

Thanksgiving Service

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[0 : 0 0] Please open your Bibles again at Colossians 1. We're going to read a few verses again together from verse 15, these wonderful verses that speak of the supremacy of Jesus. 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.

Amen. This little passage is so important for the Christian faith. This is the place where we hear so succinctly, so powerfully put the uniqueness of Jesus, His divinity, as well as His humanity, His supremacy over all things. And the Christian message, the gospel, is a message about Jesus, about the coming of God to man, the coming of God having taken flesh whilst without ceasing to be God. And so these verses are at the very heart of what we believe as Christians. This is the essence of the message, and because that is the case, this is where the battle is fiercest, because the consequences of giving up on any aspect of the truth that we have here concerning Jesus is most serious.

So there is vital theology in these verses. But also we come here to the heart of worship, because as we meditate on these verses, our minds are stretched as we think of the greatness of the Lord Jesus Christ. And the heart of worship is to think great thoughts of God, and to have Jesus exalted, to know true adoration for the Lord Jesus Christ. And so in all that we do tonight, and all that we're thinking of tonight, we want to be asking within our hearts that the Holy Spirit would bring us near to Jesus, and that Jesus would be exalted in our thinking, that we would leave tonight knowing that our love for Jesus has been increased by the Spirit speaking through His Word.

It's also intensely practical to meditate upon these words, because whether we truly believe that Jesus is both supreme and sufficient is supreme, has great consequences for the way that we live out our lives.

Some people, of course, don't believe that Christ is supreme. Atheists or agnostics, skeptics, they of course don't believe that Jesus is supreme. They would go so far, perhaps, to say that He's a good man, a good example, or a good prophet, or whatever. But they would never use the kind of language that Paul uses here to speak of Him being greater than anything else, exalted over the universe, the one from whom the universe sprung.

[4 : 1 0] But, you know, for those of us who do confess the supremacy of Jesus, there is the question as to whether practically we acknowledge His sufficiency as well as His supremacy. There are some, you see, who believe in Christ, they profess His name, and yet in their experience they live as though, in order to have fullness of life, Jesus is not enough.

They need something else to supplement what they have in Christ, Jesus plus. And Paul is speaking to precisely these conditions in his own day. The background to the letter to the Colossians is that there were some at the church in Colossae who were prescribing additional exercises for the Christians.

It seems that there were some people who were advocating the veneration of angels, for example, or abstaining from certain foods, or observing some particular Jewish holy days.

And to these in Colossae who were being influenced by those who were saying, well, you know, we're really pleased that you believe in Jesus. But if you want to be really spiritual, if you want to be really satisfied in your religious experience, you need to have this and that and the next thing. And Paul is bringing them back to Jesus, bringing them back to Jesus, and he's saying here and

throughout the letter, Jesus is enough. He is supreme. And if He is supreme, He must be sufficient. You do not need anything to supplement Jesus to make your life go better. That, of course, holds absolutely true for 21st century Christians, to harassed and burdened Christians of today who feel that, well, their faith in Jesus is important, but to deal with the uncertainties of life, then they need to go outside Jesus to go outside Jesus in order to really live, whether that is to turn to the horoscope, or to resort to alcohol for the Dutch courage to see them through difficult and challenging situations, or some special spiritual experience that some branch of the church is advocating as the way to be truly spiritual. And the message again for us is that Jesus in Himself, in His fullness, in His supremacy, is also sufficient. Jesus is all we need.

[7 : 17] And Paul here is reminding us that Jesus is supreme in creation, supreme in the church, and He's supreme in salvation. Just before we come to look at these three areas, it's interesting just to digress a little and to look at the form of these verses because there is a particular, there's a peculiar format here which stands out. And it's quite possible that this was an early hymn, that there is a poetic format, there's a parallelism of expression and ideas in the verses. The glory of Christ as creator is balanced by the glory of Christ as Redeemer, and there are expressions that are repeated in both sides of the the section, the section, the phrase, the firstborn, the phrase, for in Him, in the heavens and the earth.

