

Christ Is All - His Supremacy (1)

by J. Glyn Owen

Jesus Christ is the supreme ruler over all creation, and he is the one who sustains and upholds all things, revealing God's nature and character to humanity.

Duration: 42:45

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Colossians 1:13-18

Topics: "Supremacy"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes that the purpose of Christian preaching is not just to analyze truths, but to worship God and become better brothers and sisters to one another. He highlights the urgency of sharing the truth of the gospel with a world that is dying and going to hell without Christ. The preacher also discusses the power of words, stating that our words should reflect what is in our hearts and reveal our true selves. The sermon then transitions to discussing the supremacy of Jesus in three relationships: his relation to God the Father, his relation to the universe, and his relation to the church.

Transcript

It is good to be together again on this another Lord's Day. Welcome to you all and especially to ponder again over his word that is before us this morning. We have a wonderful passage of scripture that awaits us and I trust that we are all coming prayerfully asking the Holy Spirit to open our eyes and to enable us to have the concept and the truth of scripture that is enshrined in these verses today.

A passage which exalts and expounds the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. Now will you turn with me then if you please to Colossians chapter 1 and we are going to read again verses 15, 16 and 17. These verses form part of a nugget which really goes on as far as verse 20.

We shall be returning to it again next Lord's Day. But for this morning we are looking at verses 15, 16 and 17. He that is our Lord Jesus Christ, he is the image of the invisible God.

The firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created. Things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities, all things were created by him and for him.

He is before all things and in him all things hold together. And the passage goes on to say that he is the one who is the head of the church and the savior of those who trust in him. Now may the Spirit of God help

us then as we come to this very delightful but very profound passage of scripture.

Now can I for a moment just link you with the passage that we were with last Lord's Day morning. Mr. McLeod led us very carefully and very helpfully through that passage comprising the prayer that we have stretching from verse 9 right down to verse 14. Now that prayer passes into the exposition of this present passage almost without a pause.

We have a period there but the flow of the thought is a very ongoing one. It's like a river in spate. It moves on.

The one thing flows from the other. Just let us link it by looking at verses 13 and 14. He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness, brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption even the forgiveness of sins.

And then without introducing him again he, the personal pronoun only, he is the image of the invisible God. Let me put it to you like this. In the previous verses the apostle Paul was asking God for certain specific things.

On what basis could a man come to God and ask the kind of things that Paul was asking in those verses? How can a man approach God at all? How can a sinner draw near to a holy God? But how can a sinner not simply draw near to a holy God but expect the kind of transformation in the inner life of men and women that Paul was asking for in verses 9 to 14? How can you pray such things? Well now basically the answer is this. We have such a wonderful Savior. Fundamentally it is this.

Our Lord Jesus Christ is so utterly unique in his person that in his offices and in his work we have a wholly unique salvation and privilege. He has done things no one else could do. He makes provisions no one else could make.

And he invites us in our weakness, in our folly, in our frailty, in our sin. He invites us to come and to ask God things that we dare not ask if we're sane other than on the basis of the fact that he is the Son of God. He is God the Son and he has wrought redemption for us.

Now that's the rhythm of the thought here. It seems to me as if the Apostle Paul is saying this. If you've known anything about the Lord Jesus Christ and if you've known anything about prayer and receiving answers to your prayer of the order that we have referred to in verses 9 to 14, all right.

Now you've come to a place where you can, as it were, stand back and behold the glories of your Lord. There is a knowledge, there is a knowledge of Christ objectively which is to be given to an unbeliever if he's honest. You may read history and see what he has done and what changes he has wrought.

You may learn something about his birth and his life and his death and his resurrection objectively. But there is a knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ which is well beyond that. It's the knowledge of the fact that he brings us to God in prayer and God hears us in prayer.

And we have intimate dealings with God the Father through God the Son and what we ask for we receive and therefore we have commerce with heaven through the Christ who died and is risen again and stands as the mediator between us and God. Now when once we've come there we are in a position to look at the person and work of the Lord Jesus Christ in an altogether different way. Not simply analytically but worshipfully.

