

Above All Powers

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[0 : 0 0] And please turn in the Bibles again to Colossians chapter 1, page 956, and let me pray for us as we begin. Lord our God, we pray that we may be filled with the knowledge of your will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, so that we may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him.

And we pray this for the glory of your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen. Let me warn you, I am a ruthless monopoly player.

I show no favours. I concoct every type of scheme to win. I don't only want Mayfair and Park Lane, I want all the properties with all hotels.

I settle for nothing other than the complete domination of London. And if I understood it better, I would say the same about risk.

A perplexing game if ever I've played one, which is not frequently. But when I do play, it conjures up in me this desire to rule the world.

[1 : 2 2] Not just London, I want the lot. No mercy, no pity. Obliterate every enemy. And if I form any alliance, it's only to undercut and backstab and betray, so that I take control.

Now, of course, that's fantasy. But there's something in us sometimes of fantasy of ruling the world. If you remember that famous line by Leonardo DiCaprio in Titanic, as he's sort of balancing precariously off the bow of the ship, I'm the king of the world.

And there's something about us that likes to think that, well, maybe somehow we might actually be the next heir of the throne of England, just sort of long lost in history, but about to be discovered and will rule the world somehow.

Others, of course, take it seriously. That's just fantasy so far. But there are politicians and businessmen and especially newspaper moguls who really do think that they've got a chance of ruling the world, showing world supremacy.

Paul is praying for a little church in a little place called Colossae. These days, as I said last week, it's nothing. It's just a hill lost in history.

[2 : 3 9] But in those days, it was a medium-sized town. Paul had never been there. It had been evangelised by a man called Epaphras, who was mentioned in the passage we read last week.

And Paul is praying for the Colossians that they may know God's will. And in effect, he writes this whole letter to back up that prayer to know God's will.

That's what verse 9 said. Since the day we heard it, that is, of your faith, hope and love that you're Christians and practising the Christian faith, we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

And the reason he wants them to know God's will is so that, verse 10 says, they may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him.

What is God's will? Very simple, really. Often we make it so complex, as I hinted last week. Complex in looking for a particular job or spouse or sock to wear or something like that.

[3 : 56] God's will is straightforward, in a way. That we may lead lives pleasing fully to him. What's God's intention for the universe?

In effect, the similar sort of thing. But over and above all of that, and what we get to tonight, God's will is this, that Jesus is supreme over all.

That Jesus is supreme not only over the church, not only over the western world, not only over this earth or planet, but over the whole cosmos.

That's God's will. That Jesus is first, above and over, absolutely everything. That's God's will. It is all, in the end, about Jesus.

God's will for us, under the supremacy of Jesus, is to lead lives worthy of him, because he is supreme. If that's God's will, then leading a life worthy of the one who is supreme makes common sense.

[5 : 11] Now, what will generate a dynamic within us for the worthy life? The supremacy of Jesus does that.

What is the impetus for us to be fully pleasing to the Lord in our lives? What will fuel us bearing fruit in every good work?

The supremacy of Jesus does that. What is the engine for growing in the knowledge of the Lord? The supremacy of Jesus is that.

What empowers and strengthens Christians to endure impatience? Get the picture? The supremacy of Jesus is the answer to that.

What will galvanise in our hearts gratitude and joy? The supremacy of Jesus. They're all things that are God's will for us, as Paul said in the passage we looked at last week.

[6 : 18] And the thing that gives it the impetus, the drive, the energy, the dynamic, is the supremacy of Jesus over all things. Not laws, not commands, but the supremacy of Jesus.

And what will ignite hope in us, a hope that produces the fruit of love and faith? The supremacy of Jesus over all things.

They're the things Paul is praying for or commending for the Colossians in the first part of the chapter. But tonight we get to the engine room. What drives it?

What creates it? What ignites it and fans it into energy and flame in our hearts, in the hearts of believers, in Colossae, in Doncaster, in other places in time and space? The supremacy of Jesus over all things.

This famous passage that we're looking at tonight is a glorious and sublime peon of praise to the Supreme Lord Jesus Christ.

