

The Supremacy of Christ

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, just last week, my daughter was asked to write a song or a poem about someone great. She didn't choose me, though she did choose her mum, which was nice.
- And here's the poem. I think I've got a slide of it. It's a bit hard to see in the spelling. It's a bit bad, but anyway, here's what it says. She says, Mum, you shine like the light from the sun. If there was a mum competition, you would have won.
- I would have cheered from the front seats with your other daughter and son. Oh, you would have won, you magnificent mum. And then on the next slide, I think, is a picture of mum winning and us cheering from the sidelines.
- It's quite nice. Although when I asked about my poem, she said, well, you have to be great to get a poem. She'll keep.
- But there is a certain truth in what she said, actually, that you have to be great to get a poem. Because as we come to our reading this morning, we actually come to what is a poem or a hymn about Christ, which speaks of his greatness.
- [1 : 1 5] Our scholars agree that verses 15 to 20 in the original language are structured as a poem, as a hymn, a song. And that it was probably written by the early church, which Paul has then incorporated into his letter.
- And so scholars call these verses a Christ hymn, which speaks of Christ's magnificence, his greatness, his supremacy. And as we'll see, it speaks of his supremacy over this creation life and his supremacy over new creation life.
- In fact, it really reveals that Christ is at the centre of all life. And the question, though, is why does Paul want to or need to remind the Colossians about this, about who Christ is?
- Well, do you remember the background from last week? The Colossians were being pressured to think that Christ was not enough. As we'll see in the coming weeks, people were telling the Colossian church that they needed to add to Christ.
- They needed to add things like the worship of angels. And they had to follow certain traditions and also submit to certain philosophies. They had to add all these things to Christ as though Christ was not enough.
- [2 : 2 9] And so Paul wants them to see who Christ Jesus really is. He wants them to see Christ's greatness, his supremacy. So that they might realise that if they have Christ, they have the greatest.
- That they don't need to go back to anything else which is actually inferior to Jesus who is superior. He wants them to see that Christ is at the centre of all life.
- So they don't need these other things. And so he begins now in point one, verse 15, with Christ's supremacy over creation life. And the first statement is very simple, very short.
- It says the Son, Jesus, the one in whose kingdom we have been brought, verse 14, the Son is the image of the invisible God, he says.
- That is, Jesus reflects God's character and rule. That's what image means. So if you want to know what God is like, then look at Jesus. Of course, we heard in our first reading that humanity was supposed to reflect God's image.

[3 : 37] Indeed, we were created in God's image. God created the heavens and the earth and the pinnacle of his creation was mankind. Created in God's image to reflect God's character and rule.

To rule over the fish of the sea, it said, and the birds of the air. And yet our sin stopped us from being able to do that. To do what we were created to do.

But here is Jesus, who is the perfect image of God. Who perfectly reflects God's character and rule over the world. And actually, he is the image of God in a much greater way than humanity could have ever been.

Because Jesus is God. Unlike Adam and Eve, Jesus is the one through whom the Father created all things. All those things we heard in our first reading. Let's have a look at the rest of verse 15 to 17.

He says that the Son is also the firstborn over all creation. Why? Well, verse 16. Indeed, he is before all things.

[4 : 50] And in him, all things hold together. And now these verses after image of God, he moves to being the firstborn over creation.

And the word firstborn can mean either the one who is born first in the family. And so my family, Timothy, my son, is the eldest. He's the firstborn in that sense. But the word firstborn can also mean the one who has first importance.

Which is what the meaning is here. The one who has the highest rank in the family after the parents. The one who receives the inheritance. Of course, in ancient cultures and even some cultures today, the two meanings go together.

The eldest, the firstborn, is the most important. The first importance. The one who gets all the inheritance and the highest rank and so on. But here the word firstborn is used in just that second way.

Christ is first in importance. Highest rank. Supreme over creation. Why? Well, verse 16 says, for or because in him or by him all things were created.

[5 : 57] You see, some groups like Jehovah's Witnesses will say that because verse 15 calls Jesus the firstborn, it means that he is the first created person in God's creation.

And he's not equal with God. He's actually a created being. But they've done what the media does so well. They've taken a phrase out of context and misunderstood the meaning.

Because the context, the very next few verses show that Jesus cannot be created because he is the one doing the creating. You see, he is not a created thing if verse 17 is he is before all things.

