

Jesus: In A Class Of His Own

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[0 : 00] I know that some people here today think that I'm a football man because I was wearing my Manchester United face mask, but that was just to annoy all Liverpool supporters here in the congregation. I'm actually more of a rugby person. That's why I'm wearing a green tie to celebrate Ireland's victory over England in rugby yesterday. It's not that I'm a posh boy, but in Northern Ireland lots of schools played rugby rather than football, but that's the way it goes. I'm a rugby person and one of the greats of Irish rugby was a prop forward called Phil Orr.

He played in the front row for Ireland lots of times. He was the most capped front row player and somebody asked him one time how he managed to survive in the front row of international rugby.

It's a pretty dark and shady things go on there that even VAR and television on parks and referees don't see. It's a pretty dark world. And he said, oh, it's very simple. I survived so long because I got my retaliation in first.

People from outside Colossae had arrived in town and they were peddling their spiritually toxic religious ideas. And they were saying something like this. Nobody really knows what they said, but you get a flavor of it from some of the things Paul says. What they were really saying was this.

Jesus is fine as far as he goes. But if you want to experience the Christian life in all its fullness, and fullness was a big word that they used, you need more than Jesus. You need what we're offering to top up Jesus so that you might know fullness in your Christian life. Now, sadly, that kind of thinking is not restricted to a long time ago in a galaxy far, far away.

[2 : 32] It's around today. It's around today. If you've been a Christian for any length of time, somebody is bound to have come along to say, you know, you need to experience something else.

Or you need to take on board our teaching. And it will take you to a new level on your Christian life. You know, is your Christian life dull and listless? You need this to supercharge it.

And that kind of thinking what these out of town people from Colossae were saying was basically this.

They were undermining Jesus' sufficiency. And was Jesus alone enough? Or do Christians need something more than Jesus?

And before their error got too strong a hold, Paul decided that he was going to get his retaliation in first. So he writes to the Christians at Colossae. He'd heard this was going on.

[3 : 48] And he goes straight for the jugular of these out-of-town false teachers teaching. And what he gives us in Colossians 1, 15 to 20, 2 is one of the most magnificent pictures of Jesus' supremacy in the whole of the New Testament.

He says there's no one like Jesus. He's in a class of his own. He's in a category separate from anything or anyone else.

And the clear implication of what Paul is saying is this. That if Jesus is supreme, he's also sufficient. So we don't need anyone else or anything else other than Jesus to make us complete Christians.

You see, if we have the best, we don't need anything more. Because you can't get better than the best.

One commentator has put it this way. The connection between supremacy and sufficiency is this. His sufficient adequacy depends on his supreme authority.

[5 : 08] So what does Paul say about Jesus' supremacy? Well, we're going to take a helicopter ride over these verses. I'm not going to go into every single phrase, although you might think I am.

But just the big picture. And in this helicopter ride, you'll notice that Paul says four, highlights four areas in which Jesus is supreme.

And the first one's found at the start of verse 15 and in verse 19, where he says, Jesus is supreme in revelation. Jesus is supreme in revelation.

I went on to Google, that source of much information and lots of misinformation as well. And I came across a survey of people who were said to be fashion icons of the 2020s.

Now, who do you think topped the survey of a fashion icon of the 2020s? I'll give you a clue. It wasn't me. Although I'm told beige is back in again, and I used to wear lots of beige.

[6 : 21] But there you are. But it wasn't me. The fashion icon top of the poll was Rihanna. Harry Styles was on it as well, by the way.

Harry Styles? But Rihanna was top. And as a fashion icon, it was said that her clothes and style embody the 2020s.

Paul describes Jesus here as the image of the invisible God. And from the Greek word, which is translated image, we get our English word icon.

In other words, Paul is saying Jesus is the icon of God. He's telling us that in Jesus, we see an accurate embodiment of all that God is.

That he is the revelation of what God is really like. A friend of mine once said to me, Roger, if I were God, I would try to up my profile and make myself a bit better known.