[7 : 24] It's often mined for its theological substance. It's frequently used as points of debate. There are some slightly contentiously interpreted parts of this passage.

But too often it is divorced from its purpose. Why does Paul extol the supremacy of Jesus in these words?

Whether or not they're his originally doesn't matter. To ignite, drive, generate, fan into flame lives worthy of the Lord.

That is, it's the vision of the glory and the supremacy of Jesus over all things that will captivate our hearts and minds and flow them out into worthy living, godly living, joy, gratitude, fruitfulness, endurance, impatience and love.

And that's why it's here, in essence. Because this is God's will. This is God's will for the universe. The supremacy of Jesus manifest before the eyes of each and every person who's ever lived.

[8 : 32] It's all about Jesus. Somehow we miss that sometimes. Because the name Jesus, I think, doesn't even occur in verses 15 to 20.

It's all pronouns. He, him. But let's read it, acknowledging that it is about Jesus. Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

For in Jesus, 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 Jesus and for Jesus.

Jesus himself is before all things, and in Jesus all things hold together. Jesus is the head of the body, the church. Jesus is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that Jesus might come to have first place in everything.

For in Jesus all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Jesus God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of Jesus' cross.

[9 : 45] Get the picture? It's all about Jesus. The absolute glorious supremacy of Jesus over everything. The passage we looked at last week ended with Paul speaking of the transfer from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's beloved Son, an act of God's grace and mercy, an act in the past for the Colossians.

They now belong to the kingdom of God's Son. Now he goes on to speak more of the Son in whose kingdom we now belong.

Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the beginning of verse 15. That is an odd statement in a way. An image is something that looks like something else.

So it's saying that Jesus looks like, but what does Jesus look like? The invisible God, which by the very nature of being invisible doesn't look like anything.

But Jesus, the human Jesus, the divine Jesus, the one and the same Jesus, accurately and fully reflects what God is like.

[11 : 02] Not particularly visibly, but in character in particular. You want to see what God is like? Look at Jesus. He is the image of the invisible God.

What's the importance of that? We're going to see in a few weeks' time, but let me just jump ahead to give you the sample to see what the purpose of this passage is. In chapter 3, verse 10, we Christians are to clothe ourselves with a new self which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator.

That is, we are to clothe ourselves like Jesus. So if you want to know how we are to live, how are we to live worthy lives of the Lord fully pleasing to God, become like Jesus.

You want to know what God's like? Look at Jesus. He's the one who shows us how we are to live, you see. Jesus, we're then told, is also the firstborn of all creation.

It's a slightly contentious interpretation. The Jehovah's Witnesses will tell you, this tells us that Jesus was part of the creation.

[12 : 15] He's the firstborn of the creation. Maybe the first thing made, but he wasn't there way, way back in the beginning. There was a time when Jesus was not, is how they would interpret that. The trouble is they don't go on to read the next verse, which tells us that in Jesus all things were created.

So what firstborn of all creation is saying is not that Jesus is part of creation, but firstborn in the sense of preeminence over all of creation. He is supreme over everything that has been made.

That's the meaning of it. He is supreme. He's not part of the creation. He's actually part of the creator, we might say. This is a statement of Jesus' preeminence and supremacy again, his dignity.

And it actually conjures up an Old Testament messianic word. Hence, it's perhaps not expressed as clearly as some might like. What is the reason for this preeminence?

Jesus is the firstborn of all creation for or because, and this is the reason why he can be described in that way at the end of verse 15, in Jesus all things were made.

- [13 : 31] Things in heaven and on earth, invisible and visible. Presumably that's two ways of describing the same things. The heavenly things are invisible, the earthly things are visible. Thrones, dominions, rulers, powers, four words all overlapping in meaning.

We get bogged in a sort of sidetrack to try and think they were referring to four specifically different things, not at all. Powers human, powers heavenly, powers earthly, powers spiritual, all summed up in those four terms.

All of those things are made in Jesus. That is, he is over them all, supreme over them all. There's nothing made that's sort of outside him.