They're all in a very careful parallel. One of the commentators, William Hendrickson, writes of the format of the verses. He says, if it was not a literary gem composed by the apostle himself, it was probably a hymn or other fixed testimony of the early church adopted by Paul and reproduced here either without change or with alterations suitable to the needs of the Colossian church. Now, think of this. If, in fact, this was, as is generally supposed, an early hymn, the fragment perhaps of an early hymn. Think of this, perhaps we don't know, twenty, twenty-five years on from the time when the Jesus that is spoken of here hung in shame on a cross outside Jerusalem, regarded by those who went by as the scum of the earth, crucified between two criminals. Twenty, twenty-five years later, he is being praised with words which ascribe divinity and glory and kingship to him. The church was compelled, was constrained to worship Jesus as God. This was not something which, as some of the fanciful theologians have said over the years, was dreamed up by Paul. This was no Pauline invention. They were constrained to worship Christ as God.

Jesus, then, first of all, is supreme in creation. Jesus is supreme in creation. And he is supreme in creation, Paul says, because he is the creator. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

Now, in Genesis 1, 27, we're told that man is made in the image of God. And in that sense, man is set to reflect God. In a creaturely way, he shows what God is like. But of course, man is not God, but as the image of the invisible God, the Son is himself God. In the next chapter, in verse 9 of chapter 2, Paul is going to say, for in Christ all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form.

[11 : 00] Paul is saying that Jesus reveals God, and reveals God perfectly because he is God. He is God. He is not something less than God. He is not the highest of created beings. He is not simply a great man. He is not simply a deep philosopher. He is not simply a good moral teacher. He is not anything else. He is very God. He is the image of the invisible God. We cannot see God, but Christ Jesus has made him known.

He is God incarnate. He is God enfleshed. Hail in flesh, the Godhead see. And that means that if we want to know what God is like, we look to Jesus. Jesus says to Philip in John 14, He who has seen me has seen the Father. Now, that's really practical because it means that you can't say the kind of lazy things that many non-Christian observers say, you know, that Christ is gentle and compassionate and merciful, but God is stern and unyielding and vindictive, because Jesus has revealed God perfectly. Archbishop Michael Ramsey had the famous saying, God is Christlike, and in him there is no unchristlikeness at all. There is no nasty secret in God that we are going to discover someday, because Jesus has revealed God truly. He is the image of the invisible God. Jesus dispels the popular notions of God, you know, the kind of detached conversations that people have in the world that we have, late at night in the world that we have, late at night in smoke-filled rooms, and turn eventually to religion, and they speak of a remote, disinterested God. When people with such ideas encounter Jesus in the Word, these notions are shattered, because Jesus reveals God. He is the image of the invisible God. He is the firstborn over all creation.

Some religions like to think of deity as being one with creation. Many modern-day spiritual people like to think of a domesticated Jesus, who is simply one of us, but exalted in some way. In fact, the first heresy, an old heresy at least, was associated with a man called Arius, whose saying was, there was a time when the Son was not. He had an origin. He came into being. There was a time when the Son was not. Arius was prepared to say all kinds of things about Jesus. He was prepared to give Him the very highest place, but the one thing that he wasn't prepared to say was that Jesus was God, because that meant He was eternal.

[14:33] And Arius's catchphrase was, there was a time when the Son was not. Now, that is not what is being said here. When Paul says that Jesus is the firstborn over all creation, he's using a term of dignity. The firstborn had the right of inheritance. He's saying Jesus is the exalted one over all creation. He's the one to whom all right is given. He is exalted, and He is apart from creation. And that's made even clearer in verse 16. In verse 16, it goes on to say, 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 created by Him. Jesus, who came down from heaven to be born in weakness in Bethlehem. It's Luther that said,

I think, that whilst He was being nursed at the breast of His mother, He was upholding the universe by His power.