[7 : 34] She worked in PR, by the way. And I was able to tell her that God had already clearly shown us what he is like. Because Jesus is the image, the icon of the invisible God.

He's the embodiment in human flesh of all that God is. If we want to know what God is like, we don't have to look any further than Jesus.

And if we look anywhere else, all we get is a distortion of what God is like. What the Bible calls an idol. And the reason is that Jesus is 100% God.

Paul says that in verse 19. He says, God was pleased to have all his fullness to dwell in him. The key word there is fullness. That makes Colossians 1:19 an incendiary statement.

Because one of the catchphrases and the ideas of these out of town false teachers was the idea of fullness. They claimed that their teaching offered fullness. And Paul is saying, no, Jesus offers fullness.

[8 : 51] In him, all the fullness of God dwells. And what does fullness mean? Well, most of us here have been in a lift.

Or for our American friends, an elevator. Now, what does everyone do when they get into a lift? What do you do?

Come on, admit it. You watch the numbers going up. And then when you get fed up counting the floors that you're on, you look at the signs.

And on the signs of most lifts, you'll see telling you the maximum capacity of weight. I once got onto a lift and the door refused to close because we went over the maximum capacity.

But maximum capacity, whatever how many kilograms it is. Now, if you were in your holidays in Greece and the signs were in Greek, you would discover that the Greek word for maximum capacity is this word fullness that Paul uses here in Colossians 119.

[10 : 01] And Paul is emphasizing that Jesus is maximum capacity God. He couldn't be any more God than he is.

God was pleased to have all his fullness to dwell in him. And in a sense, Paul doesn't have to use the word all. It's a bit redundant, if you like, because if you have fullness, maximum capacity, then you do have all.

But he uses it to press home his case that Jesus is 100% God. Paul couldn't have made his point more strongly here that Jesus is supreme in revelation.

Jesus is the full revelation of what God is like because Jesus is fully God. It is because God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him.

That Jesus is the image, the icon of the invisible God. So Jesus is supreme in revelation. And then at the end of verse 15, right through to verse 17, Jesus, he says that Jesus is supreme in the creation.

[11 : 12] Jesus is supreme in the creation. At the end of verse 15, Paul states that Jesus is the firstborn over all creation. I am my parents' firstborn.

I was the first child to be born to them. So perhaps at first sight, this description of Jesus as the firstborn over all creation might be taken to mean that Jesus was the first person to be created.

That's certainly how Jehovah's Witnesses who follow an ancient heresy pushed by a man called Arius misunderstand Paul's statement here.

But if we view it in that way, we ignore what Paul goes on to say about Jesus being the creator of all things. If Jesus is the creator of all things, then he is not a creature.

He is above all creatures. The phrase firstborn of all creation doesn't mean that God created Jesus prior to us all.

[12 : 13] It means that he is the head of the queue we all joined when we were born. Paul, as I said this morning, he's doing what Paul does.

He's taking us back into the Old Testament where the term firstborn meant the person who was first in honor and rank. And Paul's statement here means that Jesus has the highest place in all creation.

That he is supreme in the creation. And why is Jesus supreme in creation? Well, in verses 16 and 17, he answers that question.

He tells us Jesus is supreme because he is distinct from all the creation. He is before all things. Verse 17. He's not part of the created order.

He's set apart from it. As God, Jesus stands outside and above the creation. And he's also supreme because he's the agent of creation.

[13 : 16] Twice at the beginning and at the end of verse 16, Paul underlines the fact that all things were created by him. Now, we often think about the father as being the creator.

And we can sometimes maybe even give the impression that the father did all the creating on his own while the son and the Holy Spirit, you know, watched on the touchline. But as the church fathers used to say, all the works of the Trinity are indivisible.

In other words, when God acts, he acts in the triunity of all three persons of the triune Godhead.

The father plan creation and the son carried out the father's plan in the spirit's power. Jesus is the word that God spoke in order to bring the universe into being out of nothing.