So, all the powers, whether spiritual or earthly, that often are against Jesus, are all in fact underneath his supreme sovereignty. is in effect what's being said in verse 16.

Not only were all things created in him, but they were created through him. He's the agent of creation by God's word. And they were created for him.

- [14 : 42] That's their purpose. They're created for the glory and the supremacy of Jesus. That is, we might say the creation, when they were created, they were created in and through Jesus, for Jesus looking to the goal of the creation.

That is, from beginning to end, Jesus is over all of the creation. Notice the emphasis on all things. Actually, that word in Greek is a simple word.

It's translated slightly different ways here, all things or everything or just the word all, eight times in this little paragraph. There is nothing outside the dominion of Jesus Christ.

You can go to the very ends of the galaxies and you are not outside the dominion and supremacy of Jesus Christ. You can plumb the depths of science or philosophy or whatever it is.

You are not outside the dominion of Jesus Christ. You can find the most backward or remote place on the planet, people who've never heard of Jesus, and you are not outside the dominion and sovereignty of Jesus Christ.

- [16 : 00] It's breathtaking. All things, heavenly and earthly. The implication of that is that it is exclusively everything belongs to Jesus.

There is no other competing power or sovereign or supremacy. All things means there's nothing left.

And that's the emphasis throughout all of this. Exclusively everything is under the supremacy of Jesus. Verse 17 goes on to say that Jesus himself is before all things.

Probably in the sense of time, Jesus existed before anything else was made. Again, that's helping to clarify how we interpret the firstborn of all creation in verse 15.

But it's also speaking of the priority. Before in the sense of primacy. He's above all things. Probably both connotations are meant here.

- [17 : 04] And then verse 17 goes on to say, and in Jesus all things hold together. All things again.

No exceptions. There is nothing in the universe that holds together outside of Jesus doing it. So without Jesus, gravity is not switched on.

Without Jesus, electrons don't do what electrons do, whatever that is. Without Jesus, the planets don't orbit. Without Jesus, the sun does not rise.

Without Jesus, our whole universe doesn't hold together. Jesus holds all things together. And there is no exception to that.

Pretty grand claim, isn't it? Astonishing claim of the supreme power and sovereignty of the Lord Jesus Christ. You see, the universe is not held together by people.

[18 : 03] It's not held together by a particular superpower. It's not held together by the United Nations. It's not held together by scientific research. It's not held together by philosophy. And it's not even held together by love.

It's held together by Jesus Christ. The same man who was crucified on a cross, looking helpless, nailed to a cross, was in fact there and then as they mocked him and stripped him, holding the whole universe together.

And they didn't know it. And they couldn't see it. Grand claims. Paul is wanting us to understand the will of God.

He's wanting us to understand the supremacy of Jesus, but there's more. He doesn't end it at the end of verse 17. For he goes on to say in verse 18, Jesus is the head of the body, the church.

Now, Paul is not plumbing down into some anti-climax here. This is just as significant, in fact.

[19 : 18] Notice how the language parallels the beginning of verse 15. He's the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. Verse 18, he's the head of the body, the church, the beginning, the firstborn from the dead.

The language of firstborn begins both sections of this hymn of praise. The church here is not the church of Colossae only.

It's not speaking about a particular congregation or denomination or place. Here the word church is used in a universal sense. The church throughout the whole world.

But notice also what it's implying. The church is a universal body. Jesus is head over the whole universe, the creation in the first part of this hymn, verse 15 onwards.

Now he's the head over the church, the universal church. And the sense is that this is the new creation that he's the head of. You see, it's not an anti-climax. It's actually now looking to the future supremacy of Jesus and how that will be manifest.

[20 : 29] He's the beginning, we're told, in verse 18, meaning like the founder, the pioneer, and then the firstborn from the dead expression to explain that a bit more.

That is, he's risen from the dead. That's the anchor of hope throughout this letter. We saw a glimpse of that last week as well and we'll see it again. Without the resurrection, all of this is nonsense.

The resurrection is the anchor of the hope of Jesus being the firstborn from the dead, but the language of firstborn implies more to come. That is, he's the beginner.

