

Supreme

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[0:00] It feels like a lifetime ago, but 15 years ago, Thomas and I first met in Edinburgh as students at the Free Church College.

! And they were some of the happiest days of my life and I'm sure of Thomas' life. Long days studying the Bible. You couldn't get anything better.

Lots of fun and laughter over coffee and food. A deep excitement of what God might do after we finish. Thinking back to those early days of seminary, I can still remember arriving as a fresh-faced student, full of enthusiasm, but not having a clue what I was in for.

And very kindly, almost immediately, people who I'd just known for five minutes began giving me advice. Thomas was one of them. You know, Andy, if we're going to make the most of this, we need to get ahead in our assignments.

Great advice. Yep, I'm with you. One of the guys in the year above us told us, seminary can become a spiritual cemetery because you're studying the Bible all day. It can become like a textbook.

[1:09] So make sure you pray and make sure you stir your affections for Jesus. Again, wonderful advice. I mostly took it seriously, but there was one piece of counsel that I heard over and over again in those early days that I fully agreed with, but I didn't take seriously.

The professors and my fellow students would say, make sure you back up your laptop. Make sure you go buy an external hard drive, save your work somewhere else.

And I heard it over and over again. And every time I heard it, I agreed with it. I even remember one student telling me, right before his dissertation was due, his laptop cut out and he lost all his work. And I thought to myself, that's never going to be me. I'll never be that stupid. Famous last words. In my first semester at the Free Church College, my laptop cut out.

And every note that I'd taken on a lecture, gone. And you know the worst thing about it? I knew better. I believed backing up my laptop was a wise thing to do.

[2:23] I'd heard it said so many times. Here's the problem. I believed it. But I didn't live as if it really mattered for me.

And isn't that what we can be like as Christians? We believe certain things about the Lord Jesus Christ, but we don't always believe like they really matter for us.

So my guess is you believe that Jesus Christ is the creator of the universe. He upholds all things. He sustains all things.

He's the one who died on the cross to reconcile sinners to himself. Here's my question. Do you believe if that really matters for you?

Well, the Christians that Paul was writing to here in Colossae, they were struggling, as we said last night, with this tension that we possess fullness in Jesus, but they felt like they were lacking.

[3:29] And these false teachers were saying, you are lacking. You need more. You need Jesus plus this and Jesus plus that. And Paul says, no, no, no, no. And so in this section, what Paul does is he just wants to set Christ before their eyes because he wants them to believe in Jesus.

But more specifically, he wants them to believe that it matters for them. And here's the amazing thing. When we see Christ for who he is and for what he's done, he's never found wanting.

And I've got two points this morning. We're going to look at the supremacy of Christ in his person and then the sufficiency of Jesus in his work.

And I hope by the end of the sermon, we can say, wow, at Jesus. So first of all, the supremacy of Christ in his person. And what Paul does is fascinating.

He shows us the supremacy of Christ in who he is in relation to God the Father first. So look at verse 15.

[4:39] He is the image of the invisible God. Now the question that should come to us is, who's the he? And back in verse 13, he's just spoken about the beloved son.

The beloved son is the image of the invisible God, the Father. Now we all understand family resemblance, don't we? Like father, like son.

If you met my son Theo, one of the things I think you'd be tempted to say is, Andy, he is the spitting image of you. He's your double. I hate giving him in trouble because sometimes when he looks up at me, I see myself staring back.

Jesus does not resemble the Father in the way that Theo resembles me. Jesus fully, perfectly reveals the Father.

You look at Jesus and you see the Father. So the writer of Hebrews said, he is the radiance of God's glory, the exact representation of his being.

[5:57] Jesus said, whoever has seen me has seen the Father. So when you look at Jesus, you don't get a partial glimpse, a rough sketch of the Father. You see the Father.

So in England, where I live now, I've been living for the last four years, one of the things I love to do in my day off is to visit cathedrals or old church buildings in London. And when you walk into a cathedral in London, the thing that always happens instinctively is your head is just drawn upwards because you've got these grand, ornate, breathtakingly beautiful ceilings.