Father. Sometimes we think of the work of creation being peculiarly a work of the Father God. And this is reminding us of the oneness of the Trinity, that the Son is involved just as much in the work of creation, and more that there's a sense in which He's the focus of creation, because creation is for Him. For Him all things were made. History, the story of all things created. History is moving towards a certain finale. There is a day coming when all created things will give homage to Jesus for whom they were made. Every knee will bow. Every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. The world was made for that purpose. The stars were set in their place to give glory to Jesus. Now, the fact that Jesus is involved in creation should guard us against two opposite errors. First, there's the error, the obvious error, of a false materialism.

You know, the evolutionists speak of the origin of the universe in such a way as to exclude God from people's minds. God is not in their thoughts. And with all of the highbrow talk of Big Bang and multiverse and so on, all thought of God is excluded. And the Christian doctrine of creation reminds us that Jesus that Jesus is at the heart. It was by Him and for Him that the worlds were made. When I look up into the heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have created, then say, I, what is mine? We look up at the stars and we see not numbers and equations, but we see the signature of Jesus.

[18:01] By Him and for Him, all things were made. It guards us also against a false spirituality because there have always been people down through history who have made a sharp disjunction between what's physical, what's worldly, what's worldly, and what's spiritual. Spiritual things are good, material things are unworthy. And that may have been going on in Colossae. It may have been that this kind of thinking, you know, that things that are tangible, things that are created are not really good, may have led to the call to abstain from certain foods. But we're reminded here that we were created by and for Jesus, that all of the world around us was made for His glory. We can put things in the creation to bad use, but the creation is good. And created things are intended for the glory of God. So, we're warned against a false spirituality. Jesus not only created the world, but He keeps Him going, keeps it going.

And it was created for Him. Jesus, as the sustainer as well as the creator of the world, is the organizing principle of the world. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is the one around whom everything fits. He is the cornerstone, not just of the church, but also of the universe. Everything must fit in around Jesus. Everything finds its place in Jesus' plan.

Sometimes it seems that the world is spinning headlong into destruction. There seems to be no rhyme nor reason in history and in the events of the world, but Jesus is still upholding what was made by Him and for Him. To quote William Hendrickson again. Hendrickson, in his commentary, is writing in 1964, which of course is at the height of the Cold War. And it's interesting how he speaks of the fact that Jesus is in control of the world that Jesus is delivering from some of the fears that were very much fears of His day. Listen to what he says at this point. Since the Christ of Calvary rules the heavens and the earth in the interests of the heavens and the interests of His kingdom and to the glory of His name, all is overruling evil for good, neither automation, nor bomb, nor communistic menace, nor depression, nor economic unbalance, nor fatal accident, nor gradual

decline in mental vigor, nor hallucination due to nervous disorder, nor any invader from outer space, and he brackets, which some people have nightmares over, will ever succeed in separating us from His love. In Jesus, all things hold together. He is supreme over creation. He is the creator. He's supreme, secondly, over His church.

He is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, that in everything He might have the supremacy. Jesus is supreme in the church, Paul says, because He is head of the church and because He is firstborn from among the dead. As firstborn from among the dead, Christ is the pioneer of all who will rise to eternal life. Because of Easter Sunday, we have a foothold in heaven. Jesus, our pioneer. He is like, if you think of a climbing picture, He is like the the alpine climber who has gone ahead of His team and has reached the summit, and we are bound to Him, so that we cannot slip and fall because Christ has secured our place. He is the firstborn from among the dead. He is preeminent also because He is the head of the body, the church. Now, in a physical sense, the head of our own body gives growth and gives guidance, gives direction to the rest of the body. And Jesus, as the head of the church, does these things too. It is from Jesus that all spiritual growth comes. If we are to grow corporately as a church, then we must be focused upon the Lord Jesus.