He's the first one to rise from the dead and those who follow him will likewise rise from the dead. And that's the church, the people of the new creation, the resurrection creation that Paul is, I think, alluding to in this language.

The purpose of this, again, is so that expression, just like we had earlier on for or because in verse 16, now we get like that a bit similar, so that Jesus might come to have first place in everything.

[21 : 44] The absolute supremacy of everything belongs to Jesus. We could say, well, that surely is already the case if you take seriously the language of verses 15 to 17, what we've already looked at.

But we know there are those who refuse the supremacy of Jesus. This second part of the hymn is looking forward to when everything in the universe is willingly under the supremacy of Jesus.

That's God's will. And the church is the beginnings of that, or is the model of that, in a sense, the new creation. Jesus is the beginning of that church, the head of the church, and the church follows him into the resurrection life, trusting in his death and resurrection.

Now, again, think, what's the purpose of this? Why is Paul saying this? He's not doing it as a theology lesson. The purpose is how we live.

The purpose is that the grand supremacy of Jesus over all things, including the church, will change our daily lives. We're going to see this in the weeks to follow.

[22 : 51] But let's just quickly put a sampler out forwards so that we grasp the connections in this letter. In chapter 2, verse 16, verse 17, verse 17, these are only a shadow of what's to come.

The substance belongs to Jesus. That is, because we belong to the church, the purpose of this is that we, therefore, belong to Jesus. So the earthly things are passing away.

They're the shadows. The things that should focus our lives and minds are the things or the substance that belongs to Jesus. Maybe even more clearly, we see that in verse 20 of chapter 2.

If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the universe, why do you live as if you still belong to the world? Why do you submit to various regulations? You see, if we're the church of which Jesus supremely is the head, then we should belong to him and live for him and not under the rules and regulations, in particular the Jewish ones, here on earth is what Paul is saying.

Chapter 3, verse 1, if you've been raised with Christ, seek the things above. That's the connection that's coming out of this hymn. A bit later in chapter 3 as well, verse 12, as a result of the resurrected Christ, as God's chosen ones, clothe yourselves with compassion and meekness and humility and above all love, in the verses that follow.

[24 : 27] That is, the supremacy of Jesus over the church is to change how we live now. We live as part of, or we should live as part of, the resurrection order, belonging to the risen Lord Jesus, who is the firstborn from the dead, and we belong in that new creation.

We belong in the resurrection life. And therefore, it will change how we live. It's a connection we saw last week. Lead lives worthy of the Lord, which flows from the increased knowledge of God's will.

Chapter 1, verses 9 and 10. Here Paul is explaining what God's will is, the supremacy of Jesus over all things, so that we lead lives worthy of the Lord.

And when we come to chapter 2 and 3 in a few weeks' time, we'll be looking back to see how this supreme Jesus, risen and exalted, is the driving force, the energy, for the new life that we should be living.

But there's more. Verse 19. In Jesus, all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.

[25 : 37] Slightly tautological, that is, all the fullness. You can't have some fullness. You either got fullness or not. But to say all the fullness underscores the absolute nature of God dwelling in Jesus.

That is, in effect, it's saying Jesus is not merely human, but he is fully divine. It's an allusion, in fact, back to a psalm, Psalm 68, where the fullness of God, it seems, dwells on the mountain of the temple in Jerusalem.

And if Paul deliberately is alluding to those sorts of expressions, here what he's saying is the real temple of God's presence on earth is Jesus. And God's, all of God's fullness dwells in there.

Even more. Than in the old temple of Jerusalem. Notice too. All the fullness, again, makes it exclusive.

The fullness of God is not found anywhere else. Or in anyone else. All the fullness of God is found in Jesus. Exclusively.

[26 : 45] But there's a bit more to come. Verse 20. Through Jesus, God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things.

He was the means of reconciliation. The mediator, in a sense. Reconciliation between who? God and sinners. Jesus. And Jesus is the means of that reconciliation.

But notice here what Paul is saying. Because we can miss this. We think of God reconciling sinners. That's too small of you. See what verse 20 says.

God was pleased through Jesus to reconcile to himself all things. Everything. Not just people. Everything.