And the extent of Jesus' creative activity is dazzling. As the middle of verse 16 indicates, as Paul's eyes sweep across the physical universe, nothing is left outside Jesus' creative power.

[14 : 29] The smallest subatomic particle, the mighty Himalayas, human DNA, the vast Pacific Ocean, the largest galaxy of stars, even the galaxy astronomers have yet to discover, all came into existence at Jesus' command.

And then he goes on to say that not only was everything in the physical universe created by Jesus, but everything in the spiritual universe was also created by Him.

You see, in the out-of-towners belief system, angels and spiritual beings played an important part. They taught that the supplement to Jesus that people needed was spiritual experiences involving angelic beings.

And they pushed the idea that these angelic beings were on a par with Jesus. So Paul launches a nuclear missile right at the heart of the out-of-towners false teaching.

He says Jesus is the creator of these angelic beings. All things were created by Him, Paul declares, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities.

[15 : 46] Nothing in the hierarchy of angelic beings compares to Jesus. He determined whether or not they should exist. And so He is superior to them all.

And Jesus is superior not only because He's distinct from creation and the agent of creation, but also because He is the goal of creation. As He puts it at the end of verse 16, all things were created for Him.

The true function of every created being or created thing, including us as human beings, is to draw attention to Jesus and to bring glory to Him.

And that goes a huge way to explain why there's so much discontentment in our world, even among Christians. Because so many Christians, even Christians, live as if they are the goal of creation.

They're dysfunctional as creatures because they see themselves and not Jesus as the center of the universe. That's why all teaching, you know, that people need to pursue greater self-esteem and get a better self-image and discover their self-identity and start looking for themselves more and more.

[17 : 16] It's all doomed to failure. Because we are not the goal of creation. Jesus is. And if we want to experience contentment, then we need to do what we were created for.

And that is to follow Jesus, to obey Him, to draw attention to Him by everything we do and say and think, and to glorify Him and so enjoy Him forever.

And the final reason Paul gives us why Jesus is supreme in creation, because He is the sustainer of the creation. In Him, all things hold together, is what Paul states at the end of verse 17.

The tense of the Greek verb indicates that Jesus continues here and now to hold everything together. If Jesus was to stop at this moment, continually and actively sustaining the universe that He created by His powerful word, it would disintegrate.

It would either collapse in on itself or spiral out of control away from itself. And as in, folks, isn't that a comforting thing to know that in Him all things hold together?

[18 : 39] It's the reason why some of you are involved in science and can be involved in science, because there's cohesion in the world.

It's not random, because in Him all things hold together. It's comforting for us even as individuals, because sometimes are we not tempted to think and believe that our lives are ready to collapse under the burden of the responsibilities we have to carry?

Our lives are spinning out of control due to the circumstances we find ourselves in. And we need to be reminded that Jesus sustains His creation, and that includes each of us.

And if Jesus has the power to sustain the whole of the universe that He created, then isn't it reasonable to assume that He has the power to sustain our individual lives?

So Jesus is supreme in revelation. He's supreme in creation. And then in verse 18, Paul says, Jesus is supreme in the church.

[19 : 55] Paul shifts the focus from Jesus' supremacy in the creation to Jesus' supremacy in the new creation, the church. And it's tied up, it's locked into the phrase that Jesus is the head of the body.

It tells us that Jesus gives spiritual life to the church. We speak about the source of a river as being the head of the river.

So Jesus is a source of all spiritual life in the church. We would not have any spiritual life in us in the first place unless Jesus had given it to us.

Because we cannot create our own spiritual life by being good or trying our best. And also, our spiritual life would dry up and shrivel unless Jesus nourished it by means of His word and the sacraments.

Spiritually, we owe everything to Jesus. He is the source of our spiritual life. And the phrase also means that Jesus gives direction to the church.

[21 : 08] The link between authority and headship is something with which we are familiar. For example, we speak about the husband as being the head of the home.