And as you stand there gazing at the ceiling, your neck begins to hurt and you just say, I can't do this. It's a mirror. To do in churches and cathedrals in London is at the front of the church, they've placed a mirror that you can look at without lifting your head.

And you see the ceiling. There's no distortion. You get a perfect image of what is above.

And when you look at Jesus, that's what we get. And maybe you're here this morning and you're not yet a Christian and you've wondered to yourself, I wonder, what is God really like?

[7:13] Here's the answer. Listen to how he talks. Watch how he behaves.

See how he treats people. There you're getting the clearest revelation of the Father. But if you're here this morning and you're a Christian, you would say, I believe in Jesus.

Right? You'd say, I believe that he reveals the Father.

So here's my question for you. How does that impact your relationship with the Father? You know, in my pastoral experience, I think when I speak to Christians, some, more than you might expect, carry this distorted vision of the Father.

They sometimes think he's distant. They sometimes feel fearful. Sometimes that's come about because of a broken relationship with an earthly father or an absent father.

[8:38] But the thing that one has to always do is say, look at Jesus. Look at the way that Jesus lived for you.

Look at the way that Jesus died for you, how he was risen for you, how he's seated in heaven praying for you. When you see Jesus, you're seeing the Father's heart.

The Father so loved you that he gave his Son for you. The Father wants you to know him as we grow to know his Son.

Well, having established the supremacy of Christ in relationship to the Father, Paul's got more than he wants us to see. And this time, he wants to show us the supremacy of Christ in relationship to creation.

More than just this earth, to the cosmos, to the universe. So look at verse 15b. Jesus is the firstborn of all creation.

[9:50] Hear that phrase again? He's the firstborn of all creation. I don't know how it is up in Carlaway, but when I was in Cumbernauld and now in London, it's not uncommon to get a really loud knock on the door and then to open the door and to find zealous Jehovah's Witnesses standing.

And as soon as you engage them in a conversation, they'll say, so are you a Christian? Yeah, I'm a Christian. So do you believe that Jesus is God? Yeah, of course I believe Jesus is God.

Okay, open your Bible. So you open the Bible. Turn to Colossians chapter 1, verse 15. What does that say there in black and white? It says that he's the firstborn of all creation.

Jehovah's Witnesses. See, he's not God. He's the first created being. Now, if that ever happens to you, know this, that interpretation simply cannot stand.

Here's why. The first part of the verse says he's the image of the invisible God. Jesus reveals God, the Father, because he is God. The second part is verse 16.

[11:03] For by him all things were created. Jesus created all things. He's not the created. He is the creator. Everything that exists owes its existence to him.

The second reason that interpretation doesn't stand is you read the Gospels, and what do you see throughout the New Testament? Jesus does that which only God can do. He forgives sins.

He walks on water. He calms the storms. He raises the dead. He receives worship as if he is God.

Why? He is God. Third reason it cannot stand is you see that term, the firstborn.

It doesn't mean what they're saying it means. Now, it does in a sense. So let me illustrate it like this. King David, question. Was he the firstborn son?

The answer, yes and no. He was Jesse's youngest son. So no. In terms of his birth sequence, he was not the firstborn son.

[12:10] But in Psalm 89, God says, I will appoint him the most exalted king over all, the firstborn son.

So Psalm 89 tells us that David is the firstborn son. Now, David is there, a shadow of the greater son of David.

When firstborn is used in the Bible, more often than not, it's not a statement on where you were born in the family. It's a status that you are the rightful inheritor, that you are the supreme ruler.

And Jesus here being called the firstborn of all creation, it's saying Jesus is supreme over all that was created.

In fact, look at what it says in verse 16. For by him, all things were created. Where? In heaven and on earth.

[13:15] Visible and invisible. Thrones, dominions, rulers or authorities. Governments, galaxies made by Jesus. Planets, plants made by Jesus.

Everything that exists made by him from the vast to the minute, they all exist because they were made by him, through him and they were made for him.

Verse 17 says, he is before all things. Now you could take that to mean that he was there before all things were but I think it's actually a reference to the fact that he is before all things in the sense of his importance.

And why is Paul stressing this point? It's because he wants us to know this and he wants the cloaching Christians to know this. There is no one who rivals Jesus. No one who comes close to Jesus. He is supreme in his being.

