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Sermon Notes

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The Supremacy of Christ, Part 1

Colossians 1:15-23

Staring at the Sun:

When I was a young boy, there was a total eclipse of the sun, and we were given special techniques for viewing it

We were told that staring directly at the sun before it was totally eclipsed was like eye suicide... even the 1% of the sun not eclipsed is 10,000 times brighter than a full moon

Eye doctors liken the effects of staring at the sun on the delicate retina at the back of the eye to taking a magnifying glass and using the sun's rays to burn a hole in a leaf

I used a thick polarized filter similar to welder's goggles to see it, and I'll never forget the occasion... the light from the eclipsed sun, even through the polarizing filter, was almost too bright for me to behold

Others looked at the eclipse by using an indirect method... the "Pinhole Projection" method... focusing the light of the eclipsed sun on white poster board, so that you were not looking directly at it

But the Scripture reveals that our God dwells in a light even more blinding than that:

1 Timothy 6:16 [God,] who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see.

"Unapproachable light"

God said to Moses:

Exodus 33:20 But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live."

God sent Jesus Christ into the world to display His glory in a way that we could handle without being incinerated:

RSV John 1:18 No one has ever seen God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known.

In Colossians 1:15-23, we have a peephole into the infinite glory of the Son of God

As we come to Colossians 1:15-23, we are on **Holy Ground**

In Colossians 1, we can stare into the spiritually brilliant light of a powerful revelation of Christ

Colossians 1:15-23 may be among the holiest ground of the entire Scripture... here we are given spiritual eyes to stare at the sun and not be blinded... to see Christ more clearly than anywhere else in Holy Scripture

Here we have the supremacy of Christ, and of the mysterious gospel that Christ came to bring... the mystery that the Holy One of God can actually LIVE WITHIN a human heart, within a human being, and that person is NOT CONSUMED

Colossians 1:27 the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

Brothers and sisters... this is truly Holy Ground... here we stare at the Son and are not blinded but rather enlightened

Here we are indwelt by the Fire of Christ and are not consumed but rather transformed

Here is the Gospel... and the Gospel is Christ!!

I. Christ's Supremacy as God's Visible Image (vs. 15)

Colossians 1:15 He is the image of the invisible God

A. Christ's Deity the Foundation of our Faith

1. The deity of Christ—foundational doctrine

- a. Christianity contains as many doctrinal concepts as there are stars in the universe
- b. "Star differs from star in splendor"... not every star is equally bright or important or glorious
 - i) Doctrine over baptism is important... this is more important
 - ii) Doctrine over church government is important... this is more important
 - iii) Doctrine over end-time teaching is important... this is more important
- c. The deity of Christ is the central doctrine of the Christian faith
- d. Here began your personal salvation, here continues your daily walk with God

2. The supreme confession

a. Simon Peter

Matthew 16:15-18 "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?"¹⁶ Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."¹⁷ Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my Father in heaven.¹⁸ And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.

b. Thomas

John 20:27-29 Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."²⁸ Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!"²⁹ Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

c. Romans 10

Romans 10:9-10 That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.¹⁰ For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

Every person you meet in Central and Eastern Europe, this is your goal... that by the power of the Holy Spirit and the power of the gospel, you can bring them to make this confession from their hearts... that they will kneel before Jesus as before God and offer him the worship He richly deserves as God

3. This is the essence of the gospel message—the deity of Christ

4. Constantly attacked by Satan—the essence of cults and false doctrines

1 John 4:2-3 This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God,³ but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world.

a. The Jehovah's Witnesses deny the deity of Christ: they say he was God's first created being and is god with a little "g" but not Jehovah God

b. The Mormons deny it: they say he was a created spirit being, brother to Lucifer and Michael

- c. The Jews deny it: they say he was a deceiver of the people, and it was for this central blasphemy that the High Priest tore his robes and condemned Jesus to death
- d. The Muslims deny it: they say he was a great prophet, rescued from the cross by Allah, but actually a lesser prophet than Muhammad
- e. Famous mockers denied it: Thomas Jefferson

Ridicule is the only weapon which can be used against unintelligible propositions. Ideas must be distinct before reason can act upon them; and no man ever had a distinct idea of the trinity. It is the mere Abracadabra of the mountebanks calling themselves the priests of Jesus.

-- **Thomas Jefferson**, letter to Francis Adrian Van der Kemp July 30, 1816,

The day will come when the mystical generation of Jesus, by the Supreme Being as his father, in the womb of a virgin, will be classed with the fable of the generation of Minerva in the brain of Jupiter.

-- **Thomas Jefferson**, letter to John Adams, April 11, 1823

But the deity of Christ is fundamental to our faith... it is a rock that Satan can assault all he wants and it will still remain!!

