

# SN The Preeminence of Christ

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[ 0 : 00 ] Turn with me in your Bibles to Colossians chapter 1. We'll read there in just a moment. Each year at Christmas time, the church celebrates the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And we're all familiar with the battles that take place in our culture about the public commemoration of Christmas. Battles, wages that are waged each year around the creche and the public display of a creche in public places.

And, of course, the creche is a symbol of the incarnation. It's a symbol of the Christmas celebration. It's a snapshot of this amazing event that God has come in the flesh.

The carol we often sing, Hark! The Herald Angels Sing, has this line in it. Veiled in flesh the Godhead see. Hail incarnate deity.

Pleased as man with men to dwell. Jesus our Emmanuel. And, of course, the name Emmanuel is an incarnation name. It means God with us.

[ 1 : 13 ] And that truth is the core of the incarnation. It's the God has come. God has come to dwell with us. The God has become incarnate. He has taken on flesh and blood to dwell with us.

He has become true man, true God. And Colossians describes who this is. And I want to read six verses from you, beginning with verse 15 of chapter 1.

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created, 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, the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have 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.

[ 2 : 36 ] Let's pray together and ask God to give us illumination into elements of this passage tonight. Father, we come to you asking that you would open our hearts, the eyes of our hearts, that you would open the eyes of our hearts to see the wonders of Christ and the wonders of the incarnation, the wonders that we celebrate and commemorate at this time of year.

So we pray, Father, that you would deepen our grasp and catch us up with a sense of amazement and wonder at the fact that this God has become man, that the man God has come to dwell with us. He's come for us in order to reconcile us to himself by shedding his blood on the cross. So we pray that you would illuminate that truth to us tonight. Help us to see the implications of it for our lives, at least in some sense, we pray, and prepare our hearts to partake of the table where we commemorate his life and his death for us.

We ask this for Christ's glory. Amen. What I want to do tonight is just look at this passage and see what it says about him being God. We want to do that quickly.

I'm not going to do an exegesis of every element of what I read to you, but just the picking up the elements that describe him as God, his deity. And so then I want to quickly look at some of the implications of that with you.

[ 4 : 00 ] But the central teaching of this passage is that Jesus is God. And I want to draw to your attention several things that make that abundantly clear in the passage.

Verse 15 says, He is the image of the invisible God. Now, when it says that he is the image of God, it cannot mean physically because we know that God doesn't have any physical being.

God is a spirit. In both the Old Testament and the New Testament, very clear with the fact that no one has ever seen God. Timothy describes God as the invisible God.

So the image cannot be physical. But the miracle of the incarnation is that the invisible God has become visible. He has come to dwell. He's come to be a person.

The word that's translated image in this passage is the word icon. And it has to do with a replica, a precise copy, a representation.

[ 5 : 02 ] So what our text is telling us is that the invisible God has become manifest. And he is manifest in the person of Jesus Christ, the incarnate Christ, the Son.

Verse 15 adds that he is the firstborn over all creation. Now, the notion of the firstborn is often misunderstood. And we might think, Oh, I know he's the firstborn Son in the creation.

But it says the firstborn over all creation. And Paul understood what he was saying, and his readers would have understood, because his readers would have understood the law of primogeniture, that the firstborn Son inherited everything.

And the firstborn Son possessed the authority of the Father. And he had all the Father's wealth, the Father's status, the Father's power, the Father's authority.

So he was in every way the equal to the Father. And when he passed on, the Son stepped into his place. So the Son was equal with the Father.

[ 6 : 04 ] He has equal rank. And that's really what's meant by this statement. He's the firstborn of all the creation. He has equal rank over all the creation. He is in every way equal with the Father.

Verse 16 says that he is the creator. By him, it says, all things were created. And the assertion of the passage is that all things, visible, invisible, even those things that are airborne and invisible to our eyes, those things that are spiritual, dominions, powers, authorities, as well as the whole scene, invisible and material creation, is all created by him.

So the assertion of the passage is that the God, who in the beginning, created the heavens and the earth, is Jesus. That everything in the created order that had a beginning, had its beginning in him.

