingers at other congregations.
We must first reckon in our own heart, in our own church, how we can be more biblical. And so I hope these weeks will be encouraging and helpful and explanatory, but I also pray they would be weeks that would help every one of us consider.
Are we, as individuals, and are we, as a collective church family, are we doing exactly and precisely what the Bible calls us to do?
[12:09] Most of the time we're walking verse by verse through books of the Bible, just chapter by chapter, verse by verse, line by line. We'll still do that some this fall, but some of these messages, because of the nature of them, we're going to look at a few different passages and that will be true for today.

So if you'd open your Bible with me to Ephesians chapter 1, I want to show you about four things that I hope will be a strong foundation for us as we proceed through our study on the church.
Number one, make note of this, Christ is the authority of the church. Christ is the authority of the church. Ephesians 1, look at verse 22.
And He put all things under His feet and gave Him as head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.
This reminds us that Christ is the Lord over everything. And God has given this one, His Son, the ruler of all things, to be head of the church.
[13:29] Let's be certain, friends, that in our own hearts, individually and collectively, that we embrace Christ as our true authority. And by the way, what would be the evidence that we truly believe Christ is our authority?

The evidence would be our obedience. If we say Christ is the authority of the church and we do not do what His Word says, then whatever our mouth may speak, our lives would be contrary to that.
If we really believe that Christ is our authority, the evidence of that would be our obedience, both individually and collectively as a church.
God the Father has given Christ the Son, the ruler of all things, to be our authority. Listen to the words of one teacher who put it this way.
He says, God didn't give us Gabriel, the angel, to be the head of the church. He didn't give us Michael, the angel, to be the head of the church. He didn't give us 10,000 really super angels to be the head of the church.
[14:51] He didn't give us 20,000 really creative angels to be the head of the church. He didn't just give us gifted preachers, teachers, theologians, and evangelists to guide and lead the church.

He gave us the king of the universe to be our head and our shepherd. Christ, the ruler of all things, is the authority in the church. And look at verse 23, speaking of the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills all in all. This is an amazing statement. Christ, who was crucified, laid in the tomb, brought back to life on the third day, witnessed by many individuals over the course of some time, ascended up into heaven. But today, the body of Christ, that's us. The church. It has been given to us to reflect the glory of our ruler, our Lord, the authority of the church.
The evidence that we truly bow to the authority of Christ is that we, his body, would magnify him, obey him. And all things strive for obedience to his word. The first thing that must be clear and must be settled in our hearts, if we are going to live as a church the way that we should, is that we must recognize and never forget that it is Christ who is the authority in this place.

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What God has said, we believe, we proclaim, and may we strive to obey it.
Where God has been clear, we don't try to make it confusing. What the Bible teaches, we give no credence to what the world may say about it, because if God has spoken it, he is our authority. It is settled.
[17:16] We want to be loving and gracious and kind, respectful and merciful, compassionate, but absolutely bold and courageous in declaring for all to hear inside the church and outside the church, that where God has spoken in his word, that is our authority, because Christ is the head of the church.

If he is our authority, that ought to be made clear by our obedience to his word. Christ is not only the authority of the church, this is really the heart of it all, number two, that Christ is the head of the church.
As the authority, he's the head of the church. Go over to chapter 4 in Ephesians. In chapter 4, I want you to look at verses 15 and 16 with me.
Rather, speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head into Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.
Now notice, biblically speaking, if we believe Christ is the head of the church, which is what verse 15 says, then that should produce something.
[19:03] Believing Christ is the head in verse 15 produces, verse 16, love among the body. If the evidence that we believe Christ is the authority is our obedience, the evidence that we believe Christ is the head of the church is our love.

This time of year when school starts, I imagine most of you do what parents have done for a long time. You take your child, you line them up against that wall in your pantry, or wherever you measure their height, and you put a little pencil mark on their top of their head, and if your conversations are like mine were years ago, you have to say you can't be on your tippy toes, you've got to be flat-footed, and quit straining your neck, and quit poofing up your hair.
We just want to measure how tall you are, not how high your hair is. And then you mark it on the wall, and your child looks at that wall, and they're either ecstatic, or they're just mad at the world. Either way, though, there is some clear objective evidence, have you grown?
And heaven helped the family where the younger child grew more than the older child. But you look at the mark on the wall, and you can say you've grown. Where if you do it in your 50s, you've shrunk, whatever it may be.
But it's a little bit harder, isn't it? To measure, are you growing in love? We can't put you on the wall, and just mark it with a ruler. It's a little bit harder.
[20:42] Yet, the Bible is clear, that if you believe Christ is the head of the church, then that body will build itself up in love, verse 16 says.

