

Title: Jesus – Supreme Over All
Date: February 18, 2024
Subject: Introduction to series on the life of Christ
Scripture: Colossians 1:15 - 23

When Napoleon neared the end of his life, a general confronted him: *I cannot conceive, sire, how a great man like you can believe that the Supreme Being ever exhibited himself to men under a human form, with a body, face, mouth, and eyes. Let Jesus be whatever you please - the highest intelligence, the purest heart, the most profound legislator, and, in all respects, the most singular being who has ever existed - I grant it. Still, he was simply a man, who taught his disciples, and deluded credulous people, as did Orpheus, Confucius, Brama.*

Napoleon responded: *I know men, and I tell you Jesus Christ was not a man. He commands us to believe, and gives no other reason than his awful word "I am God." Superficial minds see a resemblance between Christ and the founders of empires and the gods of other religions. That resemblance does not exist. There is between Christianity and other religions the distance of infinity.*

In every other existence but that of Christ how many imperfections! From the first day to the last He is the same; majestic and simple; infinitely firm and infinitely gentle. Everything in Him astonishes me. His spirit overawes me, and his will confounds me. Between Him and whoever else in the world, there is no possible term of comparison. He is truly a being by Himself. His ideas and His sentiments, the truths which He announces, His manner of convincing, are not explained either by human organization or by the nature of things.

I search in vain in history to find the similar to Jesus Christ, or anything which can approach the Gospel. Neither history, nor humanity, nor the ages, nor nature can offer me anything with which I am able to compare it or explain it. Here everything is extraordinary. The more I consider the Gospel, the more I am assured that there is nothing there which is not beyond the march of events and above the human mind...What happiness that Book procures for those who believe it!

I tell you, JESUS CHRIST IS GOD.

Who's Bigger: Where Historical Figures Really Rank is a book by a computer science professor who heads the Data Science Laboratory at his university (Steven Skiena, Stony Brook) and an engineer on the ranking team at Google (Charles Ward) (Religion News Service Dec 12, 2013 (huffpost.com/entry/jesus-historically-significant_n_4420934)). They used their skill sets and internet know how to determine a “significance” ranking of 800,000 plus names. Their top ten counting up: Jefferson, Alexander the Great, Aristotle, Hitler, Washington, Lincoln, Shakespeare, Muhammad, Napoleon and Jesus at the top.

Those assessments are nice....., but let's see what the Bible says.

READ Colossians 1:15 - 23

I. Christ is supreme over creation vv. 15 – 17, 19

Image. It's a translation of the Greek *eikon*. A camera manufacturer used the term for their products to convey they produced clearer and truer pictures. That's nice, but it was still a photo. It wasn't the real thing.

It wasn't like you could have a two-way conversation with the photo. We get closer in understanding when we consider Adam and Eve and all people are created in the image of God. They're made to reflect God.

Jesus, as the image of God, doesn't merely reflect God, but reveals God as he is the perfect manifestation and representation of God so people can see, know and comprehend who God is. Everything the invisible God is in functions, power, authority, essential nature - Jesus Christ is. God is eternal. Jesus is eternal. God is completely holy. Jesus is completely holy. God is all-knowing. Jesus is all-knowing. REREAD v. 19. Another scripture: "The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being" (Hebrews 1:3). Jesus isn't merely a photo or reflection in a mirror of God, but is totally and absolutely God.

Jesus' claim to be God got him in trouble with the religious authorities. One day he asserted, "Before Abraham was born, I am!" (John 8:58). They understood Jesus was claiming to be God and tried to stone him. If Jesus didn't mean he was God, he could've raised his hand, "Wait just a minute guys. Take a chill pill. You misunderstood. I'm not claiming to be God. No way. Way beyond my pay grade." Jesus had the perfect opportunity to do that, but he didn't. He couldn't because he couldn't lie. He was, is and always will be God

Firstborn over all creation. Firstborn is often conceived as the first child that came out of the womb. Jehovah's Witnesses and other groups try to insert that idea into Jesus' identity so he would be the first thing created by God, that he was a god and not the God. They add the word "other" to the text so it would say Jesus was the creator of all other things. But there's no reason indicated by the language to add "other."

Jesus wasn't created but is the Creator of all things. Firstborn must be understood in another manner. It has to do with rights, privileges, honor and position. The NIV Study Bible: "Christ has certain rights in relation to all creation - priority, preeminence and sovereignty" (note on Col 1:15). It's the idea of primacy.