Verse 19 reminds us that the fullness of God dwells in him. Now, we've all heard various attempts to explain the Trinity and using analogies, the three-leaf clover is an example, or someone says the Trinity is like an egg.

You know, an egg is made up of three parts. There's a shell, and there's the white of the egg, and the yolk of the egg. But all together, they make the egg, and the egg is all three parts. But all these analogies unravel, because the reality is that all of the Father is in the Son, and all of the Holy Spirit is in the Son, and the fullness of God is in the Son, so that all the attributes of God are his attributes.

[ 7 : 44 ] They are all in the Son. God is fully in Christ, and Christ is fully God. And of course, Hebrews chapter 1, verse 3, makes that point.

The Son is the radiance of the Father's glory, the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. So these things are amazing.

God took on flesh. Jesus is the exalted God. He is the image of the immortal God.

The fullness of God dwells in Jesus. He possesses all the rights, and privileges, and prerogatives of deity. And verse 18 tells us something shocking in light of what we've seen, that he is the firstborn from the dead.

Now think about that. God, the creator, all the fullness of God, all the attributes of God, all the privileges and prerogatives of deity, the one who has supremacy, dead.

[ 8 : 50 ] Dead to provide our reconciliation. As verse 20 says, he's come to make peace by shedding his blood on the cross. We sing a hymn of Charles Wesley that captures this.

He says, "'Tis mercy, all the immortal dies." And what we celebrate this time of year should leave us stunned and amazed and overwhelmed with joy, overwhelmed with the implications of the fact that the Son of God, the exact representation of God, God himself has come to earth.

He's come to earth to save us. He's come to earth to live on this earth, to experience the humiliation of living in flesh like our flesh, of seeing the world through our eyes, facing the temptations that we face, living in this gritty, dirty, needy world.

He has come to suffer humiliation, to ultimately to die, to give himself a ransom for many. He comes to live in the sweat and blood and misery and sorrow of this world and ultimately the immortal dies.

And the question I ask myself and I want us to ask ourselves tonight and I want you to ask yourself even as I'm speaking is why does this seem to not make any difference to us sometimes?

[ 10 : 19 ] Why are we not transformed by this message? Why does this message leave us with a yawn? And perhaps one of the answers is we get used to things that ought to be transforming to us.

We grow accustomed to us. None of the truths I've mentioned to you in these first several minutes are new to you. These are all things that you've known and you believe and you have embraced the truths with which we're very familiar and they become ho-hum to us.

Human beings have an amazing capacity to grow accustomed to things and we filter out certain sights and sounds and things that no longer have an impact on us that we don't even notice anymore.

I remember as a child we used to go visit relatives of ours in East Toledo and East Toledo was across the river and East Toledo there were refineries and as you get closer and closer to our relatives' house we would be overwhelmed with the foul odors that were part of the refining process of these refineries.

But our relatives never smelled them. They would grow used to these things over time. We'd grow accustomed to things. I remember when I first met my mother-in-law she was quite alarmed about my birthmark and by the time we were getting married she said to Margie you know I think Ted's birthmark is fading.

[11:50] Now it wasn't actually fading it's just that she had grown accustomed to it and she didn't see it anymore. And this passage presents us with truth that we've heard again and again.

And people are familiar we are familiar as a group of people. Every one of us are familiar with the facts of the incarnation. There's nothing I've said to you tonight that is new to you or you've never thought about or realized or heard.

But these are amazing facts. God has come in the flesh. The baby is God. He possesses all the attributes of deity.

This one this helpless baby in the manger is holding the stars in their courses. He is the one by whom all things consist. He's the image of the invisible God.

He's equal with the Father in every possible way. All the fullness of God dwells in Him. Veiled in flesh we sing the Godhead see hail incarnate deity pleased with man with men excuse me as man with men to dwell.

[13:03] Jesus our Emmanuel. These are momentous truths. And what I want to do for the next few minutes is I want to press on our consciences the implications of these truths so that we are able to smell them again and we're able to see them again and we're moved by them.

Because and so I have three points to make. The first is that this truth should rearrange everything for us. It's truth that rearranges everything. If this if the baby is God who's come in the flesh who's come on this rescue mission who's come as verse 20 says to reconcile us by shedding his blood on the cross if the immortal dies this this truth rearranges every aspect of our lives.

