

## The Supremacy of Christ

Scripture Text: Colossians 1:15-23

### Introduction

Last week we began looking at Paul's letter to the Colossians. In the first few verses of chapter one, Paul wrote about the gospel bearing fruit and growing and the church bearing fruit and growing. We want to see this church bearing fruit and growing this year, not merely in numbers of people, but in faithful disciples who are making more faithful disciples of Jesus Christ. I mentioned last week that many consider Paul's letter to the Colossians to be one of the most thoroughly *Christ-centered* books in the Bible. I also mentioned that as we go through this letter, I am going to take every opportunity to point out the *supremacy of Jesus Christ*, the importance of the gospel, and our duty as God's people to share the good news of Jesus Christ. All of this should be easy to see in the sermon text today because the passage speaks much on Christ being highly exalted and the importance of believing the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ.

While we do not know exactly to what Paul was responding in this letter, it seems that some false teachers were diminishing the significance of Christ. Paul took the opportunity to correct this false teaching and exalt Jesus Christ and the very reason all of creation exists. We exist to bring glory to the only Way to God, the only name by which we can be reconciled to Him, and the very Author of creation – Jesus Christ. The final two verses of last week's passage, verses thirteen and fourteen, spoke of God delivering us from the darkness of sin and transferring us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, Jesus Christ. Through Jesus, we have been rescued from sin and adopted into God's family. And so, Paul began the next section of the letter writing about the *supremacy of Jesus Christ*. In fact, verses thirteen through twenty are considered to be an early Christian hymn that spoke of Christ and creation, Christ and the new creation, and Christ and our reconciliation. In these verses, Paul praised the supremacy of Christ in relation to both creation and redemption.

### List of All things Mentioned:

You can get a sense of the supremacy Paul mentioned by the use of the word "all".

- Jesus is the firstborn of *all creation* (v. 15)
- *All things* were created by Him (v. 16)
- *All things* were created through Him and for Him (v. 16)
- He was before *all things* (v. 17)
- In Him *all things* hold together (v. 17)
- He is first in *everything* (v. 18)
- All the fullness of *God* dwells in Him (v. 19)
- He reconciled *all things* (v. 19)
- The Gospel is proclaimed in *all creation* (v. 23)

Paul in no uncertain terms made the point that Jesus Christ is *supreme in everything*. So let's take a closer look at this Christ hymn.

### **The Supremacy of Christ in Creation (vss. 15-17)**

The first part of this hymn claimed that Jesus is the Lord, the maker and upholder of all things in the universe. Paul wrote that Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God. God the Son, God who became flesh, became the visible representation of the immortal, invisible, and the almighty God. Jesus has the same form as God the Father in heaven. This should not be confused as mankind being made in the image of God. While God made mankind in His image, mankind is vastly different from our almighty Creator. But, Jesus is Immanuel, God in the flesh, God who came to earth and pitched His tent in human flesh. He is the visible representation of His invisible heavenly Father. *Jesus is God*. This fact is confirmed by the writer of Hebrews as well as the Apostle John in John 1:14 which states that Jesus is “the Word [who] became flesh and dwelt among us.”

But, Jesus is also the firstborn of all creation. On the surface, this may seem like Paul said Jesus had an origin. Some early Christians believed that there was a time when Jesus did not exist. Indeed, He was born of the Virgin Mary. We just celebrated His human birth at Christmas. However, it would be incorrect to think that Paul was saying that Jesus had an origin or was somehow created. This was where some early Christians, and still some today, go wrong in their beliefs about Jesus. It is wrong to think of the Son as anything other than existing eternally with the Father and the Holy Spirit, in the Godhead – Father, Son and Holy Spirit, three Persons but one God. In the Old Testament, a firstborn son would be the principal heir of an estate, which is not uncommon with many cultures today. What Paul wrote about Jesus being the firstborn of all creation was like the rights and privileges of a firstborn son, the son of a king who would inherit the kingdom. This is what Psalm 89 meant speaking of King David: “I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth.” (Ps. 89:27) However, God gave Jesus Christ such honor, not because He is the oldest son in the family, but because He is the only begotten and beloved Son of the Father.

Paul went on to write that by Jesus all things were created. Jesus did not come into existence when he was born of the Virgin Mary. On the contrary, Jesus was the *agent of creation* through whom God made everything. Jesus could not be the first thing created since he created “all things” without exception. Paul went on to elaborate on some of the things that were created by Jesus – things in heaven and on earth, things seen and not seen, thrones, dominions, rulers, and authorities. Not only is Jesus the agent of creation but He is also the *reason for creation*. Paul wrote that everything was created by Him and *for Him*, that is, for His honor and praise. Everything exists for Jesus – the mountains, the seas, the land, the church, you and me – we all exist to bring Him glory. And lastly, Paul wrote that Jesus sustains His creation by writing “in Him all things hold together.” Therefore, since creation itself exists because of Jesus, for Jesus and He sustains it, He must be fully God.

