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The Supremacy of Christ
Colossians 1:15-23
May 28th, 2017, Jeff Germs

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The late Arthur F. Burns (1904-1987), a former chairman of the United States Federal Reserve System and an ambassador to West Germany, was a man of considerable influence. He was economic counsellor to numerous presidents from Dwight D. Eisenhower to Ronald Reagan. When he spoke, his opinion carried tremendous weight, and Washington listened.

Arthur Burns was not a Christian. He was Jewish, so when he began attending an informal White House Christian prayer and fellowship meeting in the 1970's no one quite knew what to do with him and how to involve him in the group. Each week different people would take turns ending the meeting in prayer, and each week Burns was passed by out of a mixture of respect and uncertainty as to how to deal with this awkward situation.

One week, however, the group was led by a newcomer who didn't know the unusual status that Burns had in the group. As the meeting ended, the newcomer turned and asked Burns to close the time with a prayer. Some of the old-timers glanced at each other in surprise and wondered what would happen next. But without missing a beat, Burns reached out, held hands with the others in the circle, and prayed this prayer:

[2b]

"Lord, I pray that you would bring Jews to know Jesus Christ.

[2c]

I pray that you would bring Muslims to know Jesus Christ. Finally, Lord,...

[2d]

I pray that you would bring Christians to know Jesus Christ. Amen"¹

It was a very simple prayer, but I think it carries a lot of truth. We call ourselves, "Christian", but do we really know Jesus? We call Jesus, "**Lord**," but do we really obey him? Do we put him first? We call him "**Saviour**", but do our hearts overflow with thankfulness for what he has saved us from? We call him "**God**", but do we comprehend the implications of that title? We call him "**friend**", but we really know him? Or, do we just have knowledge about him? Do we spend the time to get to know him personally? And do we allow him to change us?

If we are committed to being devoted disciples of Jesus it's imperative that we get to know him better. We must not just become experts *about* Jesus. We need to get to know him. He is our master, and we are his apprentices, and if we are going to be affected by his way and his Spirit's power in our lives we must believe from our hearts that he was not only the smartest person who ever lived, but the Almighty God who created the universe and everything in it, and that he lives in us now. So, let's get to know Jesus Christ a little better this morning, shall we? We want to do just what the writer of Hebrews exhorted us to do;

[3]

¹ <http://www.changethewind.org/2008/09/necessary-prayer.html>

Hebrews 12:2 (NLT)

2 We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, the champion who initiates and perfects our faith. Because of the joy awaiting him, he endured the cross, disregarding its shame. Now he is seated in the place of honor beside God's throne.

We are going to read a ton of Scripture this morning so we can get a better idea of who Jesus is. This sermon is going to be a little headier than normal and it might, for some of you, feel like you are drinking from a fire hydrant. Let's start by reading this section from Colossians and fix our eyes on our Champion, Jesus.

[4]

Colossians 1:15-23 (NLT)

15 Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation, 16 for through him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can't see— such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world. Everything was created through him and for him.

[5]

17 He existed before anything else, and he holds all creation together. 18 Christ is also the head of the church, which is his body. He is the beginning, supreme over all who rise from the dead. So he is first in everything. 19 For God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ, 20 and through him God reconciled everything to himself. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ's blood on the cross.

[6]

21 This includes you who were once far away from God. You were his enemies, separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions. 22 Yet now he has reconciled you to himself through the death of Christ in his physical body. As a result, he has brought you into his own presence, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault.

[7]

23 But you must continue to believe this truth and stand firmly in it. Don't drift away from the assurance you received when you heard the Good News. The Good News has been preached all over the world, and I, Paul, have been appointed as God's servant to proclaim it.

[8]

I want you to understand just how phenomenal this section in Colossians is. It was written by the Apostle Paul some thirty years after Christ was crucified. This passage encapsulates the human impossibility of the dual nature of Jesus being fully God and fully man simultaneously. Some of the people who read the letter had certainly spent time with Jesus in person. They knew he was the son of a carpenter. They knew his family. How could anyone in their right mind believe the kinds of things Paul says about Jesus – unless he was actually who Paul claimed he was? Would you?

Think about it. If your brother claimed to be God would you believe him? If your friend claimed to have had a part in the creation of the world what would you think of him? You would probably seriously consider calling the men in the white coats to haul him away and have him put in a rubber room. There would have had to have been something extremely extraordinary about Jesus if his own

siblings, friends, and acquaintances were to believe he was who Paul said he was. Jesus was no ordinary man as we will soon see.

[9a]

Now, I want to divide this passage into two main sections.