It's like an earthquake that that shakes the earth and nothing ever is exactly like it was before. It's like a tsunami that sweeps out communities and and nothing is like it was before.

It's like the campfire that swept through California and and you've seen pictures perhaps of Paradise California and there's nothing there. That community will never look like it looked.

It has been completely rearranged and even though people will rebuild and and the area will be repopulated it will never be the same. it's this truth is that kind of truth.

[14:33] It's truth that rearranges everything. See here's my point. If Jesus if this baby in the manger is God then nothing in my life could be negotiable.

Everything must be rearranged by that truth. I remember speaking to a missionary I think I may have talked to you of him before a man named Paul Broman in Japan.

Margie and I met them when we were there. He had been there for 50 years. He had come in response to Douglas MacArthur at the end of World War II said what we need are 50 missionaries 500 missionaries who will come and help this country get back on its feet again.

These people with others responded to that call and he had spent 50 years there in Japan ministering the gospel. Some of you heard this story. he set up a computer company to support himself by his own labor.

He partnered with an unknown computer software business in the early 1980s Microsoft in Seattle and the company that he established had earned millions of dollars every year selling programming tools for computers that they had translated into all the languages of Southeast Asia.

[15:50] The year that we were there in 2008, the company had earned 50 million dollars that year. And yet these people lived as missionaries in small flats and bought food in bulk and shared it with one another and lived very, very simply.

And the money they earned with their company was used to support over 400 missionaries that had gone throughout Southeast Asia with the gospel. And they were doing this just on their own, unheralded, unknown, unsung.

I remember having a conversation with Paul Broman and he said to me, he said, Ted, when I learned that Jesus Christ had come into the world to live and to die and to save me from my sins, I thought that is the most amazing thing.

That's the most astounding truth. I will give my life for that. And he said, that's what I've done. And that's what I mean when I say this truth must rearrange everything for us.

Imagine with me that you were afflicted with some wasting disease. You were certain to die of this disease. And if I came to you with credibility and could tell you I can cure you of this disease, I have a cure for you.

[17:06] But here's the deal. If you take my cure, you'll never be able to eat chocolate again in your life. But if you don't take my cure, you're going to die. You're welcome to eat all the chocolate you like between now and there, but you will die.

There's none of us who would turn away from that deal. We would say, give me the cure. I can do without chocolate, but I must have the cure.

If you had a disease and I had the cure, you'd happily walk away from chocolate. It would rearrange everything for you. Here's the Lord of glory. And if he has invaded your life, if your sins are forgiven, if you have hope of glory, if you are the recipient of such rich blessing because Christ, the eternal Son of God, has come into the world to save, that gives us inexpressible and glorious joy.

And the knowledge that we will experience that joy will be forgiven of our sins. We will be with him in glory. We have hope in the midst of all the difficult circumstances of life.

There are pleasures forever more at the right hand of God. Even in the darkest hour, you have the pleasure, the comfort of knowing God, that God is with you and God will care for you and sustain you.

[18:28] That truth rearranges life for us. It changes everything. That's what Paul is talking about in 2 Corinthians 4 when he says, we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that the all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.

We are hard-pressed on every side, but not crushed, perplexed, but not in despair, persecuted, but not abandoned, struck down, but not destroyed. If this baby is God, if he is God who's come in the flesh, if he is the one that Paul says that he is, that the scriptures say that he is, here in Colossians chapter 1, then how could we say it's valid for me to believe all of that, to embrace all of that, and still continue to live for my own pleasure, still continue to live as someone who's compulsively self-serving, how could I look at that truth and say, you mean if I believe that I won't be able to eat chocolate?

I'm not suggesting Christians can't eat chocolate, but simply referring back to my earlier illustration, you get the point. You cannot know the absolute if you absolutize anything else.

You can't know the supreme one. You can't have the supreme one if anything else is supreme in your life. You can't enjoy his beauty if something else holds greater beauty for you.

And that's the truth that we're confronted with. And I speak to people from time to time who have something in their life who has a hold on them. And they're saying, in effect, if I can have this, whatever it is, you fill in the blank, then I will live.