He must be central in our thinking. It must be Jesus that is proclaimed from our pulpits. It must be to honor Jesus that we are motivated in all that we do in the life of the church. He must have first place in all things. But He's also head in the sense that He directs the body of the church, just as it's the head that directs the way we travel. We take in senses through our eyes and our ears, and the brain directs the action of our limbs, of our feet and our legs. So, Christ also is head in that sense. He is the one who is to rule the direction of travel of His church. He is supreme, and of course, He does that through His Word. He directs the church through the Word.

[24 : 23] Now, that's a hugely liberating truth to grasp hold of, because there is no other head of the church, and therefore no other person can tell us to do anything or to believe anything that is not contained in the Scriptures, because it's in the Scriptures that Jesus directs the body. We have no need, therefore, of a pope figure who's given authority to decide on issues that are thought to be too complicated for the ordinary believer, or who comes up with teachings that are additional to what we have in the Bible. But it means, too, that in evangelical situations that we can be freed from the tyranny of the powerful personality who is determined to have his or her way and for the rest to go along with their peculiar ideas. You have, from time to time in the church, you have people who come up and they start promoting certain taboos, things that they prohibit, which are in the Bible. And of course, this is again what's going on in Colossae, people of influence who want to make a name for themselves, who want to set themselves on a pedestal, who are saying, no, you don't do that, you don't do this.

Christ alone is head of the church, gives direction to the church. We've had in more recent church history movements which have been called heavy shepherding movements, and you have sect-like churches where people will lay down the law for individuals in terms of who they are to marry, or what work, what employment they are to seek, and the minutia of people's lives is organized for them by others. Christ alone is head of the church, has a right over our lives, has the right to call us to absolute obedience to all that He says. We have no need for any other rule than the rule of Christ in His Word. And the leadership in the church is limited to engaging with what Christ has said through the Scriptures. We exalt Jesus, then, because He is supreme in the work of creation, and He is supreme in the church because He is the pioneer of all who rise again to newness of life, and He is the head of the church, giving it growth and direction. He's supreme in salvation.

For God was pleased, Paul says, 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. The scope of Paul's words is breathtaking, isn't it? To reconcile to Himself all things. It's a reminder that it is not only humans who have been smitten by the fall, but that the whole universe has been put out of joint by sin. The cosmos has been affected. Paul will say to the Romans, we know that the whole creation is groaning with birth pangs together until now. I think sometimes you can detect that in an almost wistfulness in the prettiest landscape. There is a sense in which you can sense sometimes that things are moving towards a perfection that things are moving towards a perfection that they do not yet have.

Now, Christ's death on the cross was effective not only to pay for the redemption of His whole people, but also to reconcile to Himself the physical and the spiritual world. By His death, He has

satisfied the demands of His law by which the universe is governed. And only by Jesus can there be reconciliation. You know how people speak glibly about world peace. You know, we all want world peace. And if only people could get on together.

If only we didn't have the creeds and the religions that divide people and cause friction. If only there were no nations, then we would have peace. All overlooking the reality of sin. The reality of sin.

[29 : 33] sin. The brute fact that will not go away. And the Bible tells us sin it is that has thrown the universe out of balance. And that the only way that a ruined world can be restored is by the payment of the debt of sin. The only way that divine law can be honored is by the offering up of one who is worthy. One who is willing. And there was only one.

And His name is Jesus. And He is supreme in salvation. He has done what no other could do. He has reconciled men to Himself. One day all will confess that Jesus is Lord. Some gladly, some joyfully.

Some who have known what it is to be liberated by Him, to serve Him gladly. Others, grudgingly, under compulsion. And the cross, which ironically seemed such an emblem of failure. The cross of shame.