And honestly, this is where he brings it to land, the supremacy of Christ and his person over creation. In him all things hold together.

[14:34] This might sound strange. Touch yourself. Do you know the only reason you and I are alive this morning is because we're being upheld by him.

The only reason we're breathing and our heart is beating is because of him. The only reason the sun rose this morning is because of him and that's the reason the sun will go down tonight is because of him.

All things in this universe hold together in him. There's nothing in this universe that's running on autopilot. They all exist because he sustains it and he upholds it.

And so let me ask you this question. Do you believe that? Yes. Does that shape how you live your life? Does that matter for you? So if you're a mum running on empty do you know that the one who holds all things together holds you and your children?

If you're a student under pressure at school your future rests in the hands of the one through whom all things were made and for whom all things were made he's got you.

[15:44] If you're a worker a leader carrying heavy responsibilities the weight of this world is not on your shoulders it's on his. He's supreme over all things.

When I was a little boy growing up in my house there's moments I'll never forget 9-11 the planes flying into the Twin Towers and I'll never forget what my mum prayed right after we watched the news God you're bigger than this.

I remember one time my younger brother got in real trouble serious trouble I remember being really angry and thinking how could he have done this? And my mum prayed God you're bigger than this. You know what that was? That's someone who believed in the supremacy of Christ over all things and she believed it mattered for her and for us and for this world.

And here's my question for you and I do we believe in the supremacy of Christ over all things? As we watch what's going on in Iran do we believe that God is bigger than this?

[16:59] He's reigning over this he can use this with your family troubles and difficulties because we've all got them do you believe that God is bigger than them? Well having established the supremacy of the son over creation Paul now wants to tell us one more thing about the supremacy of Christ in his person but this time it's over the new creation and this is fascinating look at verse 18 it begins with the word and so it's connecting so he's first born over the original creation and here we go he is the head of the body the church so get this the one who rules over all of the universe he rules over the church when I first read this I felt that sounded like a step down CEO over the cosmos CEO over the free church of Scotland like but of course

Paul's not saying Jesus is the head of a denomination Paul's saying that Jesus is the head over all of his people through every century who have ever existed and who ever will exist he's thinking of the church as the redeemed elect of God in fact he goes on and he says he Jesus is the beginning listen to this there's that title again he's the first born from the dead do you know what that says Jesus is supreme over his resurrection people he is supreme over the new creation that his resurrection from the dead ushered do you know when Jesus walked out of that tomb a new world began a new creation dawned the old was gone the new had come a new age had begun and every single person who believes in Christ is united to the risen Christ and so for us the old goes and the new comes it's unbelievable he is the head of the body the church he is the beginning the first born from the dead why so that he might have the preeminence in it all so if you're here this morning you're a Christian you're a new creation like the same spirit that raised Jesus from the dead lives inside you you are new the old is gone you're being made into the likeness of Jesus do you believe this do you live like this is true for you so I watched a Netflix documentary Martin Scorsese having a conversation with Fran Lebowitz she's a fascinating individual and it's like a biographical documentary she lives in New York and in the documentary she's talking about life in New York and one of the things she finds most frustrating and this is the complete opposite of here and it's the thing I think I most love about here she says you live in a city with more than 10 million people and you would think with all the people it would be easy to have friends but New York is one of the most lonely places on the planet and the same is true of London barely talk to your neighbours you never talk to anyone when you pass them in the street you can sit on the tube and you can try and make a conversation and it's like everybody's trying really hard not to look at you when you come to Lewis you can't walk out the airport with people hugging you giving you warmth meeting people coming to this church and getting to know you or connecting with you and it's amazing so Fran Lebowitz in that documentary she says she says

I wish every New Yorker would pretend they live in a city and her point is this if we just pretend that we're all in this together that we all actually live near each other that we all should like each other then maybe we could be a community now here's why I mention that she's right Paul says to us do you know that you're the new creation you don't need to pretend it's true but yet in my experience so many Christians you would think they're still living in the old when the new has come and the difference is huge when you understand that you've been new because of the supremacy of Christ over all things it's truly life changing in fact to drive his point home in verse 19 Paul says in Jesus all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell who's Jesus?

we've just been told he's the head who are we? the body so if all of the fullness of God dwells in Jesus the head and we're the body connected to the head what does that mean?

