

THE SUPREMACY OF CHRIST PART 1: HIS PERSON

COLOSSIANS 1:15-18

Introduction and Background

It seems that as an associate pastor of worship that it would be appropriate for me to preach about a hymn – and our passage today certainly fits that description. It appears that while this may not have been a song to be sung, it certainly appears that Colossians 1:15-23 takes on a form of prose or poetry that's broken up into two sections – 15-18 and 19-23. This takes on the form of ancient Hebrew teaching tradition that teaches vital truth in the same moment that it shouts forth adoration and praise.

In the same way, we come to our passage today with a absolute feast of truth about Christ. But in the same breath, while we proclaim these truths about Christ, we are adoring and praising him for who he is.

The main point of Paul's teaching in vs. 15-18 is that Jesus is absolutely supreme in all things – over creation and over his church. What comes from this then, is that we follow in proclamation and praise of Jesus for his incredible majesty and power.

The context here is that right before verse 15, Paul is reminding the Colossian believers of the work of God the Father, who, "has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we now have redemption, the forgiveness of sins." Paul reminds the Colossians, and so reminds us, that this is not some esoteric argument about the finer points of theology - this is about the King, Jesus Christ, in whom we are redeemed. Paul points out that this is the kingdom of Christ - we live under the kingship of Jesus Christ.

When coming to this passage then, let us remember that this song of praise, this Christ-hymn, acts as an announcement for a king. A king would always have a herald – someone who would proclaim the accolades of the king, someone who would list the king's accomplishments and who he is before entering a room. We have the image often represented to us in books and literature of maybe a trumpeter who sounds his trumpet and hails the entrance of the king.

There is something glorious to us about that kind of entrance that attracts us. There is a sense of majesty, and awe that someone with such a reputation would enter into the room. All of us love the stories of good kings – stories such as the Lord of the Rings – Return of the King, or C.S. Lewis' classic, Chronicles of Narnia, where Aslan, while not the king, has even greater authority than any king or queen of Narnia.

In our passage here, Paul is doing exactly this – heralding the King. This passage is nothing short of a shout of praise for the eternal King of Glory – Jesus Christ. Paul in this passage is declaring that there has never been or will ever be a King as supreme and glorious as the Son of God.

As we approach this incredible passage, let us know that Christ is the supreme King of Glory, feel the weight of glory that drips from these verses, and stand in awe and worship the one who is God over all, blessed forever, amen.

Paul demonstrates the supremacy of Christ in three points:

- A. That Jesus is the unique, perfect, Son of God who perfectly reveals God.
- B. That Jesus is the creator and sustainer of everything.
- C. That Jesus is the head of the church, the body of Christ.

1. Vs. 15 - Jesus is the unique, perfect, Son of God, the one who perfectly reveals God.

a. "He is the image of the invisible God" -

i. ***Present tense: this is who Jesus is!***

ii. Not stating that Jesus is a created being - but rather that Jesus is God because he is the exact representation of God's nature.

iii. Heb. 1:3- *He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.*¹

iv. Humans are in the image of God, and we do represent him - the image of God in us is the authority he has given us over the created realm. (Pao)

1. You and I represent God in his authority and his communicable attributes. But do we represent God perfectly? No. Sin mars the perfect reflection of God in us.

v. The word for "image" here has the meaning of perfectly representing something else "a visual representation produced on a surface" (Lou-Nida).

1. Look at the back of any coin – whether it's Abraham Lincoln or George Washington – there is an imprint of someone's likeness there. Is that a perfect likeness? No, but it is detailed.

2. Now, using our coin illustration, imagine Jesus is the exact imprint of God – that in every detail, every intricacy, all the depth, the infinite nature, the omnipresence and omnipotence- all of this is perfectly, without even the slightest distortion represented in the person of Jesus Christ.

3. This is why Jesus being the "image of the invisible God" means -

vi. He perfectly reveals God the Father. Jesus is completely God, and so, in every possible way, reflects perfectly the glory of His Father.

