

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church -- Watertown, WI

Pastor Mark Gartner

Sermon for Christ The King Sunday November 18th and November 21st, 2010

Colossians 1:13-20

For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

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 he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, 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.

Dear children who have been rescued from eternal darkness and destruction. Amen

Can I ask you, what do you think of when you hear the word "supreme"? Maybe you think of Taco Bell. Taco Bell sells regular old tacos. But they also sell Taco Supremes with tomatoes and sour cream on them. Same thing with nachos. You've got your regular nachos and you've got your nachos Supreme, with all the fixings. I like the Supreme order. Or maybe, for you, the word supreme calls to mind the Supreme Court, that group of men and women dressed in black robes. They make up the highest court in the land. They have the ultimate authority in deciding the rules of our land.

Well, today, the Apostle Paul would like us to think of one more thing when we hear the word supreme. He would like us to think of the Lord Jesus Christ. Here in his letter to the Colossians, St. Paul drives home the point that Jesus is the ultimate authority. He rules over all creation. He is our all sufficient Savior. And so today we take as our theme:

Sermon Theme: Jesus Is Supreme

- 1. Because of who he is**
- 2. Because of what he has done**

First, I should maybe tell you that here in his letter to the Colossians, Paul is writing, at least in part, to counter some of the false teachings that were floating around at that time, most notably a teaching called Gnosticism. Gnosticism was the idea that a person could get right with God not simply by believing in Jesus, but rather by having the proper secret knowledge. Gnosticism often promoted the worship of angels and other spiritual beings, and therefore downplayed the role of Christ in one's salvation. You might say that Jesus was a helpful assistant, but he wasn't everything you needed to be saved. Gnosticism put Jesus down here in the rank and file, rather than up here as the commander in chief.

Well, it to counter that false notion that St. Paul, here in Colossians, makes a case for why Jesus is supreme. He begins by focusing on who Jesus is. In fact, St. Paul uses three phrases to describe the Christ. He says that he is the image of God, he's the first born of creation, and he's the head of the church. Let's take a little closer look at each of those phrases.

In verse 15, Paul says that (Christ) is "**the image of the invisible God.**" The Greek word there is *eikown*, the word that gives us the English word "icon." It's a word that was often used to describe the face of the Roman emperor stamped onto the coins in Jesus' day. That face was the image of the emperor. So it is with Jesus and his father. Jesus is the exact image of his father, or as the writer to the Hebrews puts it, "**The Son is the exact representation of God's being.**"(Heb. 1:3) That means that more than that Jesus was kind of like God, or that he had some similar qualities. It means more than that

Jesus was created in the image of God, just like Adam and Eve were created in the image of God. No rather, it means that Jesus Christ, according to his divine nature, was the exact duplicate of God. Jesus was the image of God, because Jesus is God. The only difference was that Jesus also took on a human nature. And that allowed human beings to see God in human flesh.

Think about those words a minute. Jesus was the image of the invisible God. You know what that reminds me of? It reminds me of night vision goggles—you know, the kind a soldier might wear? Without the goggles, that soldier might look out into the darkness and he can't see a thing. It's pitch black. But turn on the night vision goggles and suddenly, "Hey, there are people walking around out there!" Suddenly what was invisible to the naked eye becomes visible. In a sense, isn't that what Jesus did for mankind? He made an invisible God, visible.

Isn't that what Jesus told his disciples when he was with them? Remember when Philip said to Jesus, in effect, "**Jesus, when are you going to show us the Father?**" Jesus response? "**Don't you know me, Philip? Anyone who has seen me, has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father?'**" In other words, Jesus is the visible manifestation, the visible expression of God. Jesus is God personified. As Jesus himself said in John 10, "**I and the Father are one.**" Or as St. Paul puts it a little later in Colossians, "**In Christ, all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form.**"

That's the first phrase that Paul uses to describe Jesus Christ. He is the image of God. The second phrase: he is "**the firstborn over all creation.**" Now I have to say that there are some who misunderstand those words. If you, for example, have a Jehovah's Witness knocking on your door, he may try to tell you that Jesus is not God. He may say that Jesus is right here and God (they'll call him Jehovah) is up here. Or if you're talking to a Mormon, someone who belongs to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, he may refer to Jesus as the Son of God, just like we are all children of God. In fact, he'll tell you that Jesus was actually created by God as an angel, the angel Michael, to be exact. It was only later that Jesus earned the title of the Son of God.

