



# Central Peninsula Church

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Colossians 1:15-20  
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## Christ Incomparable

On Tuesday, April 18, 1995, Joe Montana announced his retirement from football after 16 seasons. To salute him, 20,000 fans filled downtown San Francisco for a ceremony. John Madden came to the podium and gave his opinion of Montana's skills: "This is the greatest quarterback who's ever played the game." Then Bill Walsh came to the microphone, and while he was up there, a fan yelled, "We love you, Joe." As the Niners coach, Walsh knew that hadn't always been the case. He said to the fan, "You weren't saying that in 1979. Then you were saying, 'Where'd you get this guy who looks like a Swedish place kicker?'"

In 1979 Joe Montana was just a third round draft pick out of Notre Dame. Scouts said he had a weak arm and was too skinny to survive the rough and tumble world of a pro quarterback. But when Joe Montana stepped into the pros, he entered his element. His passes were accurate and perfectly timed. He could scramble and take a hit with the best of them. He was the master of the two-minute drill, seemingly always coming through when the Niners needed a miracle.

Joe Montana was at first unimpressive to many people but was destined to be the greatest. In a much more infinite way, the same could be said of Jesus Christ. Few paid attention to him when he started out a peasant Jew with a sketchy past, but millions worship him today.

If you were called upon to come to the podium this morning to give your opinion of Christ, how would you describe him? What would you say? Certainly, human speech is too feeble to describe him in full. He is inconceivably above our conceptions, unutterably above our utterances. But we could try!

This morning we come to a passage of Scripture in our study of Colossians where the apostle Paul steps to the podium and attempts to describe the indescribable, Jesus Christ. He was speaking to a group of new believers who were being sidetracked in their faith by false teachers who said Christ was just one of thousands of emanations of an invisible God, just the first rung on a long ladder that led to a distant deity. Without even mentioning the heresy, Paul sets forth Christ as incomparable and supreme; supreme over all creation, and supreme in his work of redemption. He does so with language so exalted it stretches our imagination to the breaking point. First, we see his supremacy over all creation.

### I. The Supremacy of Christ in Creation

"And He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For in Him all things were created, both in the

heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities - all things have been created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together."

A. As the image of the invisible God: The opening line describes Christ as "the image of the invisible God." We know from both the Old and New Testaments that God is invisible. The Gospel of John affirms, "No one has seen God at any time." But then it says, "the only begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has explained him" (John 1:18). Jesus, who came from the Father's side, explains God.

A little boy was drawing pictures on the floor one day as his mother was working. She walked up to him and asked, "What are you drawing?" He said, "I'm drawing a picture of God." She said, "But you can't do that. No one really knows what God looks like." The boy shook his head and said, "They will when I get through!"

In essence, this was true of Jesus. If you want to know what God is like, look at Jesus. He is the "image" of the Father. In Greek philosophy, the image had a share in the reality it reveals and may be said to even BE that reality. An image was not distinct from the object it represented. As the image of God, Christ is an exact and visible portrait of God.

B. As the firstborn of all creation: The same verse says he is also "the firstborn of all creation." It sounds a bit like this is saying Christ was the first person ever born or ever created. This is what the Jehovah Witnesses would claim. But that's not what this is saying. The title "firstborn" comes from the Old Testament. In the Old Testament, this term could mean the first child born, but because the first born child had a special position as heir, the term often meant "first in rank and honor." In Psalm 89:27 this was a title God gave to his exalted King. God says, "I will appoint him my firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth."

Remember the story of Isaac's twin sons, Jacob and Esau? Esau was the first of the two to be born. He had the birthright to inherit the estate of his father; he outranked his brother. But then Jacob tricked his father into giving him that blessing. And so Jacob came to possess the rights of the firstborn, outranking his brother, even though he wasn't the first born child. Christ outranks all creation; he is exalted over all.

C. As the creator of all things: One of the reasons we know he wasn't created is what Paul says next in v. 16, "For by (in) him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers, or

authorities - all things have been created through him..." Although his name isn't mentioned in Genesis, Jesus was there at creation. When God the Father said, "Let us make man in our image..." he was speaking to His Son. Jesus was the agent through which everything came into being. He created stars and black holes and super novas and electrons. He created elephants and giraffes and 800,000 varieties of insects! And not just things on earth, but he created things in the spiritual realm as well - thrones, powers, rulers, authorities. These refer to classes of angelic beings. There is a whole other world we can't even see. He created it all.

D. As the end and purpose of all things: But that's not all. As the creator of all, he is also the end and purpose and goal of all creation. Paul says, "all things have been created through him and for him." We all have goals. To make the team. To finish school. To own a home. To see your kids happy and whole. To retire early. Paul says all our goals are goals with a small "g." Christ is the final goal of all things.

A few decades ago Albert Einstein announced a whole new view of space. He declared that space is not, as we had thought, a linear concept, extending outward in a straight line. But instead it is curved in upon itself. That's what this is saying about Christ - everything is turning in toward him. All things came into being at his command, and all things will