

The Supremacy of Christ

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[0 : 00] Well, just last week, my daughter, Megan, was asked to write a song or a poem about someone great. I'd like to say she chose me, but she didn't.

But she did choose her mum, which was kind of nice. So, I mean, I think there's a slide of it. It's a bit hard to see, so let me read it to you. It 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.

I think on the next slide, Paul, is a picture of mum winning and us cheering from the front seats on the side. I'm going to ask her about, well, where's my poem?

She said, well, you have to be great to get a poem. Thanks. But there is some truth in what she just said, actually, because today we come to what is regarded as a poem or a song about Jesus, the son, written about him because he is great.

[1 : 09] In fact, he is the greatest. In fact, if you look at your Bibles there, verses 15 to 20 in the original language are structured in a way that it is quite poetic. Such that most Bible scholars regard this as a song or a hymn written by the early church that Paul has incorporated into his letter.

And so scholars call these verses the Christ hymn, the hymn about Christ and his greatness, his supremacy over this creation life and over new creation life.

In fact, this hymn about Christ reveals that he is at the centre of all life. And that's what Paul wants the Colossians to see. Why?

Well, remember the background, the Colossians that we looked at 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 some other things, like they needed to worship angels, they needed to have visions, they needed to submit to traditions and experiences and philosophies and so on, if they wanted to be true Christians.

And so Paul wants them to see the greatness of Jesus, who is actually supreme over all these philosophies and angels and traditions and so on. He wants them to see how great Jesus is, so that they might realise they don't need to go back to these other things.

[2 : 34] And in fact, to go to these other things is to go to something that is inferior to Christ, who is superior, indeed supreme of everything. And so he begins in verse 15 with Christ's supremacy over creation.

So point one in your outlines and verse 15 in your Bibles. He writes very simply, In other words, Jesus reflects God's character and rule.

So if you want to know what God is like, then you look at Jesus. Of course, humanity was also supposed to reflect God's image. We heard that in our first reading, didn't we? From Genesis. God created the heavens and the earth, and then the pinnacle of creation was humanity.

Who were created in his image to reflect his character and his rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air. And yet our sin stopped us from being able to do that.

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

[3 : 52] Because Jesus is actually God. Unlike Adam and Eve, who were created in God's image and before sin came into the world. Jesus is also the one through whom the Father created all things.

All those things we heard in our first reading. And so the hymn goes on to say, verse 15, Jesus the Son is also the firstborn over all creation.

Why? Or verse 16, Because in him all things were created. Things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities, all things have been created through him and for him.

And he is before all things. And in him all things hold together. Here he begins by saying that Jesus is not just the image of God, but the firstborn over creation.

The word firstborn can mean two things. One, either he was born first. So in my family, the eldest child who's born first is Tim, my son. So firstborn can mean that one, the one who's born first, the eldest.

[4 : 59] Or the word firstborn can also mean the one who has first importance. The one who's highest rank in the family after the parents. The one who receives the inheritance.

Of course, in ancient cultures and even in cultures today, those two meanings go together, don't they? So the eldest child, the one who's born first, often is the most important in the family.

Isn't that right, Jess? Yeah. Okay, they go together. But here, what Paul is focusing on, what the hymn is focusing on, is that second meaning, that Christ is first in importance.

He has the highest rank. Why? Well, because verse 16, all things were created through him and for him. You see, some groups like Jehovah's Witness will say that, in verse 15, Jesus is called firstborn, which means he's the first person created in God's creation.

And so he's not really equal with God, he's just the first thing that God made. But what they've done is, what the media does, and they've taken a phrase out of context to twist the meaning. Because the context, the very next few verses, show that Jesus cannot be created if he is the one doing the creating, you see.

[6 : 11] He cannot be a created thing if, verse 17, he is before all things. As John puts it on the next slide, from the book of John in the Bible, he says, In the beginning was the Word, the Son, we're later told, Jesus.

And Jesus was with God, and the Word was God, he was God. He was with God in the beginning, so before everything was made. And then it says, Through Jesus all things were made, and without him nothing was made that has been made.

Now it's a bit wordy, but the point is that Jesus cannot be something that has been created. He's always been there as the Son. Sure, he came to earth and took on human form and was born as man, but he's always been there as the Son.

And so while we rightly say that the Father is the creator of the world, because he created through the Son, we can also say that Jesus is the creator of the world too. And because all things were created through the Son, then he is supreme over all things, including all things in heaven, like the angels whom the Colossians were being told they had to worship.

All things on earth, like the philosophies that the Colossians were told to submit to. You see what Paul is doing? He's saying, look at who Christ is so that you might realize if you have him, you have the greatest.

[7 : 37] So don't go and follow these other things as well. They are inferior to Christ, who is superior, supreme, the greatest. What's more, the end of verse 16, it says, Christ is not only the means of creation, but it was all made for him.

I remember being at a wedding of one of my good friends, Dan, and as the bride had just walked down the aisle, all dressed up, looking stunning, and the groom, Dan, was at the front beaming, and people were all oohing and garring, and everyone was smiling.

