

The Preeminence of Christ in the Church

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 03 December 2023

Preacher: John Howard

[0 : 00] Okay. Well, today you got me. And we're going to finish the study that we've been doing on the church out of the book, Flickering Lamps, the Blackley book.

And the topic today is the preeminence of Christ in the church. The last time I spoke was the beginning of this whole process, and the topic was the presence of Christ in the church.

So now we're going to look at his preeminence. And sometimes that's the part that gets lost. We gather. We do this stuff. We sing songs. We do ritual, if you want to call it that.

What we habitually do is ritual, by the way. And we forget. Not only is he present, but he's supposed to be the head.

He's supposed to be above all. And we forget to do that. So we're going to look at the relationship that the church has with the head.

[0 : 59] That is Christ today. Okay. So we're going to start with Scripture. The first Scripture... I sang too much. The first Scripture... You know, I have a choice.

I can sing or I can preach. I know you'd rather me... Well, you don't want me to sing either. Anyway, here we are. So turn in your Bibles and Mark, if you'd change the slide for me.

There is Malachi. We're going to look at Revelation 1, 5-8. So if you turn in your Bible to that, I'd appreciate it. Revelation 1, 5-8.

And this is right. John has been brought up in this vision or the presence of heaven or in the Spirit on the Sabbath.

Sunday, rather. And this is part of that. And what I want you to get is we're going to have a description of Christ. Look at how He is described and how He describes Himself.

[2 : 01] All right. And from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn among the dead, the ruler of the kings of the earth, to the one who loves us and has set us free from our sins at the cost of His own blood, and has appointed us a kingdom as priests serving His God and Father.

To Him be the glory and the power forever and ever. Amen. Look, He's returning in the clouds. And every eye will see Him and even those who pierced Him.

And all the tribes on the earth will mourn because of Him. This will certainly come to pass. Amen.

And I would say, Maranatha. And it happens soon.

I am the Alpha and the Omega, says the Lord God, the one who is and was and who is to come.

The all-powerful. You needed to change another one.

There you go. Now, just leave it right there. We're training new people back there, by the way. What did you notice?

[3 : 10] Well, one thing I noticed was that it starts out, and John, as he's writing this down, starts to describe Christ. And then at the end, verse 8, Christ describes Himself.

I am the Alpha and the Omega. They're all powerful. And much of this same description, by the way, you'll find in Isaiah.

If you were to go through Isaiah looking for it, and that's the problem. You have to go through Isaiah looking for it. You'll find chunks of this. It's the same description. The same description of who the Christ is.

He is God's faithful agent. The one who came to do three things, to be three things, and it's all going to be culminated at the end.

He's God's Davidic king. Remember, we sang, someone mentioned that David would have someone on his throne forever. Who is that one? It will be Christ.

[4 : 12] He reigns as king. He's the Davidic king. He's the suffering servant. It mentions in here, He's the one who died, that we might be free of our sins. He's the one that suffered for us on our behalf, that we would be free, and have life eternal with Him.

And here's the part we're all looking for, or at least I hope we are. He's going to be the victorious warrior, who is coming to bring justice and righteousness to the earth, and to vanquish evil forever and ever, and establish His kingdom on the new earth.

And we will be His population, the people of His kingdom, priests of our God. That's Christ. That's who He is. The all-powerful, the almighty, the king of kings, the king of all creation, the firstborn from the dead.

And because He is all those things, and especially the firstborn from the dead, we know, we too, will know the resurrection. We will live again. He was in the beginning, and He'll be in the end.

All things were made by Him. He's the one who brings the new earth and the new heaven to be. And we're going to live in His kingdom forever, as His people.

[5 : 35] His purpose, and He has a purpose, has had a purpose all through creation, since the beginning, will be fulfilled. No obstacle will stop Him from completing that purpose.

We were talking in Sunday school about His arrest today, and all the things that happened during that time. And that was, apparently Satan thought that this was His victory. He had the Savior, the Messiah, was arrested and was going to be executed.

I've won, I've won, Satan says. Only to find out, oh no, I've lost, I've lost, when the resurrection occurs. Nothing will thwart God and His Christ.