[20:23] If I can't have this, then I don't want to live. That's the language of supremacy. And see, if Jesus is the Son of God, if He's the Son of God, He's not here to round out my life.

He is life. He's not here as a supplement or part-time interest. If this is God in the flesh, if the baby is the invisible God made visible, if He is the one through whom all things have been created, if He is the supreme being, very God, begotten, not created, then as we sang this morning, oh, come, let us adore Him.

He must be all. If He is who He says He is, He must rearrange life for you and me. And you and I cannot know the one who is absolute unless His being relativizes everything else.

In other words, in light of who He is, everything else is of relative value. If that's not true, we don't understand who He is and we are not savingly joined to Him.

We've got to be able to stand before Him and say, I must have you. Anywhere your word speaks to me, I must obey.

[21:47] Anything your will touches, your will will be supreme. All else will be relative. There's no place for us ever to say, oh, Lord, not that.

Lord, you can touch anything else. You can have anything else. But no, Lord, not that. Not that. That I preserve for myself. If this baby is God, Jesus produces a tsunami in your life.

He rearranges everything. He must be supreme. The second thing I want for us to think about, and it's implicit, I guess, but taking it a step further than my earlier point, if the baby is God, it means laying down all the private prerogatives over your life.

If you look at the titles in this passage, the image of God, the firstborn over all creation, supreme, all of God's fullness, dead.

This one who is fully God came to this world and laid down his life. He shed his blood on the cross to reconcile us to himself, it says in verse 20. How can we celebrate his birth by doing the opposite of everything that he did?

[ 22 : 58 ] How can we celebrate him and insist on maintaining private prerogatives over our lives? Did you ever think about how much the way we celebrate Christmas is the opposite of what it meant for him?

In our culture, it's all about comfort. It's about coziness. You see the commercials on TV. It's about coziness, friends, family, good times, chestnut, roasting over an open fire, jack frost nipping at your nose, not making you really cold, just kind of nipping at your nose, not really making you uncomfortable.

The weather outside is frightful, but the fire is quite delightful. What was the meaning of the incarnation for Jesus? The manger for Jesus was all the opposite of that.

It meant excrement, animals, drafts, cold, danger, rejection. It meant laying the glory that he had with the father aside, taking the form of a servant.

How is it that for us Christmas has come all about comfort because for him it was laying aside of exchanging glory for suffering, and yet for us it's indulgence and enjoyment.

[ 24 : 21 ] You see, if I understand the incarnation, I must understand that Christmas is not about me looking for comfort, achieving my financial goals, keeping attractive beyond the age of 50, you know, home of my dreams, a fancy car, nice comforts.

If God gives you all those things, that's fine. God's given us a wonderful world to enjoy. I'm not arguing for asceticism, but Christmas means letting go of everything like Jesus let go of everything. It means coming to him and saying, Lord, give me a calling. Give me some calling. I believe you are the son of God and I want to live my life in a way that reflects that belief.

Give me a calling. Give me work to do for your kingdom, for your glory. Give me some way to imitate Christ by emptying myself. I will happily give up everything in order to do it.

I want to know you and your suffering. I want to live as you have called us to live. Did you ever read an adventure story?

[ 25 : 30 ] Sometimes in adventure stories, a person living a rather ordinary life is swept up into this great adventure and there are dangers and perils and enemies to be fought and battles to be won in times of grave danger and heroic sacrifice and great causes to be engaged in and ennobling sacrifices to be made and the hero of the story and the process of the story is transformed.

And when he returns to his ordinary life after that great adventure he's been changed. His priorities have been reshaped. He sees the world through new eyes. He can never go back to ordinary living. He's been transformed by the experience that he was caught up in in the story. And the Christian understanding that this baby is God is able to say look at what Jesus has done for me.

If we grasp the fact that this is the Lord of glory that he's come across the vast stretches of time.

He's entered into my existence. And the Christian says I want understanding that I want my life to count.

I want to live my life for his glory. I want to say to him there's nothing in my life over which I demand private prerogative. Everything I have is yours.