What would be the marks of growing in love? Are you quicker to obey His Word? Are you more forgiving when those offend you?
Are you more gracious? Are you more heaven-minded? Are you more patient? These would be the marks of growing in love.
And we can say we believe Christ is the head of the church all day long, but if we're not growing in love, there's a disconnect from what we would say we affirm to the transformation in our own life.
Where a church truly believes Christ is the authority, there will be obedience. And where the church truly believes Christ is the head, there will be love.
[21:51] And so it's imperative that our church is growing in love. Love for the Lord, love for His Word, love for each other. But notice this.

The way that you grow in love starts by knowing that Christ is the head of the church. Otherwise, you get church members and congregations that get at odds with each other.
And they start infighting. And when church members start fighting with each other, they start clinging to their preference, their opinions, their own priorities, their own desires, and friction grows. Churches and churches can get torn apart at the seams when that happens. How do you overcome that? By focusing on Christ as the head of the church.
Reminding ourselves that He is the one with the authority. He is the one that we are to worship, to magnify, to proclaim, and to love.

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[23:06] And the better we get at seeing Christ for who He is, the more our love for each other grows. Churches that are filled with fighting get that way because they take their eyes off of Jesus.

If Christ is the ruler among us, we will obey Him. If Christ is the head among us, we will be growing in love.
Love. Look at verse 16. From whom the whole body, joined and held together by every joint with which it is equipped, when each part is working properly, makes the body grow so that it builds itself up in love.
Make sure you're clear on who Christ is. The head of this church is not any staff person. It's not any leader.
The head of the church is Christ. And if Christ is the head, let's all submit to Him through His Word. And as we submit together to the authority of Christ and we see Christ to be as glorious as He is, our love for the Lord will increase and our love for each other will grow.
[24:28] And though we can't chart it like height on a wall, we will be able to recognize it because while it's hard to chart a church growing in love, you sure know when it's there.

And you can absolutely sense when it's missing. Christ is the head of the church. Third, Christ is the focus of the church.
He's not just the authority. He's not just the head. He is to be the focus of the church. Turn just a couple of pages to Colossians chapter 1. We were in Ephesians to the right as Philippians and then Colossians chapter 1.
We read this to begin our service together. Look at verse 18. Speaking of Christ, and He is the head of the body.
Same idea again. He is the head of the body of the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything He might be preeminent.
[25:36] So don't miss this. Christ isn't only the authority. He's the head of the church. We saw it in Ephesians 4. We see it again here in Colossians 1. And I want you to notice this.

He's not just a ruler. He's not just an authority. He's the head, which means by the metaphor being used here, He's connected to us.
He's not just some distant ruler. To say Christ is the head, and we are His body, is absolutely to affirm there is a personal connection and relationship to us.
If you take a physical body and disconnect it from its head, you will not have a living being. And where you have a group of people that call themselves a church, if they do not submit to the lordship of Christ, they are not a living church.
It's a dead organization. But to say Christ is the head of the church is to affirm that He's the authority and ruler, but it's even sweeter than that.
[26:50] It's also to affirm that we're a part of Him. We are connected to Him. We are united to Him. This is an obvious statement of relationship.

Christ is not the ruler in the sense of some king that we don't know, that we can't meet, who just gives rules and decrees from some faraway place that now we've got to obey Him to be loyal citizens of someone we don't know and can't love.
That's not the kind of head we have, ruler we have. We have the head of the church, Christ, who has us as His body. There's a relationship.
There's a connection. We are a part of Him. This is not just about making ourselves do what the Bible says.
This is recognizing that Christ, our head, loves us, cares for us, and wants what is best for us. This is why every true church should joyfully really just ask two questions.
[28:00] What does the Bible say? And how can we do it? That's really the only questions we should have. What does the Bible say?

How can we do that? Because if we understand that Christ is the head of the church and we have a relationship with Him and that He loves us and cares for us, then we will rightly understand that even the rules He gives us are for our good to bless us and to help us, to strengthen us.
What does the Bible say and how can we do it? He is the head of the body of the church. And then it says, He is the beginning. Two things that are meant by this language here.
One means He's the source. He's the beginning. He's the originator. Not only does it refer to the source, but also primacy, meaning the highest rank.

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Christ is the head of the church. He's the beginning. He's the source of it. And He's the highest ranking in the body.
[29:17] All of this, it says, verse 18, that in everything He might be preeminent. 3 John speaks of a man who is inside the church and it says of him that he loved to put himself in first place.

What a dangerous way to live. In 3 John, He is inside the church. He's not outside of it.
He's in it. But He's exposed by saying He loves to put Himself first. Literally, the opposite of according to Colossians 1.18 of who should be first.
It's Christ who should be preeminent. It's not my opinion. It's not our pastor's opinion. It's not our Sunday school teacher's opinion.
It's not your opinion that should be preeminent. It's Christ. It's not my name or your name that should be magnified.
[30:39] It's Christ. Christ is the beginning of the church. He's the source of the church. He has primacy in the church. The goal of everything we do is that in all we say, in all that we do, that Christ would be preeminent.