And the minister seated the congregation, then he looked at my friend Dan and his bride Chrissie, and he said, people say often at weddings that they are made for each other, and as I look here at Dan and Chrissie, let me tell you that they are not made for each other.

And people went, what? Like, you can hear this audible gasp and a few people going, what? And then he continued, he said, they are made firstly for Jesus. And then he quickly added to everyone's relief that they made a great couple as well.

But he was right, wasn't he? I'm not sure I would have done that at a wedding myself, but he was right. You see, we were created through Jesus and for Jesus.

[8 : 56] It's Jesus to whom we are ultimately designed to live. 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.

He gives it cohesion. He sustains it and gives it meaning and purpose. In other words, he is at the center of life. If we don't live for Christ, we will never find deep contentment and meaning in life.

Or we might do for a short time, but then something will happen and we'll re-question ourselves all over again. Because we were created to live for him. And do you see, Christ is not just supreme over creation life, he is at the very center of it.

not just as its ruler, but as the one who sustains life and gives it true meaning. It's not the traditions or philosophies or visions or experiences that the Colossians were being taught they had to follow. No, it's Christ. He's supreme over and at the center of creation life. But he's also supreme over and at the center of new creation life. Point to verse 18.

[10:00] He says, And he, the Son, is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

Here we're 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. So also Christ is the head of the church. He thinks something and we ought to do it. But the head also can be used to give the idea of a source of something, like the head of a river from which all the waters flow.

And that's the other meaning here. Jesus is the head in the sense he's the source of life for his body, the church. So just as our head with our mouth that eats food and our noses that breathe oxygen give life and sustain our body, so Christ as the head of the church by his spirit gives life to us and sustains us as Christians.

So he's the head of the church as our boss and our source of spiritual life, our Lord and our Saviour, if you like. So already we see that Jesus is not just the centre of earthly life but also the centre of new spiritual life.

[11:22] But then the hymn adds that in verse 18 that Jesus is also the beginning and the first born from among the dead. The word beginning here means that he opened up the way, he began the new creation, he kick-started it by his resurrection from the dead so that there will be a day when all will be raised from the dead like him and we'll all enjoy a new heavens and a new 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 nice if you've lost someone. You see, Christ is the beginning of that new creation.

But he's also the first born from among the dead, it says. Now here the word first born has both its meanings that we looked at before. He's the first to be raised from the dead. That happened 2,000 years ago or thereabouts and we actually have good evidence for it.

But he's also the first born like we saw in verse 15. First in importance, first in rank, which is the main point here. You see, just as he is first over creation, so he's also first over new creation, over everyone who will be raised from the dead.

So that verse 18, in everything, this creation and the new creation, this life and the next life in both, he might have the supremacy, it says.

[12:47] And just as Christ was supreme over this creation because God made it through him, so Christ is supreme over the new creation because God made it possible through him.

That's what verse 19 says. Do you see how it starts with the word for or because? It says, because God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him and through Jesus to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood shed on the cross.

You see, at the cross, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself and making peace. And through Christ, God won the decisive battle over sin and evil, as chapter 2, verse 15 will put it.

And so all things, whether in heaven or on earth, have been put back in order, reconciled, peace established. Of course, we may not see it yet.

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

[14:01] But the point of this hymn, these verses, is that just as Christ is supreme over creation and the center of this life because, you know, it was made through him, so also Christ is supreme over and the center of the new life because God made it all possible through him and his death at the cross.

In other words, Jesus really is supreme, the greatest. That's the point. Just last month, on the 6th of June, a famous person passed away. He was born in Kentucky as Cassius Clay then converted to

Islam in 1964 and changed his name to anyone?

Muhammad Ali, yep. Famous quote? Oh, it's on the slide already. I'm the greatest. Yeah. And in boxing, he was.

Like, three back-to-back heavyweight championships. I don't think anyone's done that since. But he's not the greatest in this world, this creation, this life.

Certainly not the greatest in the life to come. No, no, it's Christ because this creation was made through him and the new creation was also made possible through him and his death for us.

[15:08] And so now Paul brings his 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 death to present you wholly in his sight without blemish and free from accusation.

And here Paul brings the cosmic reconciliation of all things and now brings it home and applies it to the Colossians and to us. He says, You were once enemies of God because of our sin, but now you've been reconciled back to God.

Now you have peace with God. Not a peace that will be enforced on the last day where every knee will bow whether they like it or not. No, a peace where God is now our loving Heavenly Father and we are his precious children.

Reconciliation that means on Judgment Day we can stand blameless in God's sight, it says.

Counted holy before him. Free from accusation because we've been forgiven.

It's as though on Judgment Day when we hear Andrew Price, you've done this and you've done that and you've done all of this as well. Jesus will step in and say, It's okay. I've paid for all his sins.

[16:34] It's dealt with. He's free from accusation, free to enter heaven. And this actually makes a difference in this life here and now as well. It brings great comfort and assurance.