Cursed is the one who hangs on the tree. The cross becomes the emblem of Jesus' supremacy. There's no way that we can avoid the question of a relationship with God. We can have the highest thoughts, the most noble aspirations. We can be the most moral people. But unless we've been to the cross of Jesus, unless we know Him in a personal relationship as our Savior, we will not be right with God. We will not have peace with God. We will be eternally lost. We cannot sidestep the cross. Jesus is supreme, and He is sufficient in salvation. No one else can save you. And if you are trusting in Jesus, He is enough. He is enough. His grace is sufficient. We cannot add to it, and if we were to try to, we would destroy it. It is the free gift of God. Jesus then is supreme. This is your Jesus. This is Jesus held up for your adoration in the Scriptures. The one who is supreme in creation, who is supreme over His church, and who is supreme in salvation. He is supreme. There is no denial. But the question that we have to ask ourselves, the question that we close with is, if Jesus is supreme, is He also, in my experience and in your experience, is He sufficient? Is He sufficient? Let's ask God's Holy Spirit to search our hearts as we think in concrete ways of some of the areas in which we might be tempted to look for something in addition to Jesus. What of the challenge of loneliness? Is Jesus enough? Is Jesus enough? If God in His providence has set you in a solitary place, are you able to trust that the one who holds together the universe in its astonishing complexity, is also able to come into your situation and give you fullness, even in what seems to others emptiness, to fill your life, to give you satisfaction and joy. Jesus is enough. What about self-worth? Some find it so hard to think that they are of any worth at all, losing sight of any dignity that they may have before others. If Jesus is supreme in all these ways, if the stars render Him, and if you are united to Him in all His fullness by faith, then surely that gives to you great worth. To be one with Christ is Jesus enough. And then lastly, as we think of our progress or our lack of progress in the Christian faith, our desire to be more godly, to be more righteous than we are, as we think of our struggle sometimes to move forward, what do you need to be a more godly man, a more godly woman? Is Jesus enough? Paul was praying earlier in the chapter that the [35 : 01] Colossians would grow, that they would make progress in the knowledge of God's will, that they would have a fruitful life, that they would have patient, persevering spirits. And He says to them now, Jesus is all you need. You don't need what these people with all of their unsettling doctrines are saying you do need, but you need what you already have. You need to embrace and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Let's bow in prayer together. Our Heavenly Father, we thank You for reminding us in these wonderful words of Scripture tonight of the supremacy of Your Son, Jesus. We thank You that You have highly exalted Him, that having accomplished all that was given to Him for our sakes, He is now seated at the right hand of the Majesty on High. We thank You that by faith in Jesus we are united to all that He is, and that we have His fullness in our experience. Lord, keep us, we pray, from listening to the siren voices that would draw us away from Him in His sufficiency and would persuade us that we need something in addition. We thank You that the truth is that Jesus is enough. May we leave this place tonight, resting joyfully in Jesus, in His precious and powerful name, we pray. Amen.

Amen. Let's continue to exalt Jesus in our praise as we close with Psalm 110 on page 149.

We'll sing the whole psalm. The Lord said to my Lord, Sit here at my right hand until I make your foes a stool on which your feet may stand. The Lord will make your rain extend from His hands. The Lord will make your feet may stand. The Lord will make your feet may stand.

The tune is Buzzer. We sing the whole psalm. To God's praise, the Lord said to my Lord, Sit here at my right hand. The Lord ■■■■es on the Lord, sit here at my right hand. Until I make your foes a stool on which your feet may stand.

[37 : 52] I make your foes a stone on which your feet may stand.

The Lord will make your reign a step from Zion's hill.

With royal power you rule among those who oppose your will.

When you display your power, your people talk to you.

And on our eighth in holiness, your youth will come by due.

[38 : 54] Unchanger be the Lord, with soul and purpose store.

Just like melt-tis today, you are a bridge forevermore.

The Lord's at your right hand, there he will ever stay.

He on his day of wrath will approach the gates to bar his way.

The nations he will judge, the dead in its will lie.

[39 : 57] The mighty of the air, he'll crush all who his rule defy.

Our group beside the way, his thirst will satisfy.

And thus refreshed, he will with joy lift up his head on high.

The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you.

The Lord turn his face towards you and give you peace.

Amen. Amen. Amen.

[41 : 15] Amen. Amen.