Not just to analyze the facts that are stated with a pure intellect as it were, but in the analysis of the fact to worship and to adore. And my dear friends I don't need to say this to you good people but we are not here for analytical examination of truths this morning. That's not the purpose of Christian preaching.

We've got to look at the truths and we've got to analyze them and see what is what. But all that is a means to an end. The end is that we should worship God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Ghost and out of that attitude of worship become better brothers and sisters to one another and better custodians and messengers of the truth of the gospel to a world that is dying and let me say it bluntly this morning to shock you, going to hell.

This is language we do not hear. A world that is going to hell without Christ whilst you and I live so smugly and complacently and sometimes carelessly. May the Lord bring us therefore to see what we have in this remarkable passage.

There was a hymn that we used to sing a lot in the area where I used to turn when I was a lad, a young Christian. We used to sing it at Christmas time. I don't find it over here perhaps some of you know it.

It is such a simple hymn and it has a chorus to it and perhaps these are the reasons why it is not very popular. But it asks a number of questions and the chorus gives the answer. The first stanza is this, just two lines.

Who is he in yonder stall at whose feet the shepherds fall? Then comes the answer, tis the Lord. O wondrous story, tis the Lord, the King of glory. The question goes on and it asks something like this.

Who is he in Calvary's throes? Asks for blessings on his foes. The same answer. Who is he that from yon grave comes to heal and help and save and so forth? And the answer comes, tis the Lord, the King of glory.

Tis the Lord, O wondrous story, at his feet we humbly fall. Crown him, crown him, Lord of all. Now if this passage doesn't bring us there then I think something will be radically wrong with the preaching or with the listening or with both.

May the Lord help us. This morning and next Lord's Day morning we are going to look at three main things that appear in this passage. Thinking of how Lord's supremacy is absolute supremacy, we are going to see him in three relationships.

One, in his relation to God the Father. Two, in his relation to the universe in its totality. Three, in his relationship to his people, the church, very specially.

Now we are not going to get beyond the second today even if we get halfway through it. But let's look at the first. Jesus Christ in his relation to the Father, to God the Father.

Look at verse 15 going on into 16a. He says, the Apostle Paul, he is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation, for by him all things were created. Now two primary statements invite our attention there.

First of all, Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God. Now let's look at that. He is the image of the invisible God.

Now I ask you to believe me. You can consult your commentaries afterwards to see that I'm saying the truth here. When I say that there is a world of difference between the way Paul is writing here and the kind of generalities that we sometimes make when a little child has been born into a family.

You know, they always ask you, who is he like or who is she like? And you say, oh, well, he's like his mummy or he's like his daddy. Here I see some recently parented folk here this morning. That's wonderful.

But when we reply to a question like that, we reply in terms of sheer generalities. And sometimes we're not always truthful. Sometimes we're not truthful.

Now, what we have here is not a generality. Paul hasn't been asked a question that he's not able to answer. What we have here is the strictest form of language, language that is precise as precise can be.

And the words have been so carefully chosen in order to indicate that the Lord Jesus Christ is the exact representation of a God that we cannot see with these eyes. So much so that when we see the Lord Jesus Christ, he can say to us, he that has seen me has seen the Father. Now, the image is sufficiently accurate for him to be able to say that if you've seen me, you have actually seen the Father because the Father and I are one and the Father lives in me and does the work that I do.

We are one in the essentials of our nature. The image of the invisible God, the image. God is so concerned about having his image known by men.

He made man in the first place to bear his image. Neither was that meant to be a very general statement that in some vague sort of way, man made by God should somehow or other cause people to think of God. No, no.

He endowed us with a mind and intelligence like himself. The kind of mind and intelligence he hasn't given to the creatures other than humans. He's provided us with emotion, the capacity to love and to hate just as he himself can love with a boiling love, a love of Calvary, a Calvary love.

So he has given us the capacity to love. And of course, with the capacity to love, there must be the corresponding capacity to hate or not to love. Moreover, he has given us a will.

Right in the early, in the first chapter of the book of Genesis, you remember God said and there was God determined and what he determined came to pass. God willed certain things and God has given this kind of thing to you and to me. We can will under the canopy of God's sovereignty.