The whole creation. People included. That is the whole cosmos is actually reconciled to God through the death of Jesus and his resurrection.

[27 : 47] Not because the earth and inanimate objects and cats and dogs and grizzly bears and things are sinners needing their sins forgiven by Jesus. No. Only for humans made in the image of God does that apply.

But because of human sin the whole world and cosmos is subject to decay. Crying out, Paul says in Romans 8. And so not only sin but its consequences are dealt with by Jesus' death and resurrection.

So that there is now full reconciliation between the whole cosmos including sinners and almighty God. That's a vast accomplishment for the Good Friday death of Jesus.

Big enough to say it's for the sins of the world. But it's for the consequences of those sins and therefore for the benefit of the whole universe. Not just our souls but our souls, our bodies and everything reconciled to God.

It doesn't mean that every person will go to heaven whatever they believe. Not at all. You cannot read this letter consistently and come out with that view. So we need to be careful not to misinterpret verse 20 as some have done.

[29 : 02] How is this reconciliation accomplished? Verse 20 ends by making peace through the blood of his cross.

That's where sin is dealt with. That's where sin's consequences are dealt with. It's where you or I find reconciliation with God through the power of the blood of Jesus' cross.

What a breathtaking, sublime and profound hymn this is about the supremacy of Jesus.

This is theological truth par excellence but not simply for theological debate. This grand statement of the supremacy and glory of Jesus Christ is there for this purpose to drive us to live lives worthy of the Lord.

Paul had prayed back in verse 9 that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding and in part answer to his own prayer Paul speaks these things to show them God's will that Jesus is supreme over all.

[30 : 28] That's who Jesus is and will be. That's God's will and that will drive us then to lead lives worthy of the Lord.

That's God's general will for the universe we might say. It's clear applies to everyone. Paul now anchors that back into the Colossians.

Verses 15 to 20 are in the third person about Jesus and God but now in verse 21 you back to the Colossians directly you Colossians you were once estranged and hostile in mind doing evil deeds but now he's reconciled in his fleshly body through death.

Once you're estranged now you are reconciled picking up the language of the end of the hymn from verse 20 of reconciliation. The Colossians themselves are beneficiaries centuries of this glorious reconciliation that God has accomplished through Christ.

Back in verses 12 to 14 he spoke of being transferred from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of his beloved son. The kingdom of darkness is estrangement and alienation from God.

[31 : 52] The kingdom of God's beloved son is reconciliation with God. Different language same idea in effect is what is being said in verses 21 and 2. But notice the description of estrangement.

You who were once estranged and hostile in mind that is because you didn't think truth that's why Paul needs to give truth but it's not just for the sake of the mind being right.

Doing evil deeds. The end of verse 21. You see the connection between mind and action. You are hostile in your mind. You didn't think the truth but now you do think and the idea is now your mind is changing.

You were doing evil deeds as a result of your wrong thinking. Now I'm correcting your thinking so that you do good deeds and that's the connection that's made explicit in verse 22 halfway through.

So as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before Jesus. this is anticipating the final judgment day which of course is not going to happen if Jesus is not risen from the dead.

[33 : 09] It's premised on the fact that Jesus is Lord of all supreme over all and therefore has full rights to judge all on the day of his glorious return. The purpose of us being reconciled is not to sit back and wallow in a joyful state of reconciliation.

reconciliation. The purpose is to produce the fruit of good works of love which the Colossians are beginning to do but need to continue to do.

And that's why Paul is praying that they would lead lives worthy of the Lord showing good works, growing in knowledge, patiently enduring and giving thanks with joy as we saw last week.

here he describes it in this way, but on that final day before the presence of the glorious and supreme judge of all, the Lord Jesus Christ, you will be found holy, blameless and irreproachable.

That is, no accusation against you will stick. Yes, because you're forgiven, but there is more connotation here. It's not simply that your sins are forgiven and you keep on living your normal life, but your sins are forgiven and you've grown towards that final day in holiness and blamelessness and irreproachability.

