

Christ-Centered Christianity

I. The Center

*I looked, and behold, in the center of the throne and of the four living creatures, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as though it had been slain **Revelation 5:6***

1. Right now, at this very moment, there is a throne set in heaven and One seated on that throne. In the center of the throne stands a Man who has been given a name above every other name, seated far above all powers and dominions, and appointed the heir of all things. Regardless of whether *anyone* on earth is acknowledging it right now, it is truth. Jesus Christ stands at the center of it all.
2. The challenge is it takes revelation to really see that and begin to live accordingly. Humanity as a whole is living under the illusion that this is all there is – that these 70 years are here for us to get as much out of as we possibly can. As believers, we have access to, and must avail ourselves of, the truth – that we are standing in a chapter of an eternal reality that is initiated by God, led by God and eternally centered around God.
3. For thousands of years the common understanding was that the earth was at the center of the universe and the sun rotated around the earth. It took the witness of one man who through careful observation became convinced that the world was living under a wrong perspective to shift that understanding.
4. The Father has already jealously arranged for Jesus to be the center of all things.
***Colossians 1:15** He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. 17 And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. 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 may have the preeminence.*
5. The need is not for us to wrestle Christ to an elevated place above the other things that compete for our attention. The need is for the renewing of our minds to understand the centrality of Christ.
***Colossians 1:9** For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; 10 that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; 11 strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; 12 giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. 13 He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, 14 in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.*
6. The New Testament authors boldly proclaim an eternal, Christ-consumed worldview.
***Romans 11:36** For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.*

II. In the Beginning

John 1:1 *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through Him*

1. The whole Biblical account is framed in that reality – “In the beginning, God.” John frames his witness of Jesus that way – “In the beginning, Jesus.”
2. It's easy to read that as just John asserting that Jesus is God. More than that, though, John is asserting that Jesus is Genesis 1 – He is the One who made you and owns you.
John 1:10 *He was in the world, and the world was made through Him, and the world did not know Him. 11 He came to His own, and His own did not receive Him.*
3. Before ever John asserts Jesus' ability to save, He asserts Jesus' right to own. This is “*the everlasting gospel... 'Fear God and give glory to Him... worship Him who made heaven and earth...'*” (**Revelation 14:6-7**).
4. The gospel does not start with salvation. Before salvation, there is sin and the fall, but even before that, there is the glory of God.
Romans 3:23 *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*
5. John's gospel – his good news – is that Jesus – the One who made us for Himself – came searching for what was His that had been lost (**Luke 15**) and gave us the opportunity to return to the place for which He made us.
John 1:12 *But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name: 13 who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God.*
6. The other gospels begin with a people (the Jews) looking for a Savior (the Messiah). John begins with the Creator (Jesus) looking for a people.
7. It is central to our most basic confession of faith.
Romans 10:9 *...if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.*
8. We confess He is Lord – “He to whom a person or things belong, about which He has the power of deciding.” We confess that Jesus, the One who died for us in love, *is* Genesis 1. He is the One who made us for Himself and He has the right to decide who we are. The companion to “Jesus is Lord” is “I belong to Jesus.” There is a glorious difference between this confession and the confession that “I need Jesus.” We are His possession, that He pursued and searched out when we were lost by going astray, and He now rejoices at having found us (**Luke 15**).

III. In Christ

Colossians 2:6 As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, 7 rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving. 8 Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. 9 For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; 10 and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.

1. Having made us, then sought us out and brought us back in when we went astray, would it make any sense for our Lord to then leave us on our own to complete this journey as best we can?

Galatians 3:1 O foolish Galatians! Who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? 2 This only I want to learn from you: Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? 3 Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit, are you now being made perfect by the flesh?

2. Quite the contrary, Jesus is firmly committed to completing the work He has begun according to His own power that works in us mightily.

Philippians 1:6 being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ;

Hebrews 12:2 looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith

Ephesians 3:20 Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, 21 to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.

3. If we are to grow in the Lord, maturing in Christian disciplines and doctrines is good, but maturing in our living knowledge of Christ is essential.

Luke 10:42 ...one thing is needed, and Mary has chosen that good part, which will not be taken away from her.

4. It is in the context of belonging to Jesus that what John says next becomes so critical. Having believed that there is a Lord, and that Jesus is Him, knowing Him becomes everything. What the One who made heaven and earth is like shapes and gives meaning to our entire existence.

All the problems of heaven and earth, though they were to confront us together and at once, would be nothing compared with the overwhelming problem of God: That He is; what He is like; and what we as moral beings must do about Him. A.W. Tozer

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth... 18 No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him.

5. Jesus never even gave His apostles a model for doing church. Having known the Man and walking now in fellowship with His Spirit, they simply responded naturally to what was happening in their hearts. The early church was built from the inside out.

6. Our central focus, in reaching for fullness, must be learning to access the riches available through the witness of 'God with us' and the power of 'Christ in us.'

Colossians 1:27 To them God willed to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles: which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. 28 Him we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.

IV. Unto the Lamb

Revelation 19:6 *And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude, as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty thunderings, saying, "Alleluia! For the Lord God Omnipotent reigns! 7 Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready."*

1. The aim of Christianity is not to produce more moral persons, or to even see many spared from hell. We are aimed squarely for that day – when a people are joined forever in love to Christ Jesus.
2. Eternity for you and I no longer means the Day of Judgment. We're not looking to the day that we stand before God and He determines whether we're sent to heaven or to hell. In Christ that question has been answered and we can look beyond it.
3. Eternity for us is no longer about a place – it's about a Man, to whom we will be joined forever in love. Which means the movements of our hearts toward that Man are the most significant thing about us.
4. There is a shift coming in how we understand Christian discipleship. It takes something different to begin going out to encounter the Bridegroom rather than joining the party in the bride's chambers.

Matthew 25:6 *"And at midnight a cry was heard: 'Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!'"*

5. *"Sunday morning will tell you how popular the church is, Sunday evening will tell you how popular the pastor is, and a prayer meeting will tell you how popular God is."* **Leonard Ravenhill** The point is not that we need to have more prayer meetings. The point is we need to be deliberately focusing on God's popularity.
6. There's coming a great increase in the knowledge of the glory of the Lord.
Habakkuk 2:14 *For the earth will be filled With the knowledge of the glory of the LORD, As the waters cover the sea.*
7. In that day, everyone will be at the prayer meetings, and all eyes will be upon Him.
Revelation 5:8 *Now when He had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each having a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. 9 And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, 10 And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth."*