From fulfilling their purpose. And it's Him who we worship today. So let's look at how we relate to this awesome God that we worship in sermon.

Let's go to, next slide, go to Genesis. You see, God made a unique partnership, and I want you to look for this partnership. He made a unique partnership with us, as people.

[6 : 42] And it starts right in Genesis, and it follows through and it continues to this very day. And in Genesis 2, verses 8 and 9, it says, the Lord God planted an orchard or a garden, however you want to translate that, in the east, in Eden, and there He placed man He had formed.

The Lord God made all kinds of trees grow from the soil, every tree that was pleasing to look at and good for food. Now the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil were in the middle of the garden.

Now, so God's made this garden. You notice, He's created the whole earth, but the garden is only part of the earth. It's a place that has unmatched fertility and richness and beauty.

And what does He do? He takes man that He's made out of the earth and He says, I'm going to put him in this garden. Well, you know, most of us have said, great, let's just go live in the garden.

That would be a great place to be. But there's more to the story. Let's look at the next slide, which is Genesis 2, verses 15 through 17. And the Lord God took man and placed him in the orchard in Eden to care for it and to maintain it.

[7 : 57] Then the Lord God commanded man, you may eat freely the fruit from every tree in the orchard, but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it, you will surely die.

So God put man in the garden for what purpose? To tend it and to take care of it. And the picture really is that man is put there and the garden has to be expanded.

How far does the garden have to be expanded to cover the entire earth? Man was to take what God had established and extend it until the earth was filled with God's glory.

and his purpose was man to be the one to do the work. God created, man extends God's work. Who receives the glory?

God does. Why? He does what man cannot do. He created. Man can work and he can make, but there's a big difference between making something and creating something.

[9 : 02] and God gets the glory. Man gets the credit for what he does, but only in response to what God asks him to do.

If a man should say, look what I've done. Seeking praise for the creation of the garden. Something he couldn't do himself for him.

Only God could do man then is lying. He's stealing God's glory and taking it for himself. Boy, another extension is man and woman were in the garden.

What did God tell them to do? God made man and he made woman. What did he tell them to do?

Be fruitful and multiply. To fill the earth. So God said, here, I'm giving you everything you need to be fruitful and to multiply and fill the earth.

Who had to actually do the thing and have the children and raise them and man and woman had to do that? Do they get credit for that? Yeah, they get credit for doing that, but who gets the glory for making it possible for providing for them that they can do this?

[10:12] As soon as the garden grew, it would grow and responsibly increase population. Of course, Satan didn't want that to happen. So he steps in. The same principles apply to the church, by the way, to us in the church.

Who established the church? Christ. Christ did. If you look at the word church, it really means congregation or assembly. What is the name of the people in Israel in the Old Testament?

They're called the assembly or the congregation of God. It's the same idea in the Old Testament. The people of Israel were the people of God. They were the assembly or the congregation.

And in the New Testament, God said, I'm making new. Those that respond to my son are going to be in the congregation. Now, who's in that congregation?

Who's in that assembly? That community is another way of putting it. All believers. All believers, whether they are Jews or Gentiles. Again, Isaiah talks about that, that the Savior was going to come and that he was going to bring all nations before his God.

[11:24] Well, how'd you get in the church? I don't necessarily mean this one. Mostly just walked in the door and said, here I am. But how did you get into the community of faith?

How did that happen? Somebody obeyed Christ's final direction to the disciples. To do what? Go to all the world. Go fishing and we'll meet on the shore, right?

No. What? Go into all the world and share the gospel. Share the gospel. So they are obedient servants and if they share the gospel, how did you then end up in this pew?

Jody? She's going. She's got a mouthful of mint. That's alright. You accepted it. You said, this makes sense. I can remember it.

I'm going, this is the best thing anyone ever told me. Not that I didn't already sort of know it, but I know it never just sort of put it there and said, you've got to do something with this thing.

[12:34] It was good news. I mean, really good news in my situation. I was in desperate need of that. Back in our verses in Revelation, it said that we were going to be a kingdom and priests to our God.

Peter says that we're a holy people, a peculiar people. We'd be what? Priests and kings. So, there's a purpose for us. We're called to fulfill a role that we might work with God to fulfill His purpose.