. "The firstborn of all creation"-

i. Not the firstborn of all of God's creations - Jesus isn't created, he is creator - vs. 16.

ii. Sits in the seat of authority as firstborn Son – this word here is speaking about *the privilege of Jesus Christ as the firstborn Son over all creation.*

0. There is a natural understanding that we have in our society of the rights and privileges of the first born son – but even more so from the Old Testament. The first born son was the one who really controlled the entire inheritance of his father's possession.

1. Jesus described himself several times in his own parables as the Son who inherits the vineyard of his people.

2. This privilege is unique to Jesus –because of who he is, the eternal, unique, Son of God, he is the only one worthy to take this privilege of being the firstborn of all creation.

¹ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Heb 1:3.

iii. Jesus the eternal Son - reigns in authority and power.

APPLICATION:

- Jesus is the image of the invisible God – that means that for us, Jesus perfectly reveals God. God, in his infinite mercy has decreed that you and I know who he is through one single source: the one and only Son of God. The entire Bible points to him – there is no Scripture that does not have its end goal of pointing to Christ. And what is the point of our salvation?
- 1 John 5:20 “And we know that the Son of God has come and has given us understanding, so that we may know him who is true; and we are in him who is true, in his Son Jesus Christ. He is the true God and eternal life.”²
- But how does this affect our hearts?
 - o The desire of every true Christian is know God – the Father, Son, and the Holy Spirit. Our regenerated hearts long to know God and his glory – as Moses longed for the demonstration of the glory of God on Mt. Sinai, so we long to see his glory and to know him more and more. That Jesus is the image of the invisible God *draws our hearts towards him to seek him that we may know the only true and living God*. There is no other way to know God except through Jesus Christ – and the regenerated heart knows this! Jesus himself declared, “I am the way, the truth, and the life and no one comes to the Father except through me.”
 - o Therefore – let the truth of who Jesus is – the perfect revelation of God to us – draw your heart to seek him. He sits as the firstborn Son over all creation – all creation has its purpose to point us to the glory of the Son of God. Yes, we may know Him through creation, in fact, God’s glorious nature and power are visible through nature. But only through the written word of God may we truly know the eternal Son of God.
 - o Let creation and the written word of God point you to Christ – and motivate you to seek Him.

Transition: Now that we have seen that Jesus is the image of the invisible God, and sits in the seat of firstborn privilege over all creation, we move on to vs. 16-17 where Paul further explains Jesus’ authority over creation because he created it!

2. Vs. 16-17 Jesus is the creator and sustainer, of all creation which was made for his glory.
 - a. We see here that Paul now states that, without a doubt, there is no higher authority than Jesus Christ because He, as the eternal Son of God, was the direct agent in creation.
 - b. “For by him all things were created, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities”...
 - i. Some like to argue about how exactly the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit had different roles in creation. And while there is certainly time for that study, that's not Paul's intention in this passage.
 - ii. Paul's intention here is to put Jesus without a doubt, above everything that has been created by demonstrating that Jesus is creator God.

² *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), 1 Jn 5:20.

1. John 1:3 - "All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made."
2. IF there would have been one thing that Jesus had not made in creation, then he would not be God.
 - a. Jesus created all things "in heaven and earth" meaning the entire universe, and even the heavenly realm of angels.
 - i. Things visible and invisible
 - ii. Thrones, authorities, dominions, powers, - Jewish words for angelic beings –

Jesus the Son of God has created all that exists, this we can plainly see. But what was the purpose of creation? We see here in our text it says.....