He has made us that way. He need not, but he has and he has given us the ability to make certain decisions and to act in a certain way. He's given us a will.

That's not all the truth about the will, but we have a will. And when we act, we act as the, as we desire to act. Not only that, but according to the new Testament, part of the image was, was that which Paul in this very epistle speaks of as righteousness.

God is righteous. There's nothing wrong in God. Everything is right.

The judge of all the earth will always do righteousness. And somehow or other, this was embossed on his creature as the creature came out of his hand, as he was made. But you and I know all too well that that image was marred.

The vessel was marred in the hand of the Potter. That image was marred and smashed to smithereens. And it is no longer true.

Men looking at you and looking at me do not necessarily conclude there is God. I can see God in him. I can see God in her.

I can hear God in him. I can hear God in her. They don't know because the image is marred.

And by the grace of God, it is in process of being renewed, of course, but it is marred even in the best of sense. No one is a perfect example. Not even president Coolidge, though it's not fair to bring that illustration over to moral things here in Colossians.

However, Jesus is distinguished from the whole of the creation in this sense. He is said to be the very image of God. And the word icon is a very special one.

And you'll pardon me for dwelling a little bit on this because it is so important. I want you to be able to worship him today and to go out of this service saying, fairest Lord Jesus, Lord of all creation, I worship you and the Father and the Spirit in you. Bishop JB Lightfoot, whose work on this passage has become something of a classic.

He says that there are at least three main thoughts in this word icon translated image. And I'm adding a few other things from other sources. I want to bring these thoughts together.

Jesus is the image of the invisible God. See, we can't see God. We all know that we'd like to see him sometimes with his eyes, touch him with his hands, but he's, he's spirit.

And though we know he's there, we can feel the pull of his spirit upon us sometimes. And sometimes we can see him we can feel him holding us back. We know he's there.

All right. And we speak to him and we know him by the answers he sent, but we can't see him. We can't touch him.

But what we cannot see and what we cannot touch, we can behold in the person in whom God became incarnate, who bore his image, the exact image of the God you represented. Now the first ingredient in this term and its concept is this. It implies a likeness to an original, an icon.

That's a Greek word refers to something that is like an original likeness to an original. But now it is not just mere likeness to an original. It is likeness to an original in the basics and not in the non-essentials.

For example, there might be a number of, well, this is a wrong thing to say for the ladies. I was, I was going to say, I might as well say it now. There might be two or three ladies here that are wearing clothes bought in the same stores this morning.

And they're exactly the same, not quite unique. You'd never use the word icon to describe that because the garment you wear, the suit of clothes that covers your body is quite incidental to the real you. It's superficial.

You'd never use this word, but you'd use this word to describe the underlying nature that you have. What makes you a man? What makes you a woman? What makes you a person? What makes you a human being? Now, what this word says is this, that in the essentials of his nature, our Lord Jesus Christ is first of

all, the likeness of an original. The original is the Father.

He is the likeness. He is the icon of the Father. But now that's not the only thing.

That's only the first ingredient in the, in the full meaning. The second is this, the image is so, so corresponds to the original that it actually represents the original and represents imperfectly or it perfectly in other spheres. Wherever you encounter an icon in the true sense of that word, it means that somewhere or other there is an original that is, it represents.

An icon is never something that has been imagined. Now, for example, in the stamp world, you sometimes have a, the picture of a president, the portrait of a president or of a king or of a queen embossed on a stamp. Generally that refers to somebody historical, perhaps the reigning king or queen or the president of the day, or maybe in past history, what have you.

But the fact is you do not often have imaginary character embossed on the stamp, but you might, you could very well have some imaginary figure embossed on the stamp, in which case you would never use this word icon. Wherever there is an icon, there is an original that it represents. Jesus Christ is the icon.

He represents an original that we haven't seen, but he comes into this world and here he actually in everything he is and in everything he says and in everything he does, he represents the original. It's as marvelous as this. Emmanuel is nothing less than God with, God with us, alongside of us for us to touch and handle because he inhabits human nature that he has taken to his deity.

The third element that we should add to make the sum total meaning of this remarkable word is this. The image is a manifestation or a revelation of the original. Now, this has been inherent in what I've said already, but I want to bring it out very clearly.