[34 : 33] And on that final day, that progress will be perfected in the presence of the supreme judge of all. That is, a moral quality is expected.

Estrangement is demonstrated in evil deeds, verse 21, but reconciliation will be demonstrated in holiness, blamelessness and irreproachability before the judge, Jesus Christ.

Only, so that's the connection that Paul is making here. God's will is leading a worthy life. And the glorious supremacy of Jesus, the judge who is coming, should motivate us and be the stimulus for us to lead such holy, blameless, irreproachable lives.

But notice the contingency. Paul expresses it as a statement of confidence in verse 22, that on that day we will be presented as such because of the power of Jesus, but the contingency places the moral challenge back to us.

Verse 23, provided that you continue securely established and steadfast in the faith. That's right thinking.

[35 : 52] The faith there is the content of faith, trusting that Jesus is supreme over all, for example. And the idea here is of confidence and steadfastness, not being blown around or being sucked in by the false teachers who somehow have infiltrated Colossae at this time, without shifting from the hope promised by the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven.

Maybe not literally to every creature at this point, but the point is if Jesus is Lord over all creation, the gospel has got the legitimate rights and will go to the ends of the earth to all creation.

And Paul himself is a servant of this gospel. Only the supremacy of Jesus gives the anchor for the hope from which we are not to shift or deviate.

That's the language of verse 23. Don't shift from the hope promised by the gospel. The point is if you embrace a different gospel, then your hope will shift, your hope will corrode.

That's the danger. And it's only the hope of the gospel that will produce the love, the worthy living that is demanded of God. the Colossian church, it seems, were in danger of being taken in by false teachers.

[37 : 22] Partly it seems they were wanting to bring them back to more Jewish ways of thinking. We'll see more evidence of that in a couple of weeks' time in chapter two. False teachers are very common.

They're there all through the early church. Most of the letters of the New Testament are written with some false teaching in mind to correct. The reason why it's been corrected here with this grand statement of the supremacy of Jesus is because truth matters.

Not because we're going to be asked an exam on the final day, have we got our truth right, our theology right, but because our truth being right will lead us to live lives that are worthy.

That is, the worthy living of verse 10 flows from the knowledge of the truth in verse 9, as I keep repeating, so that we anchor it in our heads. We need to know the truth of the gospel.

We need to understand it, embrace it, grasp it and hold fast to it so that our lives will be lived worthy of the supreme Lord Jesus Christ.

[38 : 28] But let me say a little bit about false teaching too. This is my simple detector heresy test. You can detect any heresy by anchoring or focusing it on what it says about Jesus.

The truth is that Jesus is gloriously supreme over all and his death is absolutely, totally sufficient for the sins of the universe.

Any heresy, in fact, every heresy, somehow diminishes that statement. Lowering Jesus, limiting the effect of his death and resurrection.

This glorious statement of Paul reminds us that Jesus can be no higher, no better, no greater, no more supreme than he is. There is nothing at all outside his sovereignty and supremacy.

So whenever you hear some teaching and you're not quite sure is this true or not, focus on Jesus. And where does it place Jesus? If it brings him down just even a little notch, it's heresy to be rejected.

[39 : 39] And that's what this is about. But you see, the effect of heresy. If Jesus is not supreme over all, even if there's a little bit outside his dominion, then our hope in him falls apart in the end.

Because it's not solid enough, total enough, to bank our life on. But because Jesus is supreme over all and his resurrection from the dead is the demonstration of that, it is worth investing our whole life in Jesus.

That we live our lives worthy of the Lord in every way for his glory. There is no greater hope than the glory of Jesus. There is no more certain hope than the glory of Jesus.

That's God's will for the universe and he will bring it about. So we might as well submit to it, trust it and live for it. Is what Paul is saying here. The resurrection declares the certainty of this hope that Paul has described in these verses.

That Christ is and will be seen to be supreme over all creation. Therefore we will face him one day in glory. We better be prepared, is what Paul is saying.

[40 : 49] If we're to sum up what he's writing about here, I'll pinch his words from late in chapter 3. whatever you do in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Amen. Amen. Let's do this for you.

You're doing amazing.