So, who gets the honor and praise and glory when someone gets saved? Someone gets reborn? The gospel gets shared. Who gets the glory?

The person who shared the gospel? No. They're just the messenger. Who's the one that gives rebirth? God does.

He gets the glory. He gets the honor. He gets all of our praise. I don't even know the name of the Irish evangelist that shared the gospel with me for a day and a half.

[13:51] Patiently meeting all of my Catholic ideas that were wrong, and sharing what Scripture said. But I definitely know who I met that day when I said I want to accept Christ as my Savior.

It wasn't the Irishman, but that was only so we can, are you sure? when we try to take the credit for what only God can do, we sin against Him.

God will not bless that. Next slide. In Isaiah he said, I am the Lord. That is my name. I will not share my glory with anyone else.

The next line that says, I will not accept their idols. God will not share His glory with idols or with anything else that we set up between us and Him.

And we human beings like to have something tangible nearby that we can pin our hopes on, that we can see. whether it be a spouse or a job or a paycheck or a house or a truck, He will not share His glory.

[15:27] He will not honor us as we hold on to idols made by human hands. And He surely will not share with a man what is His.

And what is His? Glory. His is the glory that belongs to Him. He will display His glory. He will reveal His glory. Do you remember back when David was moving the Ark of the Covenant in the Old Testament?

He was moving the Ark of the Covenant. He had been sitting in this guy's house for a long time when the Philistines decided they needed to get rid of it because they were getting all these tumors and diseases and things.

So they moved it and they set it down and David says it's time to move it to Jerusalem where it can be housed properly and be in the center of the capital basically.

Well David set out to do that and I don't know I don't know it's a long story short but he obviously didn't talk to the priest or the priest didn't know or didn't say or something. Anyway they put it on an ox cart and were moving it and the oxen stumbled what happens?

[16 : 37] a guy that's working there reaches out to steady it what happens? He dies instantly dies do you know why?

the glory of God he reached out to touch the glory of God God will not share his glory he violated God's glory he thought he was doing something good and for the average even David thought what's the big deal he stopped it from falling but you see what he did is he short circuited who's responsible for the glory of God and for the things of God God is he doesn't need us to protect him the church and churches die for the same reason by the way they often try to take credit for what only God can do they reach out to touch what belongs only to God they try to do the works of God with the wisdom of man and they try to use human resources and effort to accomplish the purposes of God scripture says

God's thoughts are higher than man's how can God's work be done in human wisdom how can we get together and say let's figure out what God wants done what would be a sensible plan to reach our community what is a means that we let's go see how business sells things our problem is a marketing problem we've got the best product in the world but we're not marketing it right God's not honored by that for a church to see any success in what it does and we're talking about true success some churches some of the mega churches have used the best marketing methods in the whole of business and they've built huge churches but what happens ultimately they collapse why God says I'm not in this this is not for me they're not honoring me they're honoring and often times it's the lead pastor who then gets to thinking he's pretty important and then he starts doing stupid things and the whole thing falls apart

Mars Hill is a good example there's a couple of them in Florida recently the same thing everything was centered on glorified it bothers me I saw a billboard this church was advertising this church well guess who was on the billboard their pastor big old picture come here pastor so and so he's great who's getting the honor and glory there who's is God going to honor that probably not can he use it of course he can use anything but he isn't going to be there to say let me bless this church if a church is going to have any success it must have an attitude of dependence on God it must join in what God is already doing around them it's not to seek to do what seems wise to men and it's not to act in their own power and within their own means it is not to use only its limited resources to try to accomplish the purposes of God now I was thinking about that oh my goodness

I'm the one that did the budget and I worked on the budget and I worked on the calendar and I'm going wow are we limiting God if you read the book he asks that question when you talk about the budget is this what we're going to do or is this simply a starting point for what God might do and I'm hoping someone's made the comment that rescues me here said we got this budget and most of you won't ever look at it and the point is someone said well you know if we need more money we'll just spend it we'll just do it we won't worry with oh my goodness we've over spent our budget in this area we have to do something because this isn't going to how are we going to keep the accounting right who cares about the accounting if God says do it we do it no matter what it costs where the money comes from it's not our money anyway as long as we're using it for his purposes and his glory who cares what line item it is now gay might care because she has to do the financial report but really does it make a difference no why do we do a budget just to give us an idea of what we're doing a framework

