

**Text: Colossians 1: 15-20**

**Theme: Series-The King is Here: The Supremacy and Pre-eminence of Christ**

**Sermon delivered by Reverend Dele Agbelusi during Service of the Word on 20/11/2016 at 10.30am**

This passage is one of Paul's most profound and powerful descriptions of the person of Jesus Christ. One of the most important early church controversies over the person of Christ is engaged with in these verses. Arius, an early church heretic, used "the firstborn of all creation" (Col. 1:15) to argue that Jesus was the highest created being, but not equal with God. The modern followers of Arius, the Jehovah's Witnesses, do the same. It is ironic that the enemy would take the very passage Paul wrote to extol the pre-eminence of Jesus Christ and use it to pull Him down.

We cannot be sure about the exact nature of the false teaching that had infiltrated the Colossian church, but it seemed to denigrate the person and work of Jesus Christ. They may have been teaching that He is not fully God, but rather is the highest of a series of emanations between God and man. They taught that He wasn't supreme and sufficient for the Christian life. In one of the greatest Christological texts in the New Testament, Paul forcefully shows that Christ is preeminent over all that is, and that is possible only if He is God which He is.

In verses 15-17, he shows that Christ is preeminent over His natural creation, the universe. In verses 18-20, he extols Christ as preeminent over His spiritual creation, the church. To put Jesus as the first created being, higher than any other created being, is to undermine our salvation.

**Paul presents to us Jesus Christ in:**

- 1. His unique relationship to God and His pre-eminence over his natural creation - the universe – both the seen and the unseen world (verses 15-17)**
- 2. His preeminence over his spiritual creation - the Church (verse 18-19)**
- 3. His supremacy over everything else (verse 20)**

**1. Now in relation to God it says that Jesus is the image of the invisible God.** It only takes a limited study of the Bible to find out that God is invisible. The Old Testament says that no man has seen God. God says you cannot look upon Me and live, in Exodus. In John chapter 1 it says that nobody has ever seen God. In 1 Timothy, Paul writing about God, called Him the invisible God. God is a spirit, Jesus said, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth. God is invisible. But God has been made visible. In New Testament Greek, it has to do with an exact replica, a precise copy, a representation. Today, I think the closest word would be a photograph. God is invisible but God has become manifest and He has been manifest in the person of the Son who is none other than Jesus Christ.

Now notice the phrase "the image of the invisible God." What does it mean that He is the image? It doesn't mean He was created in the image of God, that's Genesis 1:27 and it speaks about man. We were created in God's image, He is God's image. There's a big difference. He is the replica. He is the copy of God. He is the exact reproduction. He said, "If you have seen Me you have seen the Father."

Let us refer to **Hebrews chapter 1 verse 3** which is a parallel passage to which we'll look several times this morning. It says in verse 3, speaking again of the Son, the term Son in verse 2 being modified by who in verse 3, "Who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person."

Now look at chapter 2 verse 3, talking again about Christ, "In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." Verse 9, "For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead." Not some, not a sketch, but all. He is totally God. He is the fullness of God.

You see it's a well taught fact in the Bible that we cannot see God. He is invisible- we cannot see him and touch him. But the claim of the New Testament is that in Jesus God became a man and so could be seen and touched. In Jesus, the invisible has been fully revealed to us. For he is the image of the invisible God. You see it's one thing for us to read of God's words in the Old Testament and hear of amazing encounters with him. Quite another thing for him to come down to our grotty sinful world and take on human flesh. And when he did that in the person of his Son Jesus Christ, then we were left in absolutely no doubt what God was like.

It's pretty obvious, just think of it this way...He has to be God just from the standpoint of looking at His life. For example, if God were a man I would expect Him to be sinless. Jesus was. And if God were a man I would expect that His words would be the greatest words ever spoken. And Jesus' were. And if God were a man I would expect that He would exhibit the most profound influence over human personality of anybody who ever lived, and He did. No one ever has affected the course of the world like Jesus. And I would expect if God were a man that He would do miracles, and He did. And I would expect that if God were a man He would manifest love beyond human comprehension, and He did. And so, I expect that Jesus was God. He fits every part. He is the image of God.

Further, look what Paul says in 15, he says, "He is the firstborn of all creation." Now many people have misinterpreted this and indicated by this verse that Jesus was a created being, that Jesus was made like everybody else. But, that is not talking about the act of birth, for if it is, there is a terrible mistake here because Jesus wasn't the first one created. Adam was and there were an awful lot before Jesus. No; He never was created and even when He became a man He was not the first one created.