Whereas the original may continue to be out of sight and far removed from our gaze, the icon reveals, reveals him or reveals it as the case may be. In classical and New Testament times, for example, a person's word or speech was often said to be an icon, an image revealing himself, revealing what he really was in the depths of his heart and of his thinking. You do not always know what your minister's thinking about and your minister doesn't always know what you're thinking about.

But if we are, if we are straight within ourselves and honest within ourselves, our words should represent what's going on in here so that our words become an image of what is unseen, what we feel inside and what we think inside and therefore what we really are in the depths of our being. Oh, my friends, there is something precious here. Do you ever wonder what God is thinking? Do you ever wonder how God is feeling? Look at Jesus.

Look at the crib. Look at the life. Look at the cross.

Look at the resurrection. Look at the ascension. Look at the Holy Spirit coming forth and reply to his prayer.

In everything that Jesus said and did and was, we have represented, brought out before our gaze that we may understand what's going on in the mind of God, in the heart of God, in the depths of the divine being. Jesus Christ is in this sense the revelation of God. The icon is the revelation.

Our veil is drawn back as Jesus Christ, co-equal with the Father, stands among us as a man, speaks our language, lives among us and dies and rises again. You know, when you've been pondering a passage like this and people come up to you with their quirk religions and quack religions and notions of this guru and that guru, you become almost irritated out of sheer jealousy for the glory of the Christ. He stands alone.

No one has ever seen God at any time, says John, but God, the only Son who is in the bosom of the Father, he has disclosed him. He's brought him down and he's brought him out and he's put into words what God is thinking and put into actions what God is doing and he's put flesh on the bones of our thoughts of God that are true. Unlike the alleged aeons or angels that were having such a place in the era that was being popularized in Colossae, that were only real in the imaginations of those talking about them.

Jesus Christ, it was not only real as man, but he was real as God. He was the image of the invisible God and that is why we can sing of him as we shall as we conclude today. God and Father, we adore thee for the Son, thine image bright in whom all thy holy nature dawned on our once hopeless night.

My dear Christian brother or sister, don't you give up what the New Testament says about your Lord Jesus for anything. Now let's just look briefly into the second one and we'll just have to leave it having simply introduced it really. But I want you to see that this is not everything that Paul says in this gigantic passage.

The next section deals with Jesus Christ in relation to the universe. Second part of verse 15 going on to verse 17. He's the firstborn over all creation for by him all things were created, things in heaven and on earth visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities, all things were created by him and for him.

Now the only thing that I have time to deal with this morning is just to mention something about the statement there with which the list begins. There are five or six main statements there. Look at this.

He is the firstborn of all creation. I want to mention this because there may be someone here today who will not be with us a week hence if the Lord tarry. Taken by itself, the reference there to the firstborn, if it was severed from this context, it could be completely misunderstood and it could be interpreted as if the Lord Jesus Christ were the firstborn of creatures.

In other words, as if he were the first creature that God made and then all the other creatures followed. Now that is certainly not what Paul had in mind and you have only to read on in this passage and you will see that Jesus Christ is not spoken of here as a creature at all because in the next, in the very next breath, with the very next breath, Paul goes on to say, for by him all things were created, whether they be thrones or dominions or whatever they are, spiritual beings or other non-spiritual material, doesn't matter. He says everything was created by him so he is not the first creature as such.

Now here again you see we have a somewhat technical term and it has a technical usage and we need to know what it says in order to recognize the glories of our Lord and to worship him and to represent him in this world. The word translated firstborn first of all designated preeminence and honor. Now this is a fairly common usage in the where we read, Paul tells, I'm sorry, the Lord tells Moses, say to Pharaoh, this is what the Lord says, Israel is my firstborn son and I told you let go my son so that he may worship me but you refuse to let him go so I will kill your firstborn.

God spoke to Moses that he should carry this message to the, to the Egyptians because God looked upon the people of Israel as his first born. God had creatures other than Israel. God had saints before Abram was called.

There were those who believed him and trusted him. Read Hebrews chapter 11 for certain illustrations of them. By faith Abel, by faith Noah, et cetera, et cetera.