[21 : 52] I had a boss that said a plan is only a point of departure it's where you start it's not where you're going to end up that's the same thing with our budget what about our calendar it's filled with wonderful things some of them are just fun things some of them are not some of them are really mission oriented does that mean we can't do anything else no we can do whatever we want wherever God leads us to do we have to do everything on the calendar no we don't have to we find out that it isn't going to work or isn't worthwhile don't do it because what is the point is the point to fill our calendar up with wonderful Christian activity or is it to serve God there's a verse in the ultimate that says the cattle on a thousand hills belongs to the Lord what is that we always say that means what our resources are limited but his are unlimited do you know what Jesus said when he was in the garden he said if I wanted to stop this

I could call on my God and he would send me does anyone know what he said legions in fact he said six legions I think of angels that 72 thousand angels should have showed up and showed that mob that came to get him who's really boss if he wanted to but he chose not to God God God is unlimited in his resources so when he calls us to do something we go Columbia how many how many times did we fall short on money for Columbia never I can think of some really unique wonderful times I remember Jackie you sit right over there Jackie wanted to go she loved going to Columbia the first time she wanted to go she says I don't know what I can do down there but I want to go I think God wants me to go but I can't afford it I said man I both said Jackie don't worry about that that's not your responsibility you do what you can God will provide that very day someone put in the offering a check for fifteen hundred dollars and said if someone needs money to go to Columbia here it is that afternoon we called Jackie and said guess what God paid for it she says you're kidding me no if God's God a purpose he will provide see we can't do this in our own strength and our own wisdom but we can see him work through us and with us to accomplish his purpose and that purpose involves gathering people for himself into a kingdom and a community of faith of all those who believe and respond to the movement of the spirit and who find faith and new life next slide is Ephesians and this is something you're all familiar with it says for by grace you are saved through faith and this not of yourselves it is a gift of God it is not from works that no one can boast for we are his workmanship the Greek word really is masterpiece now I want you to look around this room this is the masterpieces you see in this room are greater than anything you'll see in the room think about that you are

God's masterpiece now when I look in the mirror I don't necessarily see a masterpiece I see an old foggity man but hey God doesn't look on the outside he looks on the inside he sees a masterpiece because he knows what I'm going to be someday and I'm hoping it's young and fit like you brought you you never know it'd be my luck you'll say no John your masterpiece is going to be fat and sloppy okay if that's what you want God you know what's best then I'll go find a place to do push-ups for we are his workmanship his masterpiece having been created in Christ Jesus for what good works who did what God prepared beforehand so that we can do them before you were saved God had already laid out things that he wanted you to do he says I want to involve you in my purpose in fulfilling my purpose and I've already got it laid out now

I know you're not going to do these things perfectly sometimes you're going to do more than you're supposed to and sometimes you're going to do less but you know what we're going to get there because I've already got it prepared and where you need help I've got people already lined up to come in and help you and where you fall down I've got someone to pick you up and where you succeed I've got someone there to celebrate with you it's only by the mercies of God that we find faith to believe the truth in Christ's sacrifice we can do nothing ever to save ourselves we can't even boast about it we can only praise God and give him glory for his mercies and grace but it doesn't stop there we're saved for a purpose you know just like Adam was created to work in the garden to extend it to the ends of the earth to manage and steward it so too we've been created as God's masterpiece in Christ

[27 : 33] Jesus to do good works and that purpose is to bring his dominion his kingdom to all the earth to every ethnic group that one day when we celebrate in the before the throne of God all assembled all his people assembled before him there will be however many languages three or four thousand languages being spoken of the glory of God and people of every description race every ethnic group every variation will be there to praise him and God will get the glory and we'll live in that kingdom grown by our Savior Jesus Christ for eternity to serve and worship our God what we need to remember is who's in charge and I can tell you right now it's not us we're servants in fact the word servants in that Greek word in servant when they say we're servants it's actually slaves but it's sort of not like our slavery that we had in this country it's more it's a little bit different and so it sort of toggles back and forth in its understanding but we're servants or slaves of God and we are to do the will of our