B. True Worship Consists in Doctrine Producing Awe

1. Here is the fountainhead of true worship... deep rich doctrine leading to awe
2. Revelation and response
3. If your worship is shallow and weak, saturate your mind in Scripture... and this topic is among the richest: JESUS as the image of the invisible God
4. Puritan theologian John Owen:

“The revelation made of Christ in the blessed gospel is far more excellent, more glorious, more filled with rays of divine wisdom and goodness than the whole creation, and the just comprehension of it, if attainable, can contain or afford. Without this knowledge, the mind of man, however priding itself in other inventions and discoveries, is wrapped up in darkness and confusion.

This therefore deserves the severest of our thoughts, the best of our meditations, and our utmost diligence in them. For if our future blessedness shall consist in living where He is, and the beholding of His glory, what better preparation can there be for it than a constant previous contemplation of that glory as revealed in the gospel, that by a view of it, we may be gradually transformed into the same glory?” [John Owen, *The Glory of Christ*]

Practical point: SEEK TO KNOW THE GLORY OF CHRIST AS ETERNAL GOD...

Jonathan Edwards: As I rode out into the woods for my health, in 1737, having alighted from my horse in a retired place, as my manner commonly has been, to walk for divine contemplation and prayer, I had a view that was for me extraordinary, or the glory of the Son of God, as Mediator between God and man, and His wonderful, great, full, pure and sweet grace and love, and meek and gentle condescension. This grace that appeared so calm and sweet, appeared also great above the heavens. The Person of Christ appeared ineffably excellent with an excellency great enough to swallow up all thoughts and conceptions, which continued, as near as I can judge, about an hour; such as to keep me a greater part of the time in a flood of tears, and weeping aloud. I felt an ardency of soul to be, what I know not otherwise how to express, emptied and annihilated; to lie in the dust, and to be full of Christ alone; to love Him with a holy and pure love; to trust in Him; to live upon Him; to serve Him and to be perfectly sanctified and made pure, with a heavenly purity.”

C. Christ the Image of the Invisible God

1. “Image” = “eikon” ... Greek Orthodoxy employs man-made artistic efforts designed to stimulate worship
2. The true “eikon” is Christ Himself
3. Obviously patterned after humanity’s original purpose

Genesis 1:26-27 Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness...²⁷ So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.

4. But Christ is the perfect man, the perfect God-man, the only perfect human “image of God” that ever walked on earth
5. Parallel verse: Hebrews 1:3
 - a. Word “eikon” used in scripture to refer to Caesar’s portrait on a coin
 - b. So also Hebrews 1:3

Hebrews 1:3 The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word.

- i) Radiance of God’s glory = radiant beams of light that communicate the power and nature of the sun to the surface of the earth
- ii) “exact representation of his being” = “*character*” ... the idea is one of striking a coin... “eikon” is used in Matthew 22:20 of Caesar’s portrait on a coin
- iii) Jesus is the minted visible image of the invisible God

D. Looking at Christ is Looking at the Father

1. God the Father is invisible... not made of matter, so no light can bounce off His face and show us what He looks like; Jesus came into the world to show off the Father's very nature

^{NAU} John 1:18 No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him.

2. Astonishing encounter and statement:

John 14:8-9 Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us." ⁹ Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"

II. Christ's Supremacy over the Physical Universe (vs. 15-17)

Colossians 1:15-17 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

A. Christ's Role as Creator of the Universe

1. Clear statement of deity
2. This is something the Old Testament ascribed to Almighty God ALONE

Isaiah 44:24 "This is what the LORD says-- your Redeemer, who formed you in the womb: I am the LORD, who has made all things, who alone stretched out the heavens, who spread out the earth by myself,

3. But here it is ascribed to Jesus

B. Firstborn Over All Creation

1. Jehovah's witnesses, like the Arian's of old, have made hay with this statement
2. "Firstborn," they say, implies that Jesus was a created being
3. Word is *prototokos*...
 - a. It can mean first born chronologically, as it does in Luke 2 where it says Mary brought forth her firstborn and wrapped him in swaddling clothes
 - b. It refers primarily to rank or position in the family

In Genesis 48:14, aged Jacob crossed his hands and put his right hand on the head of the younger son, Ephraim, and put him in the firstborn position over his older brother Manasseh

Then in Jeremiah 31:9, God calls Ephraim his firstborn son among all the nations on earth

God also calls Israel in general his firstborn son in Exodus 4:22

Firstborn can mean pre-eminent in the family

Hebrews 3:5-6 Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house ... ⁶ But Christ is faithful as a son over God's house. And we are his house

4. The idea that Jesus is a created being is completely rejected both in the context here and in John's use of the word "only begotten" of Jesus in John 1:18 and 3:16

Vs. 17 "He is before all things..."

