

*“Our Savior’s Supremacy”
Colossians 1:9-20*

An Army soldier story tells this story: “As you can imagine, most young men had other things planned rather than guarding a truck on a Friday night. We sat around moping, not terribly pleased with the situation. An old man in a tank top and a pair of flip flops approached us and asked us why we looked so glum. We told him about the stupid job and how we’d rather be out partying. He then asked us about our unit. We unloaded a heap of stuff we weren’t happy about. Then he asked us what we thought about the new commanding officer. We told him that he was some pen pushing looser who we hadn’t met called Lieutenant Colonel Power. He asked me my name; then I asked him his. He said, “Bob Power.” “That’s amazing! That’s the name as our new...” Suddenly, it dawned on me. My mind was filled with horrendous images of me cutting the lawn with a pair of nail clippers. Lucky for me, Col. Power had a sense of humor.

One thing I did learn from that episode was that my relationship w/ him changed radically when I had realized who he was and the extent of his authority. In view of this new information, I was able to treat our commanding officer in a manner appropriate to his rank. There is a link between the depth of your knowledge of someone and the depth of your relationship with that person. In Colossians, Paul talks about how having our knowledge of Christ enriched can deepen our relationship with Him.

Col 2.2-3 – “My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know **the mystery of God, namely, Christ, in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.**”

Our passage this morning offers us an opportunity to deepen our knowledge, and thus also our relationship, with Jesus, our sovereign and supreme Lord. So let's embark on what is an immense and extravagant feast of the person of Christ. It is a feast of five mouth watering courses ready to bless us.

Course One: Christ the Image of God (v. 15a). *“He is the **image** of the **invisible God.**”* There has been some confusion in our day because of the way we use the word ‘image.’ Someone might say, “I’m trying to get a new image” – but this is something purely external. This is not the biblical meaning.

Here, the word ‘image’ has two aspects. The first aspect is that of *representation*. As the image of God, Jesus represents the presence and person of God in the very fabric of his being. The second aspect is that of *manifestation*. 2 Cor. 4:4 – “The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is **the image of God.**”

Paul attributes the glory of God to the risen and exalted Christ whom he witnessed on the road to Damascus. Jesus, the image of God, manifests & reveals what was hidden – he makes visible what was invisible. It is not a copy but is a projection of the real thing – Jesus expresses the reality of God. Jesus so perfectly represents the Father that to see him is to behold the Father. John 14:9 – “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.” In his incarnation, Jesus truly makes God known to us. Christ, the Image of God!

Course Two: Christ the Firstborn (v. 15b). *“The **firstborn** over all creation.”* Have you ever eaten at an exotic restaurant and not been able to identify what's on your plate? You can't tell if it's part of the meal or just garnish. Soon you wonder if what you're eating is even healthy. We might feel this same way about the word ‘firstborn.’

Does it mean that Jesus was created? Should I simply swallow this part of the meal and pretend it's okay? Should I set it aside? Jehovah's Witnesses argue that 'firstborn' means that Jesus was a created being. In the 4th century, Arian said, "There was a time when he was not." And argued from this verse that Jesus is not divine as the Father is divine. The solution is found in verse 16, where Christ is clearly proclaimed as the Creator of everything. Thus, he is not simply the highest created being.

It's helpful to look at the OT background to clarify the meaning of firstborn. In Psalm 89:27, the firstborn is the name given to the coming Messiah – "I will also appoint him my firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth." The title of firstborn refers to the person of highest privilege & position – the King of Kings. In the cosmic context, Jesus is supreme in both time and rank – Pre-existent and Pre-eminent. Jesus is the 'Absolute Heir.' And just think, we are co-heirs with him! So the idea of Jesus being the 'firstborn' is nothing to choke on. Instead, savor all the more the supremacy of Christ!

Course Three: Christ the Creator (v. 16) "For by him all things were created." The Greek implies "the totality of things." This includes more than merely the material universe around us – more than the mountains & the seas, more than the stars & galaxies. It includes all forces. It encompasses every realm, sphere, dimension and domain.

Now the phrase "thrones or powers or rulers or authorities" is peculiar. It includes not only governments and kings; it is also referring to the spiritual realm, i.e. the angelic ranks. In the first century, there was a heresy going around in Colossi – where angels were worshiped, and Christ was being placed among this angelic hierarchy.