God remember when Jesus prayed not my will but yours what should we be praying every day not my will Lord let me do your will this is the day that you made you put me in it you equip me to do what you want done today let me do your will not mine and then we have to do it in God's way and in his power and in his wisdom now it's not just doing by the way you know there's a balance scale you've seen the old balance scales the justice one you know the two things hanging off the balance being well the to do is on one side that's half of the half of the equation what's on the other side to

be God is more really honestly if he has to choose between you doing something and you being something he'll choose being something he wants you to be like his son he's more interested in your character than your actions but if he can get your character headed the right direction guess what he'll do with the actions he'll provide you the things you need to do in response to how your character is being developed so we need to be increasingly like our savior we need to allow the spirit to work in us to transform us daily from glory to glory it says in scripture into the likeness of Christ now doesn't mean we're all going to look like Jesus and you all got this picture of Jesus you know I got I was listening to a program and they oh my goodness it was British TV anyway they said yeah Jesus was blonde and blue eyed and they go wait a minute didn't he come from dark skin people most African yeah yeah but him and his disciples were all blonde and blue eyed you know we think of Jesus as being like us that's not the important part we need to look be like Jesus in our character in our demeanor in our actions in our relationships that's what he wants us to be like he wasn't blue eyed and blonde by the way I'm positive of that people across the street have more in common to him in his physical appearance than we do over here he wants us to display the grace and mercy to those inside and outside our fellowship that he displayed to those people that he was with we were talking about he treated

Judas with respect even though he knew and told him I know you're going to betray me but he called him friend I think if Judas had survived past taking the money back to the priest Jesus would have forgiven him like he forgave Peter we're also to recognize the breadth of God's church and it's far beyond these walls it's found in every corner of the world you know that everywhere you go you may have to look real hard because it may be hidden hiding in fear but the church exists church with a capital C all unified by the same spirit we all serve the same spirit there's a verse that says my spirit testifies to your spirit that you belong to Christ have you ever been with other believers when we get together at Mount

Olive do you not sense Christ's presence the spirit in them that they're brothers and sisters the fifth Sunday I think this last fifth Sunday we had was an eye opener for many of us because we saw churches from all over this area gathered with different worship styles and different everything you can think of celebrating our faith in Christ together and we could tell there was a common spirit we need to work with all diligence to make known what God is doing amongst us and the churches to bring him glory we share I'm just going to show you this slide I'm not going to spend a lot of time on it because we're running out of time I'm sure but this is Paul in Ephesians again he's talking and he says he's a prisoner he's in jail he says therefore as a person of the Lord I urge you to live worthy of the calling with which you have been called that's important live worthy of the calling the upward calling in Christ remember where you're going you have you need to live like that's an important goal like that's a goal that's worth a place worth getting to with all humility that's putting other people first gentleness patience that's my weakness right there bearing with one another in love making every effort to keep the unity of the spirit in the bonds of peace because why there is one body and one spirit just as you too were called to one hope of your calling one Lord one baptism one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all we work we live in the church and it is a pyramid but it's a real flat pyramid all this base and there's only one point and we need to recognize that that's who we need to seek and serve we need to be a blessing to our communities and a blessing to all of God's people that we meet and that worker at

[35 : 17] Walmart that refuses to help you you need to be gracious to again that's my problem we need to see the love and grace of God when we work with those around us and interact with them because guess what when they encounter you they should be encountering Christ should be that they're encountering somebody your goal is that in Christ they see not you so how do we respond to all this how do we sum all this up not just today but in total how do we sum all this up a book was overwhelming when you actually it was easy to read but it was overwhelming if you thought about all the things that he said we need to be considering and none of it is extraordinary none of it is she comes as a surprise the stuff we know but how do we do that he said wait and watch for what what is

God doing around you now think about that too many people think it is the pastor's job you got two of us in this church to do what to discern the will of God and tell you what to do is that necessarily a valid truth no because who has the spirit of God in this church all of you that are believers and who could God reveal himself working to any of you to include the young ones and to turn and say well pastor what are we going to do or hey deacons what are we doing is okay but it's missing the point

[78 : 41] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[81 : 11] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[83 : 41] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.