

## “The Crown Prince of Life”

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(HEBREWS 1:1-6 NRSV) *Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, <sup>2</sup> but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom he also created the worlds. <sup>3</sup> He is the reflection of God’s glory and the exact imprint of God’s very being, and he sustains all things by his powerful word. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, <sup>4</sup> having become as much superior to angels*

*as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.*

<sup>5</sup> *For to which of the angels did God ever say, “You are my Son; today I have begotten you”?*

*Or again,*

*“I will be his Father, and he will be my Son”?*

<sup>6</sup> *And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says,*

*“Let all God’s angels worship him.”*

Let me read that third verse from the King James Version—just for effect:

*“Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high...”*

This is rhapsody, not explanation; it’s lyrical ecstasy; musical overture—an organist “pulling out all the stops”! It’s unrestrained joy over what God has done and over who God is. It’s the language of extravagance—royalty, celebrating the God’s activity on behalf of humanity, which is finished at Easter.

The imagery moves from past to present; from the initial stirrings of creation to the final trumpet at the climax of history; from transcendent to immediate; from divine to human. The language reminds us of Revelation (22:13)—the one who said, I am “Alpha” and “Omega:” beginning and end; and it’s all to introduce and characterize the one who is “heir of all things”—the “Crown Prince of Life”.

The “Crown Prince of Life”: not “heir to the throne”, but “heir of all things.” Not some playboy crown prince, flopping from one bed to the next, riding polo ponies and driving race cars one day and standing in full military uniform at some function of state the next.

Not abdicating throne, tradition and duty for any earthly attachment, this “Crown Prince of Life” lives in faithfulness to God by his integrity and obedience, and thereby demonstrates his fitness to reign as “King of kings; Lord of lords.”

There is a story—I may have shared it with you before—a story that may help to put all this in perspective. It happened almost fifty years ago, when I was serving my student church. It was Saturday, late Spring, just before summer classes at seminary would begin. I was in the back yard, grilling burgers for supper; sitting in a lawn chair, enjoying the smell from the grill and the cool pleasantness of the late afternoon, and mentally reviewing my sermon for the next day.

Quite unexpectedly an idea came to me—a thought, really: just trotted up

and nuzzled my hand with its wet nose. It was a good idea: neat and well-groomed; not at all like some rather scruffy ideas that wander up from some street or alley. This idea already was well-formed and ready for human interaction.

I began to play around with it: scratch it behind the ears... I'd throw random thoughts out; it'd fetch them and bring them back in better shape than when I tossed them. I almost lost track of time—almost burned the burgers; but soon it was time to take them up, so I patted the idea on the head, and went inside.

I thought about that idea all during supper; then stayed up late, working it into my sermon notes, and then went to bed.

The next morning was bright and clear, and since the parsonage was only a block and a half from the church, as I frequently did, I decided to walk to church. As I stepped out on the front porch and into that bright sunlight, I almost stumbled over that idea I had played with in the back yard the night before.

He was excited—jumping around, wagging his tail; and I confess it was a pleasant surprise for me, too.

He followed me down to the church, but at the door I told him he'd have to go back home. He was a little rowdy and rambunctious for those folks, I thought. He seemed hurt; but I told him I'd see him after church.

The service was more than usually energetic and uplifting that morning, and as the choir sang its anthem, I looked, and there he was: sitting on the front pew. He winked at me, and really seemed to fit right in.

After church he followed me home, and I really enjoyed each his company. He said his name was "Doxology", and he thought he'd stick around for awhile. When we got home, I asked Jo Lynn, and she said I could keep him.

That afternoon I went to the hospital, and "Doxology" wanted to go. I said he could go, but he'd have to stay in the car. The woman I was going to visit had terminal cancer, and I told him that situation was no place for a Doxology. Well, when I got to her room, she seemed stronger than the day before, and she smiled, and told me of the joys of her life, and I could sense the strength of her faith. And she chuckled and said, "Well look at that"; and I looked, and "Doxology" was sitting on the foot of her bed. It seemed a perfectly normal place for him to sit.

The summer wore on, I was continually surprised at the places and situations in which "Doxology" seemed to be at home. When we went on a two week vacation trip to visit Jo Lynn's sister in California I told "Doxology" he couldn't go. It was going to be stressful enough with three young boys, three days in the car—but he cried, so I gave in and let him go with us.

We had planned and prepared for that trip for weeks: fixed up the back

seat with pockets for toys and coloring books and puzzles and games. And "Doxology" seemed to be right at home back there with the boys. Several times I looked in the rear-view mirror and he was the center of attention. Turned out to be one of our best family vacations; and I think "Doxology" had something to do with it.

The local high school football team made the playoffs that fall—went all the way to the semi-finals; and we all went to the game. Yep. "Doxology" went, too. I said "No" at first. I thought the crowds and the noise would be too much for him—he might get lost in the crowd—besides, it was cold. But, as usual, I gave in; and I was glad, because our team lost, and having him in the car on the way home was pleasant.

I don't know how many times that summer and fall I asked "Doxology" why he always seemed to fit in, no matter the circumstance; but he'd just wink and smile.

And then, the spring semester began at seminary. One of my courses was with Dr. Fred Craddock—reading the Epistle to the Colossians in Greek. I was preparing the first paper for that class, and in the assigned passage, for some reason I began to notice the prepositions. You don't normally pay much attention to prepositions. But somehow, they seemed to leap off the page that day. I got an "A" on the paper; and I began to understand why "Doxology" never seemed out of place. Listen for the prepositions prepositional phrases:

<p>(COLOSSIANS 1:15-20 NIV) <i>He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; <sup>16</sup>for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. <sup>17</sup>He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup>He is the head</i></p>	<p><i>of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place <u>in everything</u>. <sup>19</sup>For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, <sup>20</sup>and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself <u>all things</u>, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.</i></p>
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In him; by him; for him; through him... He is before all; over all; in all; through all... "The Crown Prince of Life"—heir of "all things."

No wonder today's text—the image of the "Crown Prince of Life"—leaves us whistling the "Doxology", rather than quoting lines from the sermon! And, by the way, I brought him with me this morning. Look around; if you see him, scratch him behind the ear. Maybe he'll follow you home.

Christ is Risen!  
Amen!