1. 15 - 17 - **Christ was the Creator of the universe and is Lord over it.**

[9b]

2. 18-23 - **Christ was the Originator of the Church and is Head over his body - the Church.**

Most biblical scholars believe that the section in verses 15-20 was an early Christian liturgical hymn that Paul copied and pasted into this letter. Others believe it was Paul's original poetic work. It doesn't really matter which is true. It is very poetic and powerful imagery that he uses to express some deep theological truths about Jesus whether it was original with him or was liturgy that they used in their corporate worship services. What we do know is that the whole letter of Colossians was to be read to the congregations in their worship services, so this bit of poetry was used to worship Christ as Lord.

First of all, **Christ was the Creator of the universe and is Lord over it.**

[10]

¹⁵ Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. That is how the NLT translates this verse from the Greek.

The ESV and many other translations render this one, **¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God,**

That is sort of a strange statement. **He is the image of the invisible God.** How can something invisible have an image? Isn't something that's invisible defined by image-lessness? It has no image, therefore it's invisible. So, what does Paul mean by saying that Jesus is "the image of the invisible God?"

The Bible talks about God's invisible image in a few other places as well.

[11]

Romans 1:20 (NLT)

²⁰ For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God.

So, again, Paul talks about God's invisible qualities being seen clearly. What can he mean by this? Here's another one.

[12]

Hebrews 11:27 (NLT)

²⁷ It was by faith that Moses left the land of Egypt, not fearing the king's anger. He kept right on going because he kept his eyes on the one who is invisible.

That's a very strange statement too. How do you see someone who is invisible?

[13]

1 Timothy 1:17 (NLT)

17 All honor and glory to God forever and ever! He is the eternal King, the unseen one who never dies; he alone is God. Amen.

Who's Paul talking about here? The preceding verses tells us that it's Jesus, the King, the Eternal One, the Immortal One, the Unseen One, the only God. So, what does Paul mean in Colossians when he says Jesus is the image of the invisible God? Well, what did Jesus say?

In John 13, in a tremendous display of humility, Jesus washed his disciples' feet, and then went on to tell them that he was going to go away and that they could not go where he was going. The disciples were all confused and they wanted to know what he could mean by all this, so Jesus had a dialogue with them about it in chapter 14.

[14]

John 14:5-11 (NLT)

5 "No, we don't know, Lord," Thomas said. "We have no idea where you are going, so how can we know the way?" 6 Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.

[15]

7 If you had really known me, you would know who my Father is. From now on, you do know him and have seen him!" 8 Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father, and we will be satisfied." 9 Jesus replied, "Have I been with you all this time, Philip, and yet you still don't know who I am? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father! So why are you asking me to show him to you?

[16]

10 Don't you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words I speak are not my own, but my Father who lives in me does his work through me. 11 Just believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me. Or at least believe because of the work you have seen me do.

So, Jesus was saying that in order to get to know God you need to get to know him. He also said in verse :6, "***I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.***" Jesus is the only way to get to know God. He is, in fact, God!

[17]

Philippians 2:5-6 (NLT)

5 You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. 6 Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to.

[18]

Hebrews 1:3a (NLT)

3 The Son radiates God's own glory and expresses the very character of God, and he sustains everything by the mighty power of his command.

[19]

Colossians 2:9 (NLT)

9 For in Christ lives all the fullness of God in a human body.

Can there be any doubt who Jesus is when you read these passages? He is God, plain and simple. The King of kings, the Lord of lords, God eternal, invisible, the Almighty.

In Christ we see who God is. God is Spirit, as it says in John 4 therefore, he cannot be seen. In essence, God is invisible, but Jesus, as God's complete representation, brings clarity to our fuzzy picture of God. And so, if you want to get to know God, you get to know Jesus. There is no other way.

[20]

Let's find out more.

Colossians 1:15 (NLT)

15 Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation,

The NIV and many other translations say something like this:

[21]

Colossians 1:15 (NIV)

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

"The firstborn over all creation." That sounds a little confusing because at first glance it seems that it is saying that Jesus is a created being just like you and me. ***Firstborn*** though, in this case, has a different meaning. It mainly has to do with his status. Notice that in the NIV it says, ***"firstborn over creation"***. Some of your translations say, ***"firstborn of creation"***. That is not the best translation. Syntactically, it could mean that, but contextually, ***over creation*** makes more sense. In my humble opinion, the NLT probably best expresses the intent of this verse.

"15 Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation,"

It denotes two things about Christ's character.