So, what does it mean that He was the firstborn? It's a simple thing, prototokosin the Greek, it means the right to rule, the heir, the ranking one, the one in authority. It has to do with the rights of inheritance. You know, in the Jewish mind the firstborn was the one who inherited everything. And what it is saying here is that Christ is the inheritor of all creation. He is the heir of everything. It doesn't mean necessarily that He had to be born or that He had to be the first one born. You think of Jacob and Esau. Esau was born first but Jacob was the heir. Jacob was the prototokos.

Look again at Hebrews chapter 1. It says in verse 1, "God who at different times and in different ways...Old Testament...spoke in time past unto the fathers by the prophets has in these last days spoken to us through His Son whom He has appointed...what?... heir of all things." He is the firstborn of all creation in the sense that He is the primary one, He is the one who has the right to the inheritance, He is the ranking one. That is why you see in **Revelation chapter 5:1-14** when they were looking for somebody who had the right to take the earth, there wasn't anybody in the universe but Him. He is the only heir. He came forth to take the scroll and possess the earth because it was rightfully His.

But secondly, **Paul goes further and shows us not only His relation to God but His pre-eminence over his natural creation – the created universe, both seen and unseen ...** Again, here this presents His deity, verse 16, "For by Him were all things created." Now that's a simple thing. I don't know how you could become confused. Jesus made everything. **In John 1:3 it says, "Without Him was not anything made that was made." He made everything. All things were created by Him. He is the creator God.**

In Hebrews, again chapter 1 verse 2, it says that His Son has been appointed heir of all things by whom also He made the worlds.

Now think of what it means. When I think about creation it boggles my mind. Everything that was made He made. Do you ever conceive of that? Do you ever conceive of what is out there? If this doesn't give you a grandiose idea of God, you just haven't looked at it.

**Further His relationship to the world and pre-eminence is indicated in verse 17, this is a staggering thing...**"He is before all things and by Him all things consist." You see, Jesus lived as God before He was ever known as Jesus, before He ever came into the world He existed in eternity past. **In John 17:1-5**, He was talking to the Father having one of those prayer meetings that He liked to have in the garden of Gethsemane each night and He said, "Father, I've finished the work which You gave Me to do, now restore Me to the glory that I had with You before the world began." Wow, what a statement. The glory that I had with You before the world began. He said before Abraham was I am. He is. Pre-existing one. He is before all things. He made all things. All things were made for Him for He is the heir of all things.

And then this word in 17, "And by Him all things hold together." This is talking about cohesion. You know, the whole world would fall apart if it weren't for Him. **I don't buy the God of the deist who says that God just made everything, wound it up and went away and says now he's going to watch it all wind down. I believe that God upholds the world.**

In Hebrews 1:3 it says Jesus Christ upholds all things by the word of His power. What keeps the world from flying to pieces? The upholding power of God. The reason we can send men out in space in little tin cans and make sure they come back and plop in the right spot is because God has rules that don't change. He upholds the earth. If the earth's rotation slowed down at all we would freeze and burn. The same thing would happen if we got any further or nearer to the sun because it's 12 thousand degrees Fahrenheit. If the moon didn't remain at its exact distance from the earth, the ocean tide would completely inundate the land twice a day. You can go on and on and discuss Science but Somebody's got to make sure everything hangs together.

You say, "Who does that?" It says right here, "He is the one by whom all things consist." Who is the one? The Son, the dear Son. What Son? The one who gave redemption through His blood the forgiveness of sin, none other than Jesus Christ as the God who made and upholds the world.

Further, Paul speaks in verse 16 about Jesus in His relation to the unseen world. Look at verse 16 again. "For by Him were all things created that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible," that means the material world and the spiritual world, "whether they are thrones, dominions, principalities, or powers."

What is His relation to the unseen world? Is He just another angel? No, He is the one who made the angels. He is the one who made everything visible and He is the one who created everything invisible. No matter what the angels' rank, thrones, dominions, principalities and powers and the New Testament adds elsewhere authorities. Christ is over all of them. He is before all of them, **verse 17**. He is the one who upholds all of them. He is the one who made all of them. He is the one for whom all of them were made. The very angels who came that day and announced the birth of Christ and said, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace to men of good will," those very angels who declared the birth of that baby were indeed the servants of that baby...ministering spirits. Angels, whether they are elect angels or whether they are fallen angels, have no power, no existence, no right to exist, no sustenance apart from the upholding power of Jesus Christ. He is superior to angels. He made them. He was before them. They were made for Him.

