

The Supremacy of Christ

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- [0 : 00] Well, if you have a Bible, please do turn with me to Colossians, Colossians chapter 1. We're going to read together from verse 15 through to verse 23, Colossians chapter 1, that's page 983 in the church Bibles.
- Colossians chapter 1, reading from verse 15 together. He, that is Jesus, is the image of the invisible gods, the firstborn of all creation.
- For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible. Whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, all things were created through him and for him.
- And he is before all things. And in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church.
- [1 : 26] He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.
- And through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.
- And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him.
- If indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.
- This is God's word. Please do keep that passage open in front of you. Let us ask the Lord to help with it before we come to it together. Let us pray. Father, we thank you that you are a God who speaks.
- [2 : 50] And we pray that by your Spirit you would speak to each and every one of us here now. That you might make Christ known. The image of the invisible God.
- That we might be made ever more in his likeness. And so live for his glory. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen.
- Amen. Amen. Well, this is the time of year, isn't it, when we look back over the events of the last 12 months.
- Every news outlet seems to offer their own version, don't they, of kind of 2024 in review, or something similar. As I was looking through one such summary last week, I was reminded of one of the great events of this year back in February.
- I'm sure many of you will have heard about it or read about it. It was advertised as the place where dreams become reality.
- [3 : 55] The tagline invited you to indulge in a chocolate fantasy like never before. Capture the enchantment.
- Capture the enchantment. A journey filled with wondrous creations and enchanting surprises at every turn. It might sound great.

It promised a lot. But Willie's chocolate experience made headlines earlier this year for all the wrong reasons, didn't it? The advertising was top notch.

The experience was not. Attendees arrived to an almost empty warehouse. A picture went viral of a few tables and fold-up chairs set up in the middle of a large, cold, undecorated room with a sole kind of bouncy castle in the corner.

People who had paid up to £35 to get in were treated to half a cup of lemonade and a small ration of jelly beans. Excited children who rushed in soon came out crying with disappointment.

[5 : 18] The whole thing was cancelled. Only a few hours after it began when crowds of frustrated parents began demanding refunds.

Another one promise that the event did deliver on was that there would be surprises at every turn. We love great experiences, don't we?

And so when something promises a great experience, there is probably always going to be a part of us that wants to believe it will deliver. But sometimes there is a big difference between the experience promised and the reality we are met with.

In the Apostle Paul's day, there are people in Colossae, the audience of this letter, where Paul's writing this letter to, there are people in Colossae who are trying to sell the Colossian Christians a great experience.

Not the full Willy Wonka experience, but the full Christian experience. Not really so they say. If you glance down with me there to verse 4 of chapter 2, you'll see that Paul gives a sense of why he is writing this letter.

[6 : 40] He says, I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. And as you read on into chapter 2, especially down at sort of verses 16 to 18, you see what these kind of maybe plausible sounding arguments are.

And it basically takes the form of people adding extra things onto the Christian life. So that the Colossian Christians might get what is being sold to them as the full Christian experience.

The message they were being sold was basically, right, you have faith in Jesus, good, good start. Wouldn't you like something a bit more? You've got your faith in Jesus, but don't you know that's just like the entry level option.

Why not join us for platinum Christianity? Maybe that's something you've felt in your own Christian life, whether you've been a Christian for five minutes or 50 years.

We might well at times wonder if we're really getting the full thing. I wonder if perhaps maybe there's something we're missing. Maybe especially when other Christians in other churches seem to have something extra, something more dramatic, a more exciting spiritual experience, an X factor that makes it feel like you're missing out.

[8 : 19] Or maybe you just, you know in your head that you are saved by grace alone through faith alone, through faith alone, through faith alone, but it just doesn't always feel like it.

And so there's maybe something quite attractive about doing stuff, something extra on top of your faith, a little extra security on top of the faith in Jesus you've got in the bank.

Maybe you're not a Christian. And part of the reason for that is you think, if Christianity was true, surely there would almost be more to it.

It would look more impressive. Or those who are Christians would seem to have more going for them. Just faith in Jesus? Surely there's something more to it.

There might well be other ways, but hopefully those examples show us that the Colossians weren't just some kind of fresh off the block new Christians, easily deceived by false teaching.