[22]

1. **Christ preceded all of Creation.**

[23]

2. **Christ is sovereign over all of Creation.**

John wrote the same things about Jesus in his gospel.

[24]

John 1:1-3 (NLT)

¹ In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. ² He existed in the beginning with God. ³ God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him.

“The Word” here refers to Jesus. Jesus is eternal. He had no beginning. He will have no end. He is self-existent.

In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God.

So, again, Jesus is God. John then goes on to say that all of creation began through Jesus, which is what Paul says in Colossians. He ***“is supreme over all creation.”***

[25]

Colossians 1:16 (NLT)

¹⁶ for through him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can't see— such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world. Everything was created through him and for him.

Paul leaves no room for error here. There is nothing that was not created by Jesus. All things, whether we see them or not were created by him. Things in the spiritual world and the things in the material world were all created by Jesus, and he is sovereign over them. He was the agent in the creation process.

Not only was everything created **by** him, but Paul says it was also created **for** him – that means you and me. We were created **for** Jesus. As human beings we have a tendency towards believing that we are our own men, or our own women. And we try to use God for our purposes instead of the other way around.

How many of us haven't appealed to God for success in our endeavours under the guise that he will get the glory. “God make me successful in my business so you will get the glory.” Is that really our motivation in wanting to be successful? Maybe, but not likely.

We were created for him, which means that every day when we wake up, before we put our feet on the floor, we should ask him to make us sensitive to how he wants to use us on that day. “Jesus, I am yours. You bought me with a great price. Show my how to live my life for you today.”

[26]

If Jesus really is supreme we will never be satisfied until we allow him to reign over our lives.

[27]

¹⁷ He existed before anything else, and he holds all creation together.

So, again, he pre-existed everything. There *never* was a time when Jesus wasn't. And not only was he the agent in Creation, but he sustains it all now. He didn't just create it and then remove himself from it. He is intimately involved in his created order. Without him life would cease to be. He is involved, not only with creation on the big universal scale, but he is intimately involved in our lives -- if we let him. This is the Jesus we serve. This is the Jesus we worship as King, Lord, and Saviour.

All three of the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) record a scenario where Jesus asked his disciples who people say he is. "What's the word on the street? Who are people saying I am?" Well, they told him that people had lots of different views, but none of them was correct. And then Jesus probed them, "Ok, what about you? Who do you say that I am?"

This is **the** most important question that we could ever ask. Who is Jesus to you? I'm not talking theologically. I mean who is he to you really? Jesus was not just another prophet. He was not just a good moral teacher. Jesus was not merely one among a plethora of so-called gods. If you have been in the church for a while, you would likely have heard the often quoted excerpt from C.S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity*.

[28]

"I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him: 'I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God.' That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher.

[29]

He would either be a lunatic - on the level with the man who says he is a poached egg - or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse.

[30]

You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to."

[31]

We are faced, then, with a frightening alternative. This man we are talking about either was (and is) just what He said or else a lunatic, or something worse. Now it seems to me obvious that He was neither a lunatic nor a fiend: and consequently, however strange or terrifying or unlikely it may seem, I have to accept the view that He was and is God. God has landed on this enemy-occupied world in human form.²

[32]

We're going to come back to this later, but who do you say Jesus is? There is no more important question that you could ever ask.

[33]

2. 18–23 - **Christ was the Originator of the Church and is Head over his body - the Church.**

[34]

¹⁸ Christ is also the head of the church, which is his body. He is the beginning, supreme over all who rise from the dead. So he is first in everything.

So, Christ is not only the creator of the cosmos, or the created order, but he is the creator of the church. It is *his* body. It is not mine, or yours. It is his to use for his purposes. He is the originator of it and he is the head of it. In other words, he gives the marching orders. The initiation for everything we do as a church comes from Christ, not from me. Not from you.

² (C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, The MacMillan Company, 1960, pp. 40-41.)

Let me read to you what the NIV Application Commentary says.

[35]

"If Christ is the head of the church, it means that the destinies of creation and the church are bound together and that God's purposes for all creation gestate in the church's congregational life.

[36]

The church does not exist to meet the needs of its members or to insure its institutional survival, but to fulfill the redemptive purposes of Christ, its Head. It should therefore reflect the image of its divinely ordered cosmos. The creative principle flourishes in the church as it bears fruit all over the world through its preaching the gospel and living worthily of Christ."³

[37]

The church is not here to meet the needs of its members. It is actually the only institution or organization like that on earth. We are not about ensuring we survive. We are all about fulfilling Christ's mission on earth – not ours. Christ is supreme, not only over creation, but over the church.