In our passage, the Apostle Paul leaves no room for doubt – you can't group Jesus with the angels – you can't group the Creator with the created. Bishop Lightfoot captures this well with a paraphrase of Paul's words: "Christ is first and foremost, Lord of heaven and earth, far above all thrones or dominations, all principdoms or powers; far above every dignity and every potentate – whether earthly or heavenly, whether angel or man – that evokes your reverence or excites your fear." In other words, don't follow the stars; follow the One who made the stars! Everything else diminishes, or disappears entirely, when compared to the true power and authority of Christ!

Paul then reemphasizes the fact that *all things were created by him and for him.* What's amazing is that there is no parallel in Jewish literature that the universe was created *for* Him. Jesus is the starting point of creation and its goal. He truly is the Alpha and Omega. The purpose of history is for the revelation and glorification of Christ.

Abraham Kuyper put it this way: "When Jesus looks at the universe from his exalted throne at the right hand of the Father, and he sees the great galaxies whirling in space, the planets and the people upon this planet, and all the minute details of life here, including the details of our individual lives, there is nothing that he sees anywhere of which he cannot say, 'Mine!'" He is Christ the Creator!

Course Four: Christ the Sustainer (v. 17). Have you ever wondered what holds the universe together? Why doesn't the moon crash into the earth or the earth plough into the Sun? Why doesn't the universe implode or a black hole suck us in? What is there in the world that prevents it from descending into a vacuum of chaos and disaster? Like a house of cards, the world is so fragile that it feels like the slightest whisper could send the whole thing down in an instant. Why doesn't everything fall apart?

Stephen Hawking said, “The eventual goal of science is to provide a single theory that describes the whole universe.” Well, the theory of everything is to be found in Jesus. Verse 17 – “He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.” Jesus is the sustaining force, the unifying principle that prevents the cosmos from degenerating into primeval chaos. And on a personal level, he is the one who holds our broken lives together as well. Christ, our Sustainer.

Course Five: Christ the Reconciler (vs. 19-20). *“God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things ... by making peace **through his blood, shed on the cross.**”* So, how does Jesus’ death on the cross provide reconciliation? Jesus overcame the barrier between God and us – Sin. Sin only results in one thing – death. But on the cross, Sin exhausted its power. By his blood, shed on the cross, sin’s punishment is carried out; and through faith in Christ and His reconciling work, we are forgiven and brought back into the family of God.

The cost was Christ’s crucifixion. Crucifixion was not only a symbol of shame, but of Roman power – it declared the sovereignty of Caesar to execute justice throughout his empire. And yet Jesus submits to it, with the purpose of establishing once for all the Kingdom of God and His eternal Lordship. The crucifixion that expresses the zenith of disempowerment, degradation and death becomes the vehicle for the expression of God’s salvific power, grace & love. By renouncing the power to save himself, Jesus unleashed an unstoppable force to save others. It is in that display of sacrifice and human weakness that we learn what true power is. For on that cross, Jesus defeated all principalities and powers. It was in Jesus’ willingness to embrace death on behalf of others that he emerges as the glorious King. Christ Jesus, Reconciler and Ruler over all! [P]

What I want to drive home is that Christ is supreme. One might object, “Jesus doesn’t have supremacy over me!” But the truth is, no one can diminish the supremacy of Christ any more than a lunatic can diminish the brightness of the sun by writing ‘darkness’ all over his wall. The question is not “Is He supreme?” but rather “Do you recognize Him as supreme?” Will you acknowledge *by act* what Jesus is *in fact*?

Tradition has it that in 1743, at the premiere performance of Handel’s Messiah in London, King George II rose to his feet during the majestic "Hallelujah" chorus. Do you know why? Because even the king of England knew there was a power higher than his. He stood to pay homage to the King of Kings.

C.S. Lewis writes, “There is no neutral ground in the universe; every square inch and every split second is claimed by Christ.” Have you acknowledged the supremacy of Jesus in your life? Notice that I didn’t ask you to make Him supreme; He already is. You can’t make Jesus supreme any more than you can make him a savior, make him God or make him loving. He simply is supreme.

The question remains: Will you live out His supremacy in your own life – at home and at work, in your worship and in your witness, day by day wherever He leads you? Do you strive to live a life where people can look at you and say, “In him, in her, Jesus is Lord!”? For nothing less is worthy of our Savior. May we forever proclaim Jesus, King of Kings and Lord of All!