[ 26 : 55 ] I don't want to waste my life. I want to live my life for your glory. If we understand the meaning of the incarnation, we're saying that. It's really what Paul talks about in Philippians 2.

He says if you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, any comfort of his love, any fellowship with the spirit, any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourself. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus who being in very nature God did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing.

Taking the very nature of his servant, being made in human likeness and being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on the cross.

[ 28 : 03 ] It was this vision of laying down everything in pursuit of God. everything for the thrill of being on the front lines of walking with God and knowing God that is behind Paul's later words there in Philippians where he says, I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings and becoming like him in his death.

My point is simply, if Jesus is God come in the flesh, then my life is not about my career, it's not about my comforts, my friendships, my accomplishments.

I don't expect to have all the friends of the world and be a hail fellow, well met. What I want is God. I want to know him and serve him and love him and bring his goodness to others.

I want to know him. My question for us tonight is, what are you out for? Are you embracing the calling of being caught up in the dangers and thrills of working for God and living for his glory and living for the fame of this extraordinary baby who is God in the flesh?

Or are you looking for a nice, quiet, safe, Christian life? Now, maybe knowing God will give you a life that's very regular looking life, and I'm not suggesting that all of us are hanging out there on the edge, but even if it's a very regular looking life, it is going to be about God's kingdom, it's going to be about God's glory.

[ 29 : 41 ] The baby, my point is simply, the baby who is God must mean giving over the private prerogatives of my life so I can live for his glory.

Then finally, the final thing I want us to see in this is rejoicing. How did Christ face all that he faced? Hebrews 12 tells us, it says, let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not go weary and lose heart. He endured the scorn and shame of the cross.

No self-pity, he faced the suffering of the cross. He knew nothing would compare with the joy that was set before him. And see, Christmas means the end of self-pity.

It was joy that moved God on. It was the joy and delight of seeing many sons brought to glory. It was the joy of knowing that you and I would be redeemed through his life and through his death.

[ 30 : 53 ] It was the joy of that everlasting glory that awaits. It was the joy of hearing the Father's well done. All those joys moved to him and motivated him so that when he suffered, he did not complain.

He did not point out his suffering in case others had missed it. For joy, he endured the cross. You see, if this baby is God, if God has come to dwell with us, if God has lived a life without sin for us, if God has died for us, if God has experienced our life and promises to be with us wherever we are, no matter where he takes us, if he's come, if he's given himself to us, that is joy.

It's God with us. It's God in the flesh. It's God coming to our world, even into our lives. God, with all of his majesty and his consuming fire of holiness and his infinite wisdom and peace and tranquility and goodness and glory, he comes to us and gives us all of that.

That transforms us. That makes us into someone, something lovely and something glorious. He says, I'm going to give you myself. There isn't anything more wonderful, more glorious than that. To have him is to have joy. Not giddy, yucking it up joy, but solid joy, lasting joy, joy even in the midst of sorrow that is delightful. God has come to reconcile us to himself.

[ 32 : 41 ] All that you and I need to be forgiven of our sin, to have our lives rearranged, to give up the private prerogatives of our lives, to rejoice in this one.

He has given us in coming. God has come to give himself to us. The baby is God, fully God, God that if you had been there could have been held in your arms.

He's given you and me his church. He's given us himself. And to have him is to have joy. The one who has him and has nothing else is just as rich as the one who has him and has everything.

Because there's nothing that can enrich anyone who has him. The question I've been asking myself this week as I thought about preaching this to you tonight is honestly, am I, are you, are we impacted enough by this truth?

This truth rearranges everything. It means laying down the private prerogatives of your life. It's a cause for great rejoicing even in the midst of trials and suffering.

[ 34 : 11 ] God, the eternal God, the image of the invisible God, the first born over all the creation, has come into our world to save.

Let's rejoice in that. Let me pray with you. Father, we pray that you would cause our hearts to be overwhelmed with joy and gratitude for what you have done for us in your life and death for us. We pray that we would be moved by these truths that are so familiar that they would not become truths that we become numb to that we can no longer smell or see but that we would be moved by them and transformed by them.

We pray this for Christ's glory. Amen.