- c. All things were created through him and for him...
 - i. The singular purpose of everything that exists is to glorify Jesus Christ. The entirety of creation breathes and functions for the sole purpose of the glory of Jesus.
 - ii. This also means that it has eternally been the purpose of God that the Son of God be supreme Lord over all creation. Thus, in the very act of creation itself, God commanding the worlds to exist out of nothing by divine command was nothing short of a shout of love for the Son of God.
 - iii. *Everything exists for him - for the glory of the Son of God*
 - iv. The purpose of every single part of creation was that it belong to the Son of God, and yes, it still does. Everything in this world belongs to Him. It was made for his glory and pleasure.
 - v.
- d. He is before all things -
 - i. The word "before" gives us the understanding of both time and rank.
 1. Jesus existed before anything was made - He is the eternal Son of God.
 - a. Because Jesus is the creator and purpose of all things, thus he ranks ahead of everything that exists both in time and in authority. There is no one who matches Jesus in authority – no one who can touch the level of his supremacy, no one who can touch the authority of the Son of God.
- e. And in him all things hold together
- f. Nothing continues to exist in this world outside the power of the Son of God. Jesus commands that the world continue to hold together.
 - . Hebrews 1:3 – he upholds everything by the word of his power –
 - a. Jesus literally keeps the entire universe in motion. Nothing continues to exist and function in the entire universe outside of the command of Jesus Christ.
 - b. But this is not like Atlas holding the globe, struggling under its weight. No, Jesus upholds every molecule, every atom of the universe by commanding them to do so.

EXPLANATION / APPLICATION:

We need to pause here and understand what this means for you and I. Brothers and sisters, Jesus, the eternal Son of God, created all things. Nothing exists here in this world that was not created by Jesus Christ. Mountains, rocks, trees, leaves, insects, molecules, even the smallest atoms – everything exists because the Son of God created it.

Think of the most beautiful scene you have ever experienced: for me, it was the view of the Teton Mountain Range in Grand Teton National Park from the surface of Jenny Lake, a glacier fed lake at the foot of the most beautiful mountain peaks. My brothers and I had the privilege of taking a canoe out on the lake, and we were mostly concerned about first, navigating in a canoe, and second, trying to fish for lake trout. But as we rowed out of the small dock, and got out onto the crystal clear water, it was as if time stood still and the beauty of the moment overtook us. Suddenly no one cared about fishing anymore – the beauty of God’s creation was there in front of us and it made us stand in awe, and feel small.

In the same way, the apostle Paul bids us to look at everything we see, even the things we know exist that we cannot see, and to stand in awe of the power and supremacy of Jesus Christ. And to know that Christ is not only the beginning of all of creation, but the final purpose of all creation is to glorify and be put under the reign of Jesus the King. You and I exist for one singular purpose: to glorify Jesus Christ the Son of God. The reason you breathe, the reason you can think, the ultimate purpose and reason that mountains are beautiful and awe inspiring, the reason that love between a husband and wife is heart-meltingly beautiful is to point, no, shout the praises of Jesus Christ the eternal Son of God creator of the ends of the earth.

But personally, individually, we find that knowing Jesus as creator affects how we think about ourselves. In his sovereign control, you and I were knit together in our mother’s wombs by the loving care of the Son of God. Brothers and sisters Jesus intimately knows the depths of who we are. Who knows his own heart? We can barely discern our own motives, many of us, including myself, lack self-wisdom. But there is one who created us, one who knows the depths of who we are – Jesus the Son of God. As David said in Psalm 139 -

“ 15My frame was not hidden from you,

when I was being made in secret,

intricately woven in the depths of the earth.

16Your eyes saw my unformed substance;

in your book were written, every one of them,

the days that were formed for me,

when as yet there was none of them.”

Transition: The fact that Jesus is our creator and that he is the purpose for every living thing, gives us purpose and security. Jesus knows us completely. And we find that the purpose of our entire lives is to glorify Jesus Christ. Now, Paul begins to narrow his focus on the supremacy of Christ in the third point: that Jesus is the head of the church, the firstborn from the dead.