When Paul said that Christ was firstborn from among the dead he meant that his resurrection from death was the commencement of all those who would rise after him. He rose first so that **in everything** he might have supremacy.

Our job as a church is to make his name famous in Campbell River and around the world. Our vision should be that everyone in Campbell River would have a chance to meet Jesus.

[38]

¹⁹ For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

God's purpose through all he has done is to bring peace to his created order. This poem of Paul's expresses the truth that since the fall of man in the garden way back at the beginning of time, creation has been out of harmony with him. There is an ugly dissonance that all of humanity can clearly feel. Things are not as they should be. And all of God's created order, since that time, Paul says in Romans 8, **"has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth"** awaiting the time when God will bring his final peace to it all.

Jesus began the process by dying for us and rising from the dead so we could have peace with God. But one day God is going to, once and for all, bring an end to the disharmony that we all sense on earth. There will be no more pain, no more tears, no more sorrow. And Jesus has made it possible for us to experience that reality now.

[39]

²¹ This includes you who were once far away from God. You were his enemies, separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions. ²² Yet now he has reconciled you to himself through the death of Christ in his physical body. As a result, he has brought you into his own presence, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault.

[40]

³ Garland, David E. *The NIV Application Commentary, Colossians/Philemon*. p. 91

23 But you must continue to believe this truth and stand firmly in it. Don't drift away from the assurance you received when you heard the Good News. The Good News has been preached all over the world, and I, Paul, have been appointed as God's servant to proclaim it.

I want to bring us back to the question I asked earlier, because in this last section, Paul says that Jesus is not only supreme over creation, and the church, but over our lives, now and into eternity. Who are you trusting with your eternal destiny and your life today?

[41]

Who do you say Jesus is? There is no more important question for us. This is not a theological question. It is a personal one. Who is Jesus to you?

[42]

Jesus said, in **John 14:6 (NLT)**

"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me.

Have you made him Lord of your life? Have you made him Captain of your soul? Do you know that he, alone, is sufficient to carry you through from now to eternity? If at some point in your life you have not said "yes" to Jesus, you should not leave here this morning without doing so. He died to pay the penalty for your sins, so you could be forgiven by a holy God. He rose to life so that you could have his life implanted in your heart.

[43]

Who do you say Jesus is, not theologically, but personally? And more importantly, what are you doing about it?

There was a whole bunch of theological talk in this sermon. It's foundational, heady stuff. We need to make sure that it doesn't stay in our heads. We need to, not just get to know about Jesus. We need to get to know him.

[44a]

"Lord, I pray that you would bring Jews to know Jesus Christ.

[44b]

I pray that you would bring Muslims to know Jesus Christ. Finally, Lord,...

[44c]

I pray that you would bring us, at CRBC, to know Jesus Christ better everyday. Amen"



Growing in Grace: Making Real What We Already Know
The Supremacy of Christ
Colossians 1:15-23
Week of May 28, 2017

Objective of this study: To get to know the nature of Jesus a bit more so we can understand what God is like and get to know him more intimately.

[Remember, the main goal of each Growth Group is to allow God's Word to change your heart so that others would see Jesus in you and be likewise changed to be like him. He wants to change the world through us]

Worship (5 - 10 minutes)

1. Sing a song or two of praise and thanksgiving to God.
2. Spend five minutes in silence asking God to prepare your heart for how he wants to speak to you.
3. After the five minutes have someone interrupt the silence and read **Colossians 1:15-20** meditatively to the group. Pause after each phrase letting God speak to you. **Did anything jump out at you?**

Welcome

Describe a creative project you worked on that gave you joy.

[It's really important when doing this study that we each think about ourselves specifically and ways we need to grow, not how Christians in general need to grow. Do the hard work of letting the Holy Spirit speak to *your* heart.]

Word

1. What stood out from the sermon?
2. Read Colossians 1:15-23
 1. What is Jesus like? Dig in. Go verse by verse. What are the implications of each of his attributes? What does he care about?
 2. Why is it important for us to recognize Jesus as God?

Work

1. Have you ever felt like it's hard to get to know God on a personal level? Why or why not?
2. How has your view of God/Jesus changed over the years?
3. What has helped you get to know him better?
4. As you think of the Colossians 1:15-23, is there any new awareness of what Jesus is like? Any aha moments?

Sermon Quote: "In Christ we see who God is. God is Spirit, as it says in John 4 therefore, he cannot be seen. In essence God is invisible, but Jesus, as God's complete representation, brings clarity to our fuzzy picture of God. And so, if you want to get to know God, you get to know Jesus. There is no other way."