He cannot be created if God is creating all things through him. As John puts it in his gospel on the next slide from John chapter 1, it says, In the beginning was the word, which is the Son.

So Jesus is from the beginning. And the word was with God. And the word was God. He was with God in the beginning. He wasn't created. He was there in the beginning.

[6 : 57] And so through Jesus, all things were made. And without him, nothing was made that has been made, he says. And so while we rightly call the Father the creator of the universe, because he created this world through the Son, we can also call the Son the creator as well.

And because all things were created through the Son, then he is supreme over all things. All things in heaven, like the angels whom the Colossians were being told to worship, which is supreme over them.

He created them. All things on the earth, like the philosophies the Colossians were being told to follow. Jesus created all wisdom. He's over them.

So do you see what Paul is doing? He's saying, look at who Christ is. And realize that if you have him, you have the greatest. You don't need to go and follow these other things as well, which are inferior.

You've got Christ who is superior, supreme. What's more, Christ is not only the means of creation, but he is the one that creation was made for. Verse 16.

[8 : 06] I remember being at a wedding of a good friend of mine, Dan. Dan, and as his bride, well, his bride had just walked down the aisle, all dressed up, looking stunning.

Dan, the groom, was beaming. All the people were oohing and garring. Everyone was smiling. And the minister seated the congregation. He looked at my friend Dan and his bride Chrissie and said, People say at weddings that these two are made for each other.

And looking at these two smiling back at me, let me tell you, they are not made for each other. And people just went, what's going on? And then the minister continued.

He said, they are made for Jesus. And then he quickly added to everyone's relief that they made a great couple as well. But you see, he was right. I've never had the nerve to do that at any wedding I've done.

But he is right. You see, we are created through Jesus and for Jesus. It's Jesus to whom we are ultimately designed to live for.

[9 : 13] And so it's in Jesus we ultimately find our purpose and meaning for life. As verse 17 puts it, in him all things hold together. That is, all things are sustained by Jesus and all things find their meaning and purpose in Jesus.

He holds it together. He gives life purpose, meaning. Because that's how we were designed to live. For him. In other words, Jesus is at the center of life.

If we don't live for Christ, we will never find deep contentment and meaning in life. Because we were created to live for him. You see, that Christ is not just supreme over creation life.

He is at the very center of creation life. Not just as its ruler, but as the one who sustains life and gives it true meaning. It's not the traditions or the philosophies or the visions or the experiences that the Colossians were being told to have.

No, it's Christ. He is supreme over and the center of all creation life. But he's also supreme over and at the center of new creation life.

[10 : 19] Point to verse 18. He says, Here we are told that Jesus and the church are like a head and a body.

Jesus is the head who directs and rules the body. Just like our heads with our brains and desires direct and rule our body. Our brain thinks something and we do it.

Also, Christ is the head, our boss, what he thinks we ought to do. But he's also the head of the church in another sense. He is the head or the source from whom life comes.

And so just as our heads with its mouth and nose that eats food and breathes oxygen to sustain and give life to our bodies. So Christ, by his spirit, gives life and sustains us as his church.

And so Jesus is the head of the church in two ways. He is our boss and our source of spiritual life. Our Lord and our Savior, if you like.

[11 : 34] And so we already see that Jesus is not just the center of our earthly life, but our new spiritual life. But then the hymn adds that Jesus is also the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead.

The word beginning here means he kick-started. He opened up the way. He began the new age where people will be raised to life physically.

The new creation where we will all one day be raised from the dead like him and enjoy new heavens and earth with new bodies that will never get sick or sore.

Won't that be nice? And we'll all be united with our Christian loved ones in that new creation, which will also be very nice. Christ is the beginning of that new creation, he says.

And he's the firstborn among the dead. Firstborn, we've seen this word before. And here it has both its meanings. Jesus was first to be raised from the dead. That happened 2,000 years ago.

[12 : 36] And we actually have good evidence for it. But he is also the firstborn like we saw in verse 15. First in importance, in rank, which is really the main point here.

Jesus is first, supreme over this new creation, just as he is first or supreme over this creation. He is first over everyone who will be raised from the dead.

So that verse 18, in everything, both this creation and the new creation, both this life and the new life, he might be first. He might have the supremacy.