[22:26] in Jesus as resurrection people you and I have the fullness of God like we have all of God for all of our Christian lives so when we're

suffering we don't have a part of God a little bit of God we have all of God his fullness does not remain distant from us in fact we are in Christ and Christ is in us everything we need for life and godliness we have in Jesus and yet here's how I know that we don't believe like this is true for me for ourselves is because we often look for the fullness of life apart from Christ we look for identity security satisfaction when we actually have all of God in Christ our head we've been marveling at the supremacy of Christ in his person

Paul brings us to land and what he wants to show us as he draws us to a close is the sufficiency of Christ in his work look at verse 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things whether on earth or in heaven making peace by the blood of his cross this is a really simple question why did Jesus die why did Jesus go to the cross he died on the cross for me he died in my place he bore my sin he took the punishment I deserved so that I could be forgiven and reconciled to God do you believe that do you believe that that is true of you now this is gloriously wonderfully true in fact what we will celebrate at the table is his death for us we'll proclaim it until he comes again hallelujah what a savior but let me say if you if you stop at the fact that Jesus Christ died on the cross for you you actually don't understand the full glory and the wonder of the cross in Genesis chapter 3 when Adam and Eve sinned they fell but they didn't only fall all of creation fell all of creation was cursed all of the universe was broken there's a story of a South American book publishing company they needed a new printing press and so they applied to a company in America to send them down the latest printing press and so they sent it down and the South American book publishing firm started to assemble this printer and it took them a lot of time and they were exhausted and then when they got it they thought they had got it up and set up they tried to turn it on and it wouldn't work so they phoned the American company and said listen you're going to have to send a technician and so this young almost teenage looking boy arrived and before it even got near to the printing press the South American company picked up the phone and they phoned the company and said listen you sent us a kid there's not a chance he can assemble this and the response came on the phone you don't understand that little boy that you think's a kid he invented this machine he designed it he created it

I think he can fix it Christ created this universe do you think he can fix the universe he died to reconcile all things to himself all things in heaven and on earth visible and invisible he died yes for the forgiveness of our sins because cosmic treason is the root issue of what's broken in this world but his death on the cross is far bigger than you and I often think he died to renew all things I want you to stop and take this in the one who created all things the one who spoke all the galaxies into existence the one who upholds all things came into this world with a seed that he upheld and let grow it was that tree was turned into a cross he let himself be nailed to it with hands the ones that he had made he let himself be slapped by them he let the Romans nail the crosses into his arms as he sustained this world he suffered to reconcile all things to himself now here's the key for what purpose making peace by the blood of his cross one of the greatest words in all the New Testament and the Old Testament is the word peace peace because peace does not mean the absence of hostility or inner calm peace means shalom

Jesus Christ came so that all things could be restored to harmony in creation between us and God between us and creation so that all things would flourish and thrive he came to reconcile you and me and all things.

So if he can reconcile all things to himself, do you think he can handle you? Do you think he can handle the stain of your sin?

[28:54] Do you think he can handle the depths of your guilt and shame? Of course he can. Now if we can go back to where I started, there was a student.

I believed backing up my laptop was important. I knew it was the right thing to do. I just didn't believe it mattered for me. And so I lost it. Before the foundation of the universe, the father said to the son, we're going to redeem a people for ourself.

Jesus heard that. Jesus believed that. Jesus acted upon that. And he did it for you and for me. Where we struggle to believe and live like it matters, he who had everything, he laid aside his glory, came into the universe he had created to suffer so that we could all be reconciled to him.

And so the application as we leave here this morning, it's not that we just need to go and believe harder. No, no, no, no. It's we need to see that he acted on our behalf.

[30:20] He believed. He believed. He acted. And we need to open our eyes to him because everything we need for life and for godliness is found in him and in him alone.

Christ is bigger than you ever thought. His cross is deeper than you ever imagined. And the peace that he won is more glorious than you ever realized.

And this table proclaims that until he comes again. Let's pray.