Creator. He is over all creation because he created all things and created them for himself. Things in heaven: stars, meteors, galaxies. Things on earth: giraffes, blue whales, armadillos, and people. Visible things: trees, water and people. Invisible things: atoms, DNA, gravity. Thrones, powers, rulers, authorities: angels, demonic, any and all spiritual forces. All things: we could try to name all things but here's a case where it's best to say everything. Anything in creation that we'd name, God declares "I made that. Me. Me. Me. Me. Me"

Sustainer. He holds everything together. You probably didn't realize it, but each of us could be cited for traveling over the speed limit this morning. We're about halfway between the Equator and North Pole which means we spin on the earth's axis at 740 mph. At the equator it'd be 1037 mph. At the North Pole it takes all day for one spin. In addition, the earth sprints around the sun at a rate of 67,000 mph (19 miles per second). Since the sun and its solar system are part of the Milky Way Galaxy, we're traveling at 448,000 mph (124.4 miles per second) [space.com/33527- how- fast- is- earth- moving]. Feeling a little wobbly?

Two hydrogen atoms and one oxygen atom combine to form a molecule of water. A hydrogen atom electron travels 1367 miles per second (education.jlab.org/qa/electron_01). H. H. Mitchell in the Journal of Biological Chemistry says: "the brain and heart are composed of 73% water...lungs are about 83%...muscles and kidneys are 79%." That means there's a whole lot of moving and quaking going on inside us. The energy

and speed in atoms could be destructive but the Creator of the universe and his laws of energy and forces hold it together. Jesus does the same with all of creation and our lives. He's the glue and the glue-er.

Stephen Jay Gould gives evolution's position: "We [exist] because one odd group of fishes had a peculiar fin anatomy that could transform into legs for terrestrial creatures; because the earth never froze entirely during an Ice Age; because a small and tenuous species, arising in Africa a quarter million years ago, has managed, so far, to survive by hook and by crook. We may yearn for a "higher" answer - but none exists."

Kinda leaves a person feeling helpless, hopeless, meaningless and on the short end of the stick.

Jesus is proud of what he's made and he attaches his name to all he's made. He's supreme over creation.

II. Christ is supreme over the new creation vv. 18 - 23

More of his resume. Head of the church. Our physical heads house our brains, the command centers that send out signals and instructions to the rest of the body. It coordinates the functions and activities of the rest. It isn't the reverse. The little toe doesn't give the orders. When I smack it into a chair leg, chemical and electrical reactions convey information through neurons, neurotransmitters and synapses to the head, but the brain gives the okay to pull back the toe, yelp in pain and cry out for Jean to kiss it and make it better.

Jesus is the Control Center of the church. He's the leader. He's the direction giver. He's the one who maintains order. He's the problem solver. He's in charge.

Beginning and firstborn from among the dead. Earlier we discovered firstborn refers to holding the prime position. Jesus was the first to rise from the dead with the newness of a glorified resurrection body. People whom Jesus raised from the dead like Lazarus resumed life, but their bodies were limited and they would die again. Jesus experienced the wonders and glories of a body that was raised imperishable, in glory, in power, a spiritual body, clothed in immortality (1 Corinthians 15:42-44, 54). He was the Alpha, the first among many who will follow and be raised to resurrected life. Firstborn from the dead shows Jesus' supremacy.

Supremacy is reinforced using "all" seven times: over all creation, by him all things were created, all things were created by him and for him, He is before all things, in him all things hold together, in everything (or all things) he might have the supremacy, to reconcile to himself all things.

Leonardo da Vinci devoted 3 years to his masterpiece The Last Supper. Before unveiling it to the public, he showed it to a friend whose opinion he highly valued. The friend erupted with gushing praise: "The cup in Jesus' hand is especially beautiful." Da Vinci was disappointed and immediately began to paint out the cup. The friend was flabbergasted and wanted to know why. "Nothing must distract from the figure of Christ."

Reconciler. God's goal is to bring all things on earth, in heaven, inanimate objects, animals, heavenly beings, back into a right relationship with himself, but his primary concern is people. We had been his enemies. We were the ones launching missiles of defiance. We were the ones who exploded dirty bombs of self-righteousness. We were the ones attacking him with weapons of hatred and disbelief. We were living in darkness, condemned slaves to sin, under the power of Satan, objects of God's wrath. We were reprobates - good for nothing, degenerate, filthy sinners.

Reconciliation isn't a compromise where both sides get a little of what they want but they don't get all they want. God is the one who's in the right. People have to be brought back to him and line up with him. The enormity of this restoration requires a peacemaker of greater value than all the moral crimes and sins that disrupted the connection. Only the perfect would suffice.

What did we get? God's love. For each hateful act he retaliated with his pure love. For each flagrant violation of his moral law, he struck back with unmerited grace. For each defilement of his image, he countered with his profound mercy. Ultimately, he unleashed his doomsday weapon. Jesus died on the cross to spell doom for our sin. By using something so cruel and horrible, he showed there's no length he wouldn't go to bring people back to him.