And just as Christ was first born or supreme over creation because it was made through him. Well, so also Christ is first born or supreme over new creation because it was established through him.

See, verse 19 starts with the word because or for. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood shed on the cross.

[13 : 47] You see, at the cross, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself and making peace. He was opening up a way for a new creation to happen, establishing it.

You see, through Christ at the cross, God won the decisive battle over sin and evil. And so all things, whether in heaven or earth, have been put back in order, reconciled, peace established, whether they realize it or not.

Of course, people still rebel against God and it still seems as though things are out of order in this world. But don't be fooled. God is simply giving people more time to believe in Jesus and experience his peace as his children before Jesus returns and enforces this peace on his enemies.

But the point of this hymn, these verses, is that just as Christ is supreme over creation at the center of this life, because God made it all through him and his death on the cross.

See, Christ really is the greatest. Last month, on the 6th of June, a very famous person passed away. He was born in Kentucky as Cassius Clay, then converted to Islam in 1964, changing his name to, anyone?

[15 : 12] Muhammad Ali. That's on the slide. His most famous quote. Anyone? It's on the slide now. I am the greatest. Yeah. And he was great in boxing.

Three back-to-back heavyweight championships. But he's not the greatest in life. Certainly not in new life. Christ is.

Jesus is the greatest. The supreme in everything. And so now Paul brings this message home to the Colossians and to us. Point 3, verse 21.

He says, Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through his death to present you wholly in God's sight, without blemish and free from accusation.

You see, here Paul brings the cosmic reconciliation of all things. And he now brings it home and applies it to the Colossians and to us. And he says, You were once enemies of God.

[16 : 26] But now you've been reconciled back to God. Now you have peace with God. And not a peace that will be enforced on the last day where every knee will bow, whether they like it or not.

But a peace where God is now our loving Father. And we, his precious children. And this reconciliation means that on judgment day we can stand blameless in God's sight.

We can be counted holy before him. We can be free from accusation because we've been forgiven. It's as though on judgment day when we hear, Oh, Andrew Price, you did this and you did that.

Oh yeah, you did all that as well. Jesus will step in and say, It's okay. I've paid for all his sin. It's dealt with. No accusation anymore.

He's free to enter heaven. And this great confidence makes a great difference in this life too. For it brings comfort and real hope, assurance.

[17 : 34] I mean, I've conducted a number of funerals recently. And while there was rightly grief, there was also hope, real hope. Because the people who passed were Christians.

And so there was great comfort in their grief, great assurance that they are now with God. And we who trust in Jesus will see them again. It made a huge difference to the families on that day.

But the funerals I've conducted recently where they were not Christian, there was no such comfort. It was a wishful thinking, but that was as good as it got.

You see, this great news that we are now free from accusation and have confidence to stand before God on that final day. It's not just pie in the sky out there. It has real benefit and comfort and assurance down here.

And Paul is reminding them though, that just as God brought reconciliation for the universe through Christ, so God has brought reconciliation for you through the same person, Christ. And it makes a difference now.

[18 : 40] And so Colossians, why would you want to leave Christ? Why would you want to go after these other things when it is Jesus who has saved you and made you right with God?

When it is Jesus who is at the center of this life and your new spiritual life? And so Paul warns them, don't leave Christ.

And he adds this warning. See verse 23? We are presented holy in his sight, free from accusation. Verse 23. If you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel.

This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

Here, Paul returns to where he started, chapter 1, with the hope of the gospel, which bore the fruit of faith and love, chapter 1, verses 4 and 5. And he says, they will stand on that last day free from accusation if they continue in their faith, their trust in Jesus.

[19 : 53] The same Jesus they heard about in the gospel. The Jesus that they converted to originally. The Jesus who is supreme and at the center of life.

For it is this Jesus who died for us to forgive us and save us from judgment when we appear before God on that last day. No other person has done that for us. And so if we follow any other person, or tradition, or philosophy, then we won't stand on judgment day.

We will not be God's loved children in heaven, but instead we will be God's rebellious enemies in hell. And so there are really three points of application for us this morning.

And the first is, do you have faith in Christ Jesus? Do you trust in him and him alone? His death for you? To make you right with God? To bring you peace with God?

To give you certainty of heaven? If you want peace with God now and assurance of heaven later, then you must trust in Jesus. Do you?