Christ existed before any physical or spiritual created being existed... he predates it all

He also stands in the pre-eminent position, BEFORE all things,

5. Thus Jesus is PRE-EMINENT OVER all creation

C. Universe Created BY Christ

Vs. 16-17 "for by Him all things were made, things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible... all things have been created by him..."

1. Every atom in the periodic table was crafted by Christ, throughout the entire universe
2. All the Hydrogen atoms in the stars, all the gold in the hills, all the oxygen in the atmosphere... all created by Christ
3. Each atom has its own properties: the inert gases, the heavy metals, carbon the basis of life... all these atoms crafted by Christ, so also the atoms combine to form complex molecules and the molecules complex organs and structures... all crafted by Christ

D. Universe Created FOR Christ

"all things have been created FOR him"

1. This is Christ's personal possession, for He made it

Psalm 50:9-12 I have no need of a bull from your stall or of goats from your pens, ¹⁰ for every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. ¹¹ I

know every bird in the mountains, and the creatures of the field are mine. ¹² If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is mine, and all that is in it.

2. Every green hill is Christ's, for He made it; every running stream and the fish that swim there
3. So also every single human being in history was crafted by the hand of Jesus Christ of Nazareth
 - a. You belong to Christ by creation, for he knit you together in your mother's womb
 - b. Your hair is his, your face, your vital organs are all his by creation
 - c. So also are all your loved ones... your precious children are Christ's by creation... they are his to do with as He sees fit, for they belong to Him
 - d. So also the people you are seeking to reach with the gospel
 - e. The universe was made FOR Christ... for His pleasure, His glory, His private possession
4. What is ascribed to God generally in Romans 11 can be ascribed specifically to Christ here

Romans 11:36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.

E. Universe Sustained by Christ

“and in him all things hold together”

1. The universe was designed to need the constant care and energy of its creator
2. Deists posit a universe like a vast, complex clock that God the Creator designed, wound up and lets run... with which He never interferes
3. Biblically, if Christ withheld His active effort toward His universe for an instant, it would cease to exist
4. Every single moment of the day, every single atom in the universe is constantly held together by Christ
 - a. Atoms made up of three basis parts: protons, neutrons, electrons
 - b. Protons have a positive charge, electrons a negative charge, neutrons have no charge

- c. According to Coulomb's Law, opposites attract, similar charges repel... positively charged things are attracted to negatively charged things but are repelled by positively charged things
- d. BUT in the nucleus, all these positively charged protons stick together... eight of them in an oxygen atom
- e. WHY DON'T THEY FLY APART? Nuclear physics calls it "strong nuclear force", the strongest force in the universe... but physicists don't really understand the strong nuclear force
- f. Colossians 1:17 tells us why every atom in the universe holds together:
CHRIST KEEPS IT THAT WAY

"In Him all things HOLD TOGETHER"

- g. If Christ stopped holding the atoms of your chair together, it would fly apart
5. This obviously has profound ethical implications for the universe: Christ was actually in some mysterious way holding together the iron of the nails that pierced his hands and feet; he actively keeps the universe together, even when that includes great suffering for himself or for those he loves
 - a. He kept Hitler's body together every moment of his life, even while he was carrying out some of the most disgusting and wicked deeds in history
 - b. He keeps air molecules together even when it means the destruction in a tsunami or hurricane of human life or property
 - c. He keeps bullets together while they kill innocent children in war zones or in drive-by shootings
 - d. And he will sustain the existence of human souls for eternity, whether in heaven or hell
 - e. Christ is not going to annihilate anyone... everyone will spend eternity in either heaven or hell
 - f. Those who spend eternity in hell will be constantly sustained by the will of Christ
 6. Christ's ongoing active sustaining of the universe is essential to its continued existence

Revelation 4:11 "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being."

Application: Our ongoing lives are totally in Christ's hands:

James 4:13-16 Now listen, you who say, "Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money." ¹⁴ Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. ¹⁵ Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." ¹⁶ As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil.