3. Vs. 18 Jesus is the Head of the Church, the first one resurrected from the dead, supreme over all the universe.
 - a. “He is the head of the body, the church” -
 - i. The words here clearly state that Jesus Christ is the "head" - Christ and Christ alone is to be identified as the leader, the supreme authority of the church.
 1. Jesus not only is the head of all creation, but He is the founder, beginning, and supreme authority of the church, referred to here as the body - or the body of Christ.
 2. The eternal Son of God is the head of his church, he is its final and supreme shepherd. The church belongs to Jesus Christ. This is not “my” church, nor yours, this church, us, as a group of believers in Jesus Christ, belong to Christ. He is our shepherd, our master, our Lord, and Savior.
 3. Paul is focusing in his explanation of the supremacy of Christ on the universal church – all those who have been united to Jesus Christ by faith. The very fact that Paul narrows down his focus here on the church implies several things for us:
 - a. First, that Christ's headship over the church is distinct from the rest of creation - they are His body, His redeemed ones, His people.
 - b. Jesus is Lord over all of creation, both those who hate and reject him, and those who are his. But, the leadership of Christ over his church is special: he is its only leader. The church belongs to Christ – the church is called the body of Christ which implies that the church belongs to Christ and Christ alone.
 - c. You and I belong to Jesus Christ as part of his church. We are his possession. He is our leader and we are united to him. The church is called the bride of Christ. The word for “head” here implies a special care and leadership – as our good Shepherd, Jesus Christ cares for us, loves us, and protects our faith and keeps us till the end so that we may be with him forever.
 - d.

APPLICATION – Brothers and sisters – here we begin to see how the person of Jesus Christ is so supreme, and causes us to stand in awe. The one who through whom and for whom the entire universe was created has drawn us to himself and united us to himself through the gospel. This Jesus, so wrapped in glory, and majesty has purposed to bring us to himself, and call us his body. You and I are so intimately united to Jesus Christ that we are his very body – his bride. How precious this is to think on for us! What a motivation for joy this is for us – we cannot escape the wonder and glory of this – and we will stand in awe and wonder of this for all of eternity – that the Son of God would die for us, as Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 5:9-10, “For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him.” (NIV).

- ii. “He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead”
 1. In their identification with Christ, they are united to Him. The body of Christ will experience the same resurrection that Christ experienced first: a victorious resurrection. In Jesus’ resurrection, he began the church, his

body, by destroying their sins and uniting them to himself. In his resurrection, God declared that the work of redemption was finished, as Paul writes in Romans 4:24 that Jesus was, “delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.”

2. Jesus demonstrated his absolute Lordship over all things and the church in his resurrection - it was a victorious resurrection- the grave couldn't hold him. Even death has no authority over Jesus Christ.
 - a. Php. 2:9-11, "Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."The Holy Bible: English Standard Version (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Php 2:9–11.
 - b. Over all things - Christ is supreme - Christ is preeminent
 - i. The word here for Christ being preeminent has the sense of being first, or ranking above all others. The meaning here is this: that Jesus Christ is absolutely first in rank in both creation and the church. There is no sphere of life in this universe where Jesus Christ does not reign supreme.

Application:

Beloved, all of these things culminate in this: that in the world and in the church Jesus Christ is the supreme authority. There is no one, nothing that is higher than him. But as his church, this is special for us! He is our shepherd who will never leave us nor forsake us! Who has the authority to undo the salvation that Christ the Lord has purchased? No one! Who has the power to take us out of the hands of the one who is supreme above all? Church, we are secure in the power and love of him through whom and for whom all things were created! We live such busy lives, and often, our minds are so distracted and busy that we fail to grasp the glory and awe of Jesus. Look at how Paul drives our minds to his greatness here in this passage – he directs our thoughts to the truth that our hearts may be filled with joy. This is a joy feast! Jesus Christ is our source of hope and joy and this passage draws us to seek him. We must think about Christ – we must meditate upon him – everything he is in his glory and power.

Conclusion: We have seen clearly that Paul demonstrates that Jesus is supreme in all things. Jesus is supreme the image of the invisible God. We see his supremacy in that he is creator, the one through whom and for whom all things exist. Jesus is supreme also over the church as its head, its loving shepherd, for the church is his body they are vitally united to him. Let these things drive us to seek and savor Jesus Christ, who is God over all, blessed forever, amen.