[20 : 52] Second, for us who do, then like the Colossians, we are to continue in our faith. Established and firm. Not moved from the hope held out in the gospel.

You see, like the Colossians, we get all sorts of messages from our world and society, don't we? Even our non-Christian family and friends. And there seems to be a consistent theme in all these messages, which is not so much get rid of Jesus altogether.

Our society seems to be too polite to say that outright. Rather, what it seems to suggest is don't take Jesus too seriously. You can have a bit of this and a bit of that.

You can have a bit of this religion, a bit of worldliness and a bit of Christ as well. Which is exactly what the Colossians were being told to do. And so we get messages like, you know, you don't want to be too serious about Jesus.

After all, you don't want to be known as a fundamentalist. We're told it doesn't matter if we, you know, don't read our Bible that much. If we miss church for three or four weeks in a row.

[21 : 53] I mean, there are good reasons to miss church, like holidays and things like that if you're overseas. But, you know, it doesn't matter if you have sleep in for three or four weeks in a row. It's not that important. Surely you don't have to, you know, come late to family lunch.

Because you went to church first, just skip church, it doesn't matter. Are we told that we don't have to take the Bible that seriously? Oh, you can take the bit about love, but just reject the bit about sexuality and things like that. It's the latest topic, isn't it?

After all, it's the 21st century, they say. But what does Paul say? We had to continue in the faith. The faith. Not a faith of a bit of Christ and a bit of the world.

But of Christ alone, established and firm in him. Not moved. From the hope held out in the gospel. We had to continue in our faith.

And third, we had to see Jesus for who he is. As the one who is supreme at the center of both this life and the one to come. The one who has made life possible and gives it meaning and purpose.

[22 : 55] If this is who Jesus is, then this is who Jesus is to be in our own lives. The one who is supreme over our life and at the center of our life.

The one who shapes our life. The one whom our life revolves around. As the earth revolves around the sun, which gives life to the earth. So our lives are to revolve around God the sun.

He gives life to us. And I've seen this in a number of ways in various Christians. Some from this church, from others. And it's been very encouraging. I remember one family from the 1030 service who were heading away on holidays.

And the family were heading away on Sunday morning and wanted to meet them down at Mornington for Sunday morning tea. And they said, no, we're going to go to church first and we'll leave afterwards. Even though it's going to be harder for the kids.

They're going to be a bit more ratty and tired and so on. But our life doesn't revolve around the kids. It doesn't revolve around holidays. It revolves around Jesus. So they came to church first, then left straight for holidays afterwards.

[24 : 01] Another friend of mine, she took a promotion at her work. But her promotion took her away quite a bit on travel. It meant she could not attend Bible study anymore.

And she missed a lot of church. She tried to go to churches in the places she was at. But it's very difficult. And she found that for her, at least, that her relationship with Christ suffered. And so she handed back the promotion.

People at work had never, ever seen anything like that done before. You're what? You're going backwards? You're giving up your pay rise? You're what? Why? And then she said, because I'm a Christian and I want to follow Jesus.

And that made even less sense to them. But you see, for her, her life didn't revolve around money or promotion, career. It revolved around Christ.

And older people from our church received some inheritance a few years ago. And the first thing they did was give a lump sum to our church, which has paid for a number of ministries here that are happening today.

[25 : 05] It's the first thing they did. They didn't give, you know, firstly spit it off to kids. I mean, they gave money away to other things as well. The first thing they did was do gospel ministry. Why?

Because their lives revolved around Christ. Christ is supreme. And he's at the center of all life. And so encouraging to see people living that out in their own lives.

Well, I started with a song that my daughter Megan wrote about her magnificent mum. Magnificent dad, anyway. Magnificent mum. And in our verses today, we see a hymn about the magnificent Christ, who is indeed the greatest.

Christ supreme. So may we remember just who our Lord and Saviour is. And so joyfully live for him. Let's pray. Our gracious Heavenly Father, we do thank you for the Lord Jesus Christ.

We thank you that he is the greatest, that he is supreme both over this creation and the new creation. That he's at the center of this life, giving it meaning and purpose.

[26 : 16] And at the center of our new spiritual life as Christians. And so Father, we pray that you would help us to keep lifting our eyes as this passage does.

And seeing who Jesus really is. That we might continue to live for him. For we ask it in his name. Amen. Amen.