We're referring to the position of leadership that God has given to the husband in the home. So as head of the church, Jesus has the ultimate authority in the church.

Giving the church direction by His word. Jesus not only brings the church into being, He continues to call the moves within it.

We live in a world, we live in a church world where there are lots of different voices demanding that we listen to them and do what they say. We are called upon to look to Jesus and to Jesus alone for direction because He and He alone is the head of the body, the church.

So Jesus is supreme in revelation. He's supreme in the creation. He's supreme in the church. And finally, in verses 20 to 23, Paul highlights a fourth area of Jesus' supremacy.

[22 : 22] Jesus is supreme in reconciliation. My maternal grandfather, my granda Miller, he hated washing dishes.

He just hated washing dishes. He told me that when he was a small boy, he said to his mother, I wish people would either invent a machine that washed dishes or make plates that you could throw away.

And then he added, I love to see them both. He also had a great idea. He said plates should be made out of bread and you could just eat them. That was his other idea as well.

Although he hated washing dishes almost every day of his life, he washed dishes. It was a chore to him, something he just did.

But one of the things he loved to do was to tell stories. When he asked him, well, granda, come on, tell us about the old days. His eyes would light up and away he would go.

[23 : 24] Telling yarns was no chore to him. He really enjoyed it. And Paul says here that reconciling the world to him was not a chore for God.

It was not something that he did reluctantly. Rather, it is something, Paul says, God was pleased to do. It filled him with delight. One commentator puts it this way.

Salvation was God's joyous work. A task he set about with relish. Please remember that when you have doubts that God loves you.

He didn't have to save you. He saved you because he wanted to. It pleased him to do so. It was his joyous work to save you.

And there's something more that Paul is saying than that. God, he says, was delighted to entrust the task of reconciliation to Jesus.

[24 : 27] God was pleased through him, through Jesus, to reconcile all things to himself. The father had full confidence in the son's suitability and competency to carry out his task.

He knew that there was no one else who could carry out the work of reconciliation and that Jesus was more than able for the task. And yet, although reconciliation was God's joyous work, which he delighted to entrust to Jesus.

Remember, too, that reconciliation was God's costly work. It only happened because of Jesus' death. At the end of verse 20, Paul writes about God making peace through Jesus' blood shed on the cross.

And at the start of verse 22, he talks about how God has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death. We've only been reconciled to God because Jesus has died in our place.

He bore the full force of God's just curse on us because of our disobedience and failure. He absorbed the full fury of God's holy anger towards our sin and rebellion.

[25 : 45] Here's how J.I. Packer puts it. It was by a substitutionary, propitiatory sacrifice on the part of the sinless God-man that our reconciliation was achieved.

God quenched and put away his own just wrath against us by sending his Son to atone for our sins in the darkness of Calvary.

And then look at the middle of verse 20 and notice God's wide-ranging work of reconciliation. Through Jesus, God is going to reconcile all things, whether things on earth and things in heaven.

Since the fall, the whole of creation has been out of sync with God's original design for it. It is, as Paul puts it in Romans 8, 18-22, subjected to frustration.

It's in bondage to decay. And we see that all around us. And we see that in us, in our physical bodies as well. Adam's sin, in which we share, plunged God's original creation into disorder.

[26 : 57] It needs to be pacified. It needs to be restored to God's original design for it. And Paul says that one day, through Jesus' reconciling work, that is going to happen.

There is going to be a new heavens and a new earth, which will be back in full sync with God's original design for it. And we are going to be part of this cosmic reconciliation with new resurrection bodies, which are completely free from all sin and pain and disease, so that we are completely and fully and perfectly human.

We will worship God and serve him with perfect joy. And that, folks, is certainly something not to be sniffed at. So tomorrow morning, when you wake up and you feel that pain in your back or your knee, remember, you're one day closer to a new resurrection body.

As my friend in America says, I'm waiting for the big upgrade. That's what God's going to do in our lives. The whole of the universe is going to be reconciled to him.