## **2. His pre-eminence over his spiritual creation -the Church (verse 18-19)**

Here Paul turns to show that Jesus is God from the standpoint of redemptive history. First of all, Jesus in His relationship to the church, verse 18, "And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead that in all things He might have the preeminence." Redemptively, Jesus Christ is supreme. There is no other. In all things He has preeminence. In redemptive history there is none greater than Jesus Christ. There is no greater angel. There is no greater God. There is nothing greater than Jesus Christ; redemptively He is preeminent and that belongs only to God.

**Notice what it says, "He is the head of the body, the church."**

Paul says to the **Ephesians in chapter 2 verse 10**, "You were created in Christ Jesus." He is the one who makes new creatures, the head of His church. And guides His church through the Word.

Secondly, speaking redemptively, He is the beginning. And this carries this whole idea further. He is the one who gave life to His church. He is the one who gave it its beginning, He is the source. He is the generating energy of the church. He is the one who brought it to life, who brought it to existence. But I feel that the primary meaning here is rank. He is the supreme one in His church.

It stands to reason, people, that the one who is first in rank in the universe, that the one who is the universal point of reference, that the one who is the agent and the goal and the forerunner and the sustainer and the governor of all creation, that the one who is the head and the life and the beginning and the first in rank, and the one who was primarily resurrected from the grave before all others in rank to give life to the rest has got to be the one who is preeminent. Nobody who ever lived has the history that Jesus had. He is supreme. There is none like Him.

**3. His supremacy over everything else. (verse 20)**

That brings Paul to the last consideration and he just sums up everything in case there might be a loose end floating around. He has spoken of Jesus in relation to God, in relation to the universe, in relation to the unseen world and in relation to the church. **And now he speaks of Jesus in relation to all other things...just whatever else may be lying around...just to make sure you don't leave anything out...verse 19, this is a great statement. And you could spend time just weeks and months digging into the reality of this. "It pleased the Father that in Him should all pleroma, all fullness dwell."**

Listen, Paul sums it up by saying this, now mark this, the powers of deity and the attributes of deity were not to be distributed among a multitude of beings. It was all given to one. "There is no other expression of God than this one, in Him dwells the totality of the pleroma of God." There is no other like Him, God gave His attribute to no other.

All you need is Jesus Christ for in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily and you are complete in Him.

**You say, "But there's got to be some information apart from Him that I need to know." Look at verse 3 of chapter 2, it says, "In whom are hidden all...how many?... all the treasures of...what?... wisdom and knowledge." There's nothing that you need outside of Christ in terms of spiritual truth, spiritual reality.**

Only this sovereign all powerful Jesus can give us the security we need. Because if your Jesus is a rather weak and pathetic figure who will be blown over by the first puff of wind then you will fall. And unless you see Jesus as the Bible presents him as the awesome sovereign King over the entire universe, then you'll be tempted by other things. That was the problem for the Colossians. They believed that they were at the whim of demonic forces and that they needed to placate those demonic forces through religious deeds and experiences. But Paul says that

Jesus is Lord over them too. He'll tell us in chapter two that he has defeated them through the cross. Some of us may well feel we are at the whim of unseen evil forces. But Jesus is Lord. He has the power to rescue you and bring you through. Or what about death? Death is for many the ultimate thing to be afraid of. But Paul says Jesus is the firstborn from among the dead. He has defeated death and is able to bring you and me through it.

Or consider the church, not the human organisation of the Church of England, but the gathering of God's people here today. Are you sometimes tempted to think how pathetic it all seems? We are very small in this city of London. It seems so weak and useless. The tide of secular thinking and non-Christian antagonism seems so strong. Is there any hope? Of course, there is. Look at who is our boss! Look at who's at the top? It's Jesus Christ, the Lord of heaven and earth, the one who holds the entire universe together in the palm of his hands. Do you not think he as our captain can bring us safely home? Do you not think that he will protect and keep his people to the end? Do you not think that he has the power to defeat everything that is thrown against his church? What did Jesus himself say? The gates of hell itself will not prevail against the church of Christ. No, whatever you and I face this coming week or this coming year, whether it be uncertainty, a broken heart, unemployment, exams, bereavement, illness, conflict, or even death itself. Whatever it is, Jesus is sufficient for those trials. And if you don't believe in a powerful Lord Jesus such as is seen in Colossians then you will fall. Because only a sovereign Lord Jesus can give us security. And the challenge is to trust him. Let us pray.