His name, His purpose, His glory. Preachers matter, but only for a season.
Leadership matters, but leaders come and go. What I do on Sundays, opening the Bible, it matters. Biblically, it's important.
But the day that I'm gone, the head of the church remains. And the church is never about magnifying a man or a career or a brand.
Christ is to be the preeminent one in our hearts individually and in our church collectively. I love how one pastor put it, he said, I am to open the Word of God to you so that you may know the mind of God and the heart of the Savior.
[32:04] Christ is the teacher. I'm only the waiter. I didn't cook the meal. I'm only supposed to deliver it to you hot without messing it up. I was a waiter for many years a long time ago.

My job was not to cook it. My job was to deliver it. to hand it to you.
To not mess it up. I feel that way every Sunday as we look at God's Word together. I don't come up with the truth.
It's not my freedom to change the truth. I just want to deliver the truth to you faithfully and clearly. Christ must be the preeminent one.
Now, what happens in a church if the pastor becomes preeminent? Well, if all the focus is on the pastor, here's the way it works. People begin to critique what the pastor does and when they like the decisions he makes, when they like the sermons he preaches, then people elevate that pastor.
[33:13] And when they don't like the decisions he makes, and they don't like the sermons he preaches, then they begin to tear him down. That's a dangerous way to live. What happens when members become the focus?

But when members become the focus, then what happens is everybody tries to make sure that the church members are pleased, and so all of a sudden, there's certain truths we don't want to preach. It might make somebody upset.
There's certain decisions that the Bible calls us to make we may not make because we wouldn't dare risk drive someone away, even if it means we have to compromise the truth. When members become the focus, everything becomes man-centered.
Another dangerous way to live. And so the pastor cannot be the preeminent one, and the members cannot be the preeminent one, neither would be for the health of the church.
Christ alone is preeminent. Now my guess would be, most all of us, maybe indeed every one of us would say, well we know that, we agree with that, we affirm that.
[34:24] But can I ask you, does your life give evidence that that's true? If Christ is the preeminent one, are you obeying His Word?

Are you doing what His Word says? It's so easy to say, well we believe that Christ is the authority, but if we don't do what His Word says, do we really believe that?
Are there parts of the Bible that you've become so comfortable disobeying that they don't even stir your heart anymore?
If that's true, do we really believe that Christ is the preeminent one? It's so easy to say, well of course Christ is the head of the church, but when His Word talks to you to be a forgiving person, do you forgive quickly?

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When the Word speaks to you about using your gifts to build the body of Christ, are you using your gifts to serve in the church? When the Bible speaks to us about teaching our children the ways of the Lord, are you teaching your kids at home the Bible?
[35:44] When the Bible speaks about not forsaking assembling together, is the Lord's Day your priority to be gathered with the church week after week? It would be easy for us to say we believe these things, but what I want to challenge you to do is to see, is there any part of your life where the practice of your life does not line up with what doctrine you would say you affirm?

Are there Sundays where you physically come here but you say, I don't really want to sing today, I don't really want to listen today, I don't really want to think about the doctrine today, I don't really want to go home and obey what the Word says.
In those moments, we may be here, but have we lived as though Christ is the preeminent One? Obedience should be the mark of that.
And then lastly, Christ is the glory of the church. Let me just read quickly Hebrews 13, 20 and 21. Now may the God of peace who brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, the great shepherd of the sheep by the blood of the eternal covenant, equip you with everything good that you may do His will.
Notice that. What's the mark that we're putting Christ first? That we do His will. Working in us, that which is pleasing in the sight through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever.
[37:20] Christ is the glory of the church. This church isn't about my name. It's not about your name. If the Lord tarries in 50 years, 70 years, 80 years, none of us in this room today will be here.

But the head of the church remains. And if everybody else looks at our church and approves of us, but Christ doesn't, we have failed.
And if nobody believes in what we do and Christ is magnified, then we have done exactly what we were to do.
Give glory to Christ. He is our ruler. He is our authority. He is our head.
He is our focus. He is the glory of this church. Every song, every lesson, every Bible study, every sermon, every ministry exists to make much of the Lord Jesus Christ.
[38:45] We sing these words to begin our service. From heaven He came and sought her to be His holy bride. and with His own blood He bought her and for her life, speaking of the church, He died.

He purchased us with His blood. Let the evidence that we believe He is the head of the church be our quick obedience to Him and our joy in magnifying the name of Christ above all other names.
Lord, we thank You today for Your Word and pray for the help of Your Spirit to help us to understand and to obey. May these not only be truths that we would affirm with our words, but may it truly be the practice of our lives.
Lord Jesus, You are the head of this church and every true church. You are our authority. You are our ruler. You are the head. You are our focus. And all the glory belongs to You alone.
May You continue to work in us to produce an ever-increasing love and desire for obedience. It's in Your name that we pray. Amen.
[40:13] Amen.

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