I mean, I've conducted a number of funerals recently and while there was rightly grief, there was also celebration because the people who passed were Christians and everyone knew where they were now with God.

And they also knew that we who trusted in Jesus would see them again. And so they had this great comfort and great assurance because they knew that they were free from accusation, that they were free to be with God and live eternally in heaven.

But I've also done funerals where the people have not been Christian and there was no such comfort, no such assurance. In fact, there was just a kind of wishful thinking. I'm sure he's up there looking down on us.

I'm sure if you push it too hard, which you can't really right there and then, they're not sure. It's just hopeful, wishful thinking. You see, Paul is reminding them that just as God brought reconciliation for the universe through Christ, so God has brought reconciliation for us through Christ, which makes a difference now.

[17:48] It brings us assurance and hope. So why would you want to leave Christ is the point. Why would you want to go after these other things that the Colossians were being pressured to go after?

Why would you leave Christ who saved you and made you right with God? Why would you forsake him when it's Jesus who is at the center of this life and our new spiritual life? And so Paul warns them not to leave Christ or add other things to Christ, which is really what the issue was.

You see verse 23? He says, God has done all this for us through Christ without blemish, free from accusation, if, verse 23, 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 in chapter 1 with the hope of the gospel which bore the fruit of faith and love in their lives.

So chapter 1, verse 4 and 5. And he says that they will stand on that last day free from accusation if they continue to trust in that same Jesus they first trusted in when they heard the gospel.

[19:06] If they stick with this Jesus who is supreme for it's Jesus who died for us to forgive us and to 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 after 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.

That's the difference it makes. And so there are really three points of application for us. The first is do you have faith in Jesus? Do you trust in him? Believe in him? Do you trust in his death on the cross to bring you peace with God now and assurance of heaven later?

If you want peace with God now and assurance of heaven later then you must we must trust in Jesus. So do you? That's the first question. But the second one for us who do already trust in Jesus is will we continue to trust in him?

Not move from the hope held out in the gospel. You see like the Colossians we get all sorts of messages from the world and society and even our non-Christian family and friends and they're not so much telling us to give up Jesus altogether our society and our family is often too polite to say that but they do exactly the same thing as what's happening in Colossians.

[20 : 33] They say look just add to Jesus a few other things now have a bit of a mix as well don't take him too seriously you don't want to be a fundamentalist after all and don't take your Bible reading all that seriously either it doesn't matter if you don't read it for a month it won't matter you can kind of fill your head with other things as well other philosophies think about those and chase after those and when it comes to your family and church you don't have to take it all that seriously you go to church once a month that's good enough isn't it surely and when it comes to the Bible well you know take the bit love the bit about love from the Bible that's good but you know reject all this stuff about sexuality you know after all it's the 21st century we get all these messages don't we but what does Paul say well we're to continue in the faith not a faith of a bit of Christ and a bit of the world but Christ alone established and firm not moved from the hope held out in the gospel we are to continue with Christ and Christ alone and thirdly we are to see Jesus for who he is the one who is supreme and at the centre of both this life and the one to come the one who has made life possible and given meaning to it and if this is who

Jesus is then he is to be the one who is supreme and at the centre of our own lives is he not that's who he is after all he is the one that our life is to revolve around as the earth revolves around the sun which gives life to the earth so our lives are to revolve around the son of God who gives life to us and I was very encouraged by various people some of whom at this congregation who have demonstrated this very thing in their own lives I mean here today we've got a family who just moved house for the first time and they're here in church after moving over the weekend could have had a nice excuse oh we'll just sleep in we're tired life doesn't revolve around moving it revolves around Jesus I remember another family I think I've mentioned this one before their family were going away on holidays on a Sunday down to Mornington I think it was and they were going to leave in the morning and meet up with the family for morning tea or something like that but they said no no we're going to go to church first and we'll leave afterwards around holidays revolves around Jesus don't get me wrong there's good reasons to miss church I'm not saying that but you get the point another friend of mine took a promotion but it took her away from Bible study and church and so after a while I think it was a month or two months she handed back the promotion took a drop in pay people at her work did not understand it they thought she was mental and then she told them the reason is because the promotion was affecting her relationship with God and they went even more mental never heard of it before but you see her life did not revolve around money or career revolved around Jesus for Jesus is the one who is supreme Jesus is the one who gives life and meaning he's at the center of it and so our lives are meant to revolve around him and it's been so encouraging to see people here in this congregation do that very thing I started with a song that Megan wrote about her magnificent dad I mean magnificent mum well in these verses today we have a hymn about the magnificent Christ who indeed is the greatest 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 this great hymn about the greatest person Christ father we thank you that it lifts our eyes to see just who he is that he is supreme over both this life and the life to come and indeed is at the very center of it and so father we ask that you might help us to reflect who he is in our own lives to follow him and to revolve our lives around him for we ask it in Jesus name amen will save you I hope you fun situation time so

I hope you have a ves free exclusive to me story and thank you and all and thank you for bring