And where do they get the idea that Jesus was not God, but in fact was created by God? Well, unfortunately, they get it from misinterpreting this passage. Notice that Paul says that Jesus is the firstborn over all creation. And they say, "Well, there you have it. Jesus was the first of all God's creatures. First, God the Father created the Son and then he created everything else."

But, you see, that interpretation is not being true to this passage, nor the rest of Scripture. Notice, Christ is not called the "first created." He's called the "firstborn." That's a technical term which emphasizes that Christ was over all creation. In fact, in the next verse Paul says, "**For by him all things were created.**" The point of this whole section is not to lump the Son of God together with creation, but rather to distinguish him from creation. The Son of God rules supreme, not as one of the created but rather as the Creator. He is the firstborn over all creation.

There is one more descriptor that the Apostle Paul applies to Jesus. He says that he is "**the head of the body, the church**". This is another way of underscoring Jesus' supremacy, not only over creation, but also over the whole Christian Church on earth. Notice that Jesus is not described as the arm or the foot or the toe of the church, but as the head of the church. The human body can survive without an arm or a leg. But without a head, the body is dead. So it is with Christ. Without Christ as the head, there is no church. Without Christ, there are no Christians. Without Christ, there is no life.

Paul's point here is this: Jesus Christ is not some two bit player in world history. He is not merely a religious leader who lived 2000 years ago. He is God over all. He is the King of kings and Lord of lords. He is the one who is worthy of our worship and praise, for he is Supreme.

2. Because of what he has done.

And yet, we know that Jesus is supreme, not only because of who he is. We also know that Jesus is supreme -- Because of what he has done. What has the Son of God done? Well, we touched on one of the things already. Paul writes, "**{16} For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities.**" Now, maybe as you

read those words, you're thinking to yourself, "Wait a minute. The Son created all things? I thought that creation was the work of God the Father. Don't we confess in the Apostles' Creed, 'I believe in God the Father Almighty, maker of heaven and earth'? Since when is the Son the Creator?"

Actually, Lutheran theologians have always taught "the external acts of God are indivisible." What does that mean? It means that when God does something outside of himself, it's not just the Father or the Son acting. It's God—the Triune God—that does it. All three persons of the Godhead are involved. In the case of creation, the Father was there; the Spirit was there (remember, Genesis 1 says that **"the Spirit was hovering over the waters"**?), and the Son was there. John's Gospel says, **"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. Through him all things were made."** It's as if the Son served as the agent or the means through which God called into existence everything that exists. Or as Paul says here in our text, **"All things were created by him and for him."**

And yet, not only did the Son create the world, he also continues to preserve it. In verse 17, Paul says that Christ is **"before all things; and in him all things hold together."** The Greek word there literally means that all things cohere in Christ. You might say that Christ is the glue that keeps the universe from falling apart. Christ is the one who established the laws of nature like gravity and centripetal and centrifugal force to keep us and the rest of the planets from flying off into outer space. Christ is the one who maintains the balance between plants and animals, one producing oxygen and the other producing carbon dioxide. Christ is the one who keeps the ant's head glued to his body. Christ holds it all together.

And yet, if it weren't enough for Christ to create and preserve everything in heaven and earth, he has done something even greater. He has reconciled to God a world corrupted by sin. And how did he do that? Paul tells, **"By making peace through his blood, shed on the cross."** By giving his life on the cross, Jesus has brought us back into fellowship with God. Or as Paul puts it in here in our text, **"For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins"** (Colossians 1:13-14). My friends, you realize, don't you, that that is the ultimate reason for us to celebrate that Jesus Christ is supreme? He has set us free from the guilt of our sins. He has set us free from the power of the Devil. With Jesus as our Lord, we can say "no" to sin and Satan. And we can look forward to that day when he will relate the entire created world from the effect of Adam and Eve's sin forever.

You realize that even nature itself is looking forward to that glorious day! That's what the writer of the hymn "Joy to the World" meant when he wrote **"and heaven and nature sing,"** or **"while fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains repeat the sounding joy."** That's what the psalmist meant when he wrote, **"Praise the Lord...fruit trees and all cedars...small creatures and flying birds"**(Ps 148:7,10). If all of nature recognizes who Jesus is and what he has done, shouldn't we also know and believe it? Jesus Christ is supreme. As much as it may seem like this world is out of control, the fact is, it's not. Jesus is still in control. Our world, more importantly, our lives are still in the hands of our creator, preserver and redeemer God. And there's no better place to be. For truly he is...our Savior Supreme. May God give us the faith to believe that and take comfort in it, for Jesus' sake. Amen.