The effectiveness of God's military strategy is limited only by people's refusal to surrender and accept his terms of peace - throwing self at the Savior's feet. Those who do are reconciled. They're positionally holy before God, without a sin stain on their lives and no longer an enemy of God. They're free from the clutches of sin. They're under the power and control of God and no longer a horrible, deplorable reprobate.

The verses prior to our text give more about Christ's provision. V. 13: he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves. We're no longer living in a dark world filled with gloom and doom. The bandages have come off and we see a life full of vibrant color and light.

V. 14: in him we have redemption. A missionary in West Africa was helping people understand what it meant to be redeemed. His African assistant told him in the Bambara language "We say that God took our heads out." The missionary wanted to know how that explained redemption. The man told him that many years ago some of his ancestors had been captured by slave traders, chained together and driven to the seacoast. Each of the prisoners had a heavy iron collar around his neck. As the slaves passed through a village, a chief might notice a friend among the captives and offer to pay the slave traders in gold, ivory, silver or brass. The prisoner would be redeemed by the payment. His head would then be taken out of the iron collar.

Christ bought us out of the slave market of sin. He's taken our heads out of sin's iron collar and now we're free. We've been brought into his home.

He's forgiven our sins. A missionary to India met with representatives of other religions to discuss their beliefs. A member of a major non-Christian belief system said to the missionary, "Tell me one thing your religion can offer that mine can't." The missionary pondered a moment and replied "Forgiveness! Forgiveness!"

Devout Muslims may pray five times a day, make a pilgrimage to Mecca, fast during Ramadan, but when asked if they know their sins are forgiven, can only answer: "We don't. We hope for the best."

Unlike other belief systems, Christians have the promise from the Lord God that their sins are forgiven.

This is our new position. It also shows how we're to live. Continue in the faith means keep on living out the faith. If a person doesn't do so, they won't be holy and blameless. They'll make it to heaven but by they'll be like the spiritual builder who uses improper building materials and "will suffer loss but yet will be saved - even only as one escaping through the flames" (1 Corinthians 3:15).

During our previous series, for know and grow, we landed on the verse “But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18). It stresses advancing in understanding of who Jesus is and what he’s done. First is knowing Christ as Savior and then knowing more of him in factual knowledge and personal experience or intimacy of relationship with him. Desire and determine to be better acquainted and more familiar with him so we can love and serve him.

Our new series will help us know more of Jesus Christ and build our relationship with him. We’ll embark on an epic adventure through the historical records of the Gospel accounts, weaving them together in chronological order for a journey of a lifetime, of Christ’s lifetime.

We’ll see the person of Jesus - his identity revealed through his names, titles, what he said about himself and how others viewed him. We’ll discover his personhood - character, attributes, demeanor.

We’ll see his mission and purpose for himself and others. What were his interests, concerns, priorities? How did he spend his time? What did he consider important and unimportant?

Who did he encounter along his journey? What did they want and expect from Jesus? How did they react and respond to him?

How did Jesus respond to the people he met? What did he want? What were his expectations? How did he treat people, including his enemies? How did Jesus respond to life - its problems, circumstances, etc.?

And of course, his teachings. What was his focus?

Sounds like a tall order and challenge, but what should we expect when we’re dealing with our subject?

We won’t cover all aspects of his life. We’ll skip the birth narratives. We dig into them at Christmas and they’re maybe the most familiar part of his life. We’ll also skip Jesus’ last week as these are also more familiar. We’re not totally ignoring them as Jesus frequently foretold he was going to die and rise...and we’ll pause during Easter to concentrate on Christ’s death and resurrection.

The scope of our study will overflow into Sunday school as it's impossible to get to everything during the message. That time will provide the opportunity to share with and build up one another. The passages will be given out the week before so you can read and study them. You can mark what draws your attention, questions that arise, insights you’ve gained and be ready to join in.

A pastor was finishing his sermon while caring for his son. The boy was restless and bored because he couldn't go outside because it was raining. In desperation, the pastor picked up an old magazine and thumbed through it until he came to a large, brightly colored world map. He tore the page from the magazine, ripped it into little pieces and scattered them on the living room floor. “If you can put this page together, I'll give you some money.” He hoped it would occupy most of the morning, but 10 minutes later his son announced he'd completed the puzzle. The pastor was amazed. “How did you get done so fast?” “It was easy. On the other side was a picture of a man. I put a piece of paper on the bottom, put the picture of the man together, put a piece of paper on top and then turned it over. I figured if I got the man right, the world would be right.”

If we get Jesus right, the world will be right.