III. Christ's Supremacy over the Spiritual Universe (vs. 15-17)

Colossians 1:15-17 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

A. Colossian Heresy: Christ Like an Angel

1. The unique Colossian heresy: God is good but all physical matter is evil
2. Because the good God could not have created evil matter, there must have been some other spiritual beings, emanations from the divine being... one of these emanations far removed from God created evil physical matter
3. In such a scheme, Jesus is actually merely one of the higher emanations, a good emanation, like an angel; not a bad emanation, like a demon
4. Bad emanations, like demons, block access to God... but with the help of angels and with special knowledge, people can get past the physical world and get to God
5. Colossians destroys this whole false understanding completely
6. One way it does is by this claim here: Christ is not merely an angel or a good emanation
7. He actually created all INVISIBLE THINGS as well as the VISIBLE
8. He created all spiritual beings, no matter how power they are
9. The language speaks of a whole array of spiritual beings... and Christ created all of them

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

10. Thrones, powers, rulers, authorities refers to spiritual beings in the heavenly realms
 - a. Christ created spiritual beings and endowed them with extraordinary powers
 - b. He established those powers and sustains them and upholds them

B. Satan and His Demons Created by Christ, for Christ, and are Sustained by Christ

1. Amazing! Satan was created a good being by Christ
2. YET Christ boldly demanded that his own creator bow down and worship him!!

Matthew 4:8-10 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. ⁹ "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." ¹⁰ Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'"

3. Just as amazing, Christ could pull the plug on Satan's existence at any moment
 - a. It's not just atoms that Christ holds together
 - b. Christ sustains Satan's being at every moment... he could will Satan out of existence instantly
4. This CRUSHES any sense of dualism, as though Christ and Satan were fighting on more or less equal terms
 - a. Jesus is infinitely above EVERY power, principality, kingdom, rule, authority
 - b. He actively rules over all of them for the benefit of the church

Christ is seated at God's right hand:

Ephesians 1:21-23 far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given, not only in the present age but also in the one to come. ²² And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way

NEXT WEEK (God willing):

IV. Christ's Supremacy over the Church (vs. 18-19)

Colossians 1:18 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.

- A. Christ is the Head of the Church
- B. Christ is the Source of the Church
- C. Christ is the Firstborn from the Dead
- D. Christ is Supreme Over All Things for the Church

V. Christ's Supremacy in Our Reconciliation (vs. 19-23)

- A. God's Pleasure in our Salvation
- B. Christ's Incarnation
- C. God's Glorious Plan for Comprehensive Reconciliation
- D. Christ's Blood Atonement
- E. The Infinite Journey of Our Reconciliation
- F. The Ongoing Ministry of the Gospel: "IF you continue..."

VI. Application

- A. Saturate Your Mind in this Deep Doctrine: The Absolute Supremacy of Christ
 - 1. Stimulate yourself to worship
 - a. Ask: "Am I astonished at the greatness of Christ?"
 - b. Ask: "Is Christ uppermost in my own affections?"
 - c. The Apostle Paul cherished the knowledge of Christ above everything else in the universe, as though the desiring of anything else was like having a yearning for manure or a desire to collect rotting garbage in your bedroom

Philippians 3:7-8 But whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. ⁸ What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ

"Knowing Christ" was the single greatest treasure of Paul's life... the quest that drove him every single day of his life

Does it drive you? Do you know everything about Christ that you would like to know? Are you satisfied with your knowledge of Christ, or do you want to know more?

Paul was an apostle, had astonishingly great revelations of Christ, saw Him in resurrection glory on the road to Damascus, was caught up to the Third Heaven and perhaps saw Christ on His throne; he was led inerrantly by the Holy Spirit to write incredible truths about Christ

Yet all he could think was “I want to know Christ! That I may know Christ! Oh if only I could know Him better! The world holds nothing attractive to me compared to knowing Christ Jesus my Lord!”

Is everything like rubbish and manure and filth compared to knowing Christ?

WHAT DO YOU WANT IN LIFE? Is knowing Christ better the first of these desires?

Confess as sin the way you’ve let desires for earthly pleasures and treasures crowd out your desire to know Christ better. Ask Him for forgiveness. Then ask Him to reveal Himself to you.

2. Go for a walk like Jonathan Edwards did and take Colossians 1:15-23 and mull over it again and again in prayer and ask God to give you a sense of the greatness of Christ, your God
3. Meditate on the fact that Christ holds the universe together, and that He actively and sovereignly rules over the events on this physical planet
4. Look at the stars at night and ponder a Savior who can walk the dusty roads of Palestine while sustaining stars trillions of miles away
5. Ponder the fact that everything in the universe, including your own body and the lives of your loved ones belong to Christ by creation
6. Do not resent Christ for any adversity or hardship He chooses to bring your way: He is loving and He is a King... what He does He has the right to do, and He does it for our best interests
7. Marvel over the arrogant boldness of Satan in demanding that his own Creator should bow down to him in worship... then realize that a lot of that Satanic arrogance is still in your heart
 - a. How many times have you sought to make Christ bow to your will?
 - b. How many times have you spoken harshly against His wise choices for your lives?