- [9 : 29] The temptation to look for something else, to look for something more, really does exist. And there really are going to be people who will try and sell that something extra to us.
- persuading you that you don't yet have it all. And promising that you can have the full thing by just adding on a few extra steps to your faith.
- In Colossae, that took the form of things like worshipping angels. Sounds pretty impressive, doesn't it? Asceticism, that's kind of deliberately depriving yourself of certain things.
- Taking part in certain festivals, eating certain foods, avoiding others. A list of extras that sound like they might well be spiritual. And they come with a promise of something more than the Christians in Colossae currently have.
- But Paul writes this letter to say, do not fall for it. The advertising might be good.
- [10 : 41] The promises are empty. If you go down that road, just like those people driving up to that warehouse in Glasgow in February, you'll find you've been sold alive.
- And he lays the groundwork and equips us with some essential tools in verses 15 to 23 of chapter 1 so that we can be rooting out these false promises before they ever take hold of our hearts.
- There's two things we're going to see come out really clearly in these verses as we go through them together. The person of Jesus Christ is preeminent over all creation.
- And the person of Jesus Christ is preeminent over all redemption. Preeminent just means supreme. Over and above everything else.
- So let's just turn to each of those things in turn beginning with our first point this evening. Jesus is preeminent over all creation.
- [11 : 48] Paul begins there in verse 15 by telling us that Jesus is the image of the invisible God. If you want to know what God looks like, look at Jesus.
- Open up a gospel and read about Jesus. Jesus. And he then continues, doesn't he, Jesus is the firstborn over all creation.
- Now in saying firstborn, Paul of course isn't saying there that the Son of God had a beginning. That there was a time when he did not exist. That's not what Paul is saying at all.
- Firstborn here is not so much a biological term as it is a legal term. What Paul is saying is that Jesus, and this is what we read in Hebrews earlier, Jesus is the heir to all things.
- Everything ultimately belongs to Jesus. And if we had a moment of doubt for whatever reason, verse 16 makes it pretty clear, doesn't it? For by him all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, all things were created through him and for him.
- [13 : 06] Just have a moment to think about that list for a second and try and think of something that falls outside the scope of Jesus' activity in creation.
- things in heaven, check, things on earth, check, things visible, check, things invisible.
- Every throne, every dominion, every ruler, every authority. Paul's list is not exhaustive, is it? But it is all-encompassing.
- There is nothing in creation, nothing at all, that was not created by him. And as if that wasn't enough to convince us of his preeminence, look there at the last two words of that verse.
- Why does every single thing in creation exist? What is the purpose of every atom in this universe?

[14 : 18] It was all created through him and it was all created for him. And, right, verse 17, it keeps going, in him all things hold together.

So, nothing, nothing that currently exists, right, nothing in this building right now would continue to exist if it were not for Jesus holding it together.

The chair that you are sitting on has not collapsed in a random heap of molecules because Jesus holds all things together.

so there is no part of this world that wasn't made by Jesus. There is no part of this world that exists now apart from Jesus and there is not a part of this world that is not ultimately for Jesus.

Do you see how what Paul is saying here completely undermines any false teaching being offered to the Colossians? These people were saying, weren't they, Jesus is great, why not add something on?

[15 : 36] Why not become a premium member? What's Paul saying in verse 15 to 17? He's saying, if your faith is in Jesus, then your faith is in the one who is before all things, who is over all things, who holds all things together and for whom all things exist.

you have Jesus, but why not go for something more? Isn't really an offer that makes much sense when literally nothing exists outside and apart from Jesus.

There's nothing outside of him, there's nothing above him, there's nothing before him and everything is for him. What exactly do you think you can add on?

So that's a pretty good start, but things get even better because Jesus is not only preeminent over creation, he is preeminent over all redemption.

Paul continues there in verse 18 by reminding the Colossians that Jesus is the head of the body, the church. Now in first reading, that might sound like a bit of a tail-off from where we were in verse 15 to 17, as if Paul is just going to bulk out the CV with anything that's left.

[17 : 02] Because if you look at the church in maybe purely worldly terms, it might well look somewhat weak and unimpressive, but this isn't a step down in Jesus' resume. I think we're actually supposed to see it as a step up.

Because the church is not some unimpressive charity organization trying desperately to maintain some relevance. The church of Christ is the beginning of a new creation in which Christ himself is going to reconcile all things to himself.

and so the head of the church is actually a step up from the creator of all things here and now because the church is the beginning of what is going to last into eternity.

see. All things have come from him. In redemption beginning with the church all things are going to be reconciled once more in him.

Do you see that the direction of history that Paul is giving us here it starts with Jesus it exists in the present because of Jesus and it all ends with Jesus Jesus Jesus Jesus Jesus Jesus can't really miss the point Paul is making can you it is all about Jesus and it's all about Jesus being over all things a general rule of thumb is that if you want to find the main focus of a Bible passage look for repetition I wonder if you spot it in those verses just look through it again with me verse 15 Jesus the firstborn of all creation verse 16 by him all things were created again all things were created through him and for him verse 17 he is before all things and in him all things hold together end of verse 18 that in everything he might be preeminent verse 19 in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell verse 22 reconcile to himself all things if you are following the