But what about us as individuals? Well, let me put it this way. If you go to a visitor attraction and you go through the front of it, you're usually faced with an information sign with a big map telling you all the places you can go and see and where they're located.

[28 : 34] And you think to yourself, how do I get to them? Well, is there not usually a big arrow on the map and beside it the words, you are here?

And then you can work out how to get to where you want to go. Perhaps we feel that a bit, that Paul's talk of God's wide ranging work of reconciliation leaves us a little bit lost.

Where do we fit into these things? Well, in verse 21 and 20 to 23, Paul says, you are here because he informs us of God's personal work of reconciliation.

He gives us one of his many then and now pictures of the Christian. Once we were alienated from God, we'd deliberately chosen to declare war on God and we lived in open hostility to him.

But God had compassion in us and in his infinite undeserved mercy, he sent Jesus to die in order to end the hostility and alienation and bring us back to himself.

[29 : 45] Now we've been reconciled to God. We are now God's children. We're no longer God's enemies. God is no longer against us, but God is for us.

We've not been lost in the crowd of God's wide ranging cosmic reconciliation of all things. We have been personally and individually reconciled to God.

And is that not so very comforting to us? The God who through Jesus is sustaining the whole universe so that it does not fall apart out of control is at the same time through Jesus spirit, sustaining you personally so that your life is going in the exact direction that he wants it to go.

Folks, what a breathtaking picture we have of Jesus in these verses. He's in a class of his own, supreme in revelation and in creation and in the church and reconciliation.

What a crushing blow to all ideas then in the church at Colossae and today in the contemporary church, that Jesus is good as far as he goes, but he needs to be supplemented with other ideas and experiences.

[31 : 13] How can you improve on the best? If Jesus is the highest, the unsurpassed, the best, the supreme, the most excellent, the most complete, the full, then we need no one but Jesus and no other experience other than trusting in him moment by moment.

What do you think of this Jesus? The one who is supreme because he created, controls and sustains the whole creation.

What do you think of this Jesus who is supreme in the church as its only king and head? God made him supreme, verse 18, that in everything he might have the supremacy, that Jesus might be first in everything.

I wonder, is he first in your life? Is his supremacy clear by the way that you live?

If you were put on trial for being a Christian, would there be enough evidence to secure a conviction? Is Jesus supreme in everything?

[32 : 44] Because of who he is and what he has done. This morning I began with a story from the killing times. Let me finish with another one.

One day in 1684, John Brown, who lived at Priest Hill, was summarily executed without due legal process because he refused to adhere to Charles II's religious policy.

He was shot in front of Isabel, his wife and their two small children. And as she sat in the mud beside the bullet-ridden body of her dead husband, with a sneer, the soldier's commander asked Isabel Brown, what do you think of your husband now, woman?

And Isabel Brown replied, Sir, I ever thought much of him, and now more than ever. It's probably not hard to think highly of Jesus, the one who is supreme in revelation, in the creation and in the church.

We like somebody like that. But what do you think of Jesus, the one who is supreme in reconciliation because he's the crucified saviour?

[34 : 20] What do you think of Jesus, whose mangled, mutilated, battered, and bloodied body is impaled on a cross to make peace between you and God?

Perhaps Isabel Brown can help you by giving you the words to say, as the one who is supreme in revelation, in creation, and in the church, I ever thought much good of him.

And now, as the one who is supreme in reconciliation, more than ever. Let's pray. Lord Jesus, who is like you?

You are God most high because to the glory of the Father you have been given the name that is above every other name. As a result of who you are and what you have done, you are supreme in revelation, in the creation, in the church, and in reconciliation.

And ever since, by grace, your Holy Spirit opened our eyes to see you in all your beautiful splendour, we have thought much good of you. May your Holy Spirit continue to give us grace so that daily we might think even more good of you by constantly putting you first in everything in our lives.

[35 : 54] And Lord Jesus, we ask this in your supreme name and for your greater honour. Amen. Amen.