### **The Supremacy of Christ in the New Creation (vss. 18-20)**

The first part of this passage declared Jesus is our Creator God. The second part declared He is our Savior. After Paul made clear statements regarding the divinity of Jesus, he then wrote in the second part of this hymn about Jesus’ role and relationship with His redeemed creation. In verse eighteen, Paul wrote the following:

**Colossians 1:18** And [Jesus] is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything He might be preeminent.

We have heard this before. In our look through First Corinthians we read how the church is the Body of Christ and Jesus is the Head of this body. Paul wrote here that Christ is the head of the church. Jesus is the leader of the church; He is the coach of this team. But more than that, He is the very reason the church exists. We, as the church, exist because Jesus Christ died for it. No one else died for the church, only Jesus did. This means we belong to Him. His “headship” over the church may also suggest a role in sustaining it. Jesus gives life to us by His Holy Spirit.

Earlier, Paul made it clear that all creation is a result of Jesus Christ. Creation, however, is broken. It is infected with a disease – a sin disease. Not only is Jesus the agent of creation, but He is also the agent of the new creation – the redeemed. The event which marked the beginning of this new creation was Jesus’ resurrection. In verse eighteen, Paul wrote that Jesus is “the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.” This is a reference to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. His resurrection marked the beginning of the new creation, a new era prophesied in the Old Testament. He was the first to rise from the dead and because of His resurrection, His new creation, those who believe in Him and place their trust in His work on the cross, will also rise from the grave. Isn’t that good news?

Paul also wrote that through Jesus, God reconciled all things to Himself, “making peace by the blood of the cross.” It is through Jesus’ incarnation and atoning death that God’s righteousness is satisfied and peace between God and man is restored. As the “Prince of Peace” (Isa. 9:6), Jesus will ultimately crush all rebellion against God. For believers, this means reconciliation to God. It means restoring the broken relationship that Adam and Eve initiated in the Garden of Eden. This is why Jesus is so utterly necessary for us. Without Him, we live in rebellion to God. We have the wrath of God thrust upon us. But with Christ, we have peace and reconciliation, and the basis for this peace is His blood on the cross. The cross of Christ and His subsequent resurrection is the pivotal point in human history. Because of Jesus’ work, God’s corrupted creation is re-created into a new order.

### **The Supremacy of Christ in Reconciliation (vss. 21-23)**

The final section of this passage explained the meaning of this reconciliation. In the final verses of this passage, Paul contrasted the difference in our lives before knowing Christ and after knowing Him. This was a message Paul needed to remind the Colossians, and it is a message the church needs to hear today. Our lives before knowing Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior are marked by alienation, hostility and “doing evil deeds.” In verse twenty-one, Paul wrote the following:

**Colossians 1:21** And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds,

That is the condition of everyone before they repent and turn to Christ. We are all alienated from God. That is what sin does – it breaks our relationship with God. Just like parents and

children who may be alienated by bad choices, by selfishness, or a lack of love for one another, sin destroys our relationship with God. Scripture declares that we are enemies of God. We have hostile thoughts and evil desires. We do not want what is good and pleasing to God, but we desire what is evil, and we act upon those thoughts. We do things to hurt God and each other. These bad actions are an outflowing of our sinful desires. Jesus declared that it is not what goes into a man that defiles him, but what comes out of his heart. That is the condition of everyone without Christ. It is not a pretty picture.

But there is hope. Jesus has reconciled us by His death. Jesus Christ was born, in order to die for us, so that we can have life and a restored relationship with God. While we were once alienated to God, we are now reconciled to Him by the death of His Son. This is available to anyone who believes in Jesus, who repents of his or her sin, and places his or her trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior. And that's not all. Our salvation, believing in Jesus Christ, has a purpose. Sure, it is to reconcile us to God. It is to restore our broken relationship with Him. But that is not all of it. God did not *just* bring us peace at the cost of His Son's life. Salvation through Jesus Christ is so much more.

**Colossians 1:22** [Jesus] has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, *in order* to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him...

God does not just want a restored relationship with us. He wants to re-create a people of His own choosing. God wants to present us, the church, holy and blameless and above reproach. God does not want just any kind of people. He desires to have a particular kind of people – a holy people, set apart for Him. Jesus reconciled us and is now working in our lives in order to present us holy and blameless to His Father.

The last verse, verse twenty-three, seems to indicate that there is a condition to keep your salvation, meaning there is something you need to do to remain saved. Indeed, we must come to Christ in faith and believe the work He did on the cross is *sufficient* to save us. We have to believe that. But Paul stated that we have this salvation if we *continue in faith*, steadfast, and not shifting from the hope we have in the gospel. Paul's expectation, though, is that the Colossians had this saving faith. Saving faith is persevering faith. Scripture declares that those whom God draws to Him will come to Him and He will never cast them out. In the letter to the Romans, Paul wrote that nothing will "separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:39) Salvation is not based on your works, but on the work of Christ on the cross. God's salvation is complete and this is good news.

## Conclusion

The question you must ask yourself is this: Have I responded in faith to Jesus Christ? Have I given up on trying to save myself, thinking I can do it without God? Have I turned to the only One Who can reconcile me to God? Have you? There is only one name in all of creation by which we can be saved, and His name is Jesus Christ. The good news of Jesus Christ has been proclaimed in all creation. God has revealed His immeasurable love for us and His plan to redeem His creation. It is as simple as turning from ourselves and turning to Jesus Christ. Have you done that? If so, will you share that news with others? May it be so!