[19 : 33] Jesus of Colossians 1 then no matter what anyone else says they are experiencing on top of that even if angels are showing up in their worship services do not be deceived you have not been sold short because you can't have anything more than the one who is over and above everything and Paul lands his point home in verses 21 and 22 verses 15 to 20 is something kind of a CV for Jesus verse 21 and 22 is like a mitral biography for the Colossians and what Paul does here is he locates their story in the eternal all encompassing story of the preeminent Jesus he tells us doesn't he in this little biography who they were and who they now are that their faith is in him firstly who they were verse 21 you who once were alienated and hostile in mind doing evil deeds they were alienated they were separated from God they were hostile towards him that they were opposed to him they were doing what is evil that's who they once were but it is not is it who they are now because verse 22 he has reconciled them in his body of flesh by his death in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him so instead of hostility they are now reconciled to God instead instead of alienation or separation they are now acceptable before him instead of evil deeds they are now characterized by holiness and blamelessness before God there has been a radical transformation in who the Colossians are why is it that Paul tells them this or reminds them of it

I mean they knew the gospel they had heard the gospel so why does Paul feel the need to emphasize this here well I think we begin to get an answer if we just have a quick scan through verse 21 and 22 and try and pick out what it is that the Colossians contributed to their radical change what did they bring to the table just look there what did they do maybe a better question to ask what did they add nothing is it who brought everything they are acceptable to God only because all because of Jesus and what he did on the cross all because of Jesus verse 22 he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death verse 15 to 20 tell us something about the preeminence of Jesus verse 21 and 22 remind us of where our story fits in and it doesn't just kind of like overlap does it as if we had some story outside of Jesus and then with a bit of his help we got things sorted out all of our story fits into his story there is not a part of our redemption that we bring along there is nothing we add there is nothing we can add because nothing can be added to

Jesus who is over all things nothing can be added to his work that is the Colossian biography and if you're a Christian here this evening that is your biography again can you see how that just undermines the idea that you need to or indeed possibly can add anything to Jesus to be acceptable before God you see how it undermines the idea that you can experience anything more than what you already have in Christ the goal of the Christian faith to be holy and blameless and above reproach before God it only happens through the redemptive work of Jesus alone who is in all things and over all things and for whom all things exist so when someone comes and says you have faith in

Jesus what about something else on top of that what about something more Paul is equipping us to know and to believe and to say there is nothing there is nothing outside of Jesus there is nothing more I can have apart from Jesus and there is nothing more I can do to add to what Jesus has already done for me no no need to add anything else no need to top it up with anything else it may be worth saying none of that is to say that how you live doesn't matter just earlier in chapter one Paul encourages the Colossians to bear fruit in every good work but that fruit is not what makes you acceptable before God that fruit is not experiencing something more than what you have now in

Christ it is simply living out all that you already have in Christ Jesus if you're a Christian I hope that gives you tremendous assurance of your standing before God you are right with him you are holy and blameless in his sight all because of Jesus so Jesus is preeminent over all creation Jesus is preeminent over all redemption he is the savior of humanity but I wonder if you noticed there is isn't there there is a condition let me just read from verse 22 Jesus has reconciled you in his body of flesh by his death in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him if indeed you continue in the faith stable and steadfast not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard

[27 : 04] Paul has reminded the Colossians of how amazing and supreme Jesus is and of what Jesus has done but there is isn't there there is an you can be sure all that is yours that the fullness of a Christian experience in Christ is yours and always will be if you continue in your faith stable and steadfast not shifting from the hope of the gospel doesn't sound that glamorous does it maybe that's why we're sometimes tempted by other things that sound a little more exotic but it is the one thing that matters with new year just around the corner it's the time isn't it when people start thinking about what they might change in the year to come perhaps what they'll add onto their lives about new hobbies they want to take up new skills they want to learn new habits they want to embed but if you're a

Christian here this evening here's what I want your new resolution to be continue in the faith you have stick with Jesus don't be tempted to add anything on no matter what else might be dangled in front of you by spiritual con men no matter what might be dangled in front of you by your own heart however convincing it sounds Paul says Jesus is so much better stick with him and you will have everything because he is preeminent over all things whatever kind of spiritual experience you are searching for whatever you might look for certainty and assurance don't be deceived but hold firmly to the faith you have in

Christ let us pray together before we sing our final hymn Father we thank you and praise you for Jesus the image of the invisible God the first born of all creation the one by whom all things were created the one for whom all things were created the one who is before all things and in whom all things hold together we thank you that he is our head the head of our body the church we thank you that in him the fullness of God was pleased to dwell and because of him alone we have redemption we have been reconciled to you so help us as we go forward from here to stick to Jesus and Jesus alone Lord may we not be deceived but rather hold firmly to the faith you have given us in

Christ that we might continue stable and steadfast and so be presented holy and blameless and above reproach before you in Jesus name we pray Amen amen peace Thank you.