And there are others not mentioned in Hebrews 11. But God had saints and God had children. God had his people before Abraham.

But when the race sprung from Abraham, God said, Israel is my firstborn. What did he mean? What he meant was that Israel stood in his sight as, as, as preeminent and honorable as his people. And he was giving to Israel a place and the position not given to anyone else at least to that point in time.

You have the same kind, you have the same word used later on of the Messiah. For example, in Psalm 89 verses 27 and 28, I will also appoint him my firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth. I will maintain my love to him forever and my covenant with him will never fall.

Now notice the movement. The term is transferred from Israel to Israel's Messiah in whom Israel is represented. And what he said here is that God is honoring his son, his Messiah above everybody.

He's giving him a preeminence and an honor. You've only to look again at those words in Psalm 89 and you see what this means. I will appoint him my firstborn, here it is, the most exalted of the kings of the earth.

I will maintain my love for him forever and my covenant with him will never fail. He's not just a prophet, he's a prophet to prophets and for prophets. He's not just a priest, he's the priest of priests.

He's not just the king, he's the king of kings. This is to be developed but it is all there in the purpose and intention of God, preeminence and an honor. But now we must add to that.

The term firstborn implied a priority and supremacy over all creation in this context. As a matter of fact, it implied the supremacy of the creator over his creation. The supremacy given to one who makes something and therefore to whom that something belongs by right of creation.

He made us. We are his. Not only the sheep of his pasture but the creatures of his hand.

Now my friends, this is the savior that is declared and represented in the new testament. You have heard me say before and you forgive me, I trust for repeating it. Some things need to be repeated.

I do love the real genuine intimacy that is involved in the prayers of God's people when they speak of him as Jesus, my Jesus. But I want you to remember that Jesus is Lord of all creation. Don't get too too near to him and think that you're on the same level as he is.

You are not. He's the vine, you're the branches. Even when you're in him and there is no more intimate relationship with him than being in him.

But you're still a branch of the vine and he's the true vine. In other words, my friend, he stands apart. He was there when creation began.

He was the architect of his own birth. He chose his own parents. He was the architect of his own crib and of his own cross.

He stood before the whole august creation when the sons of the morning sang for joy. He was there in the beginning. He was the Lord and by him all things were made.

And in that point of time, before time began, he had supremacy. He was given lordship. He stood apart from and over what was then in the future.

The whole emergence of the cosmos of which you and I are but infinitesimal parts. Well, then do we close this morning? Well, my friends, I close and I repeat. I close by asking you, when last did you bow adoringly, adoringly, and you can't adore in a hurry.

When last did you bow your knees and bow your neck adoringly at the feet of the Lord Jesus Christ and see in him the Lord of the universe and therefore the hope of the world? When last did you acknowledge his equality with the father and delighted so to do, even though it meant this, that he has the right of deity over you to rule your life, to direct your goings, to choose your path and your friends and your destiny. Let us ask him to forgive us our sins against him. Our disparagement of his excellency and sovereignty and greatness and glory, our inability to give him his due and by his grace, let us bow afresh and ask that he would help us to do what hitherto we've been unable to do and let us discipline our lives the better to do what he requires and what he is deserving of.

Let us pray. Now God and our father we bow in your presence. We feel like pygmies in stature, small, very small, terribly small.

When it comes to comprehending the truths of your word, especially those which speak about yourself and your co-equal son and spirit. And because of that, we oftentimes live on the surface of things, things that we deem we can handle and manage and understand. And we do not dig into the depths of divine truth.

God forgive us. Because it is exactly at that point where we know we can't manage things, that we touch the infinite realities that we need to touch, to worship and to honor and to serve you. Almighty God deal with us as individuals, deal with me and with all of us who lead in holy things in this congregation.

Deal with everyone who teaches here and with all of us who worship. We belong to one another in the body of your son. Deal with us that we may know what we need to know.

To honor you as we need to honor you and should. And obey as you require us to obey. Forgive our sins of word and deed and thought.

For we ask it through the precious atoning blood of the one who was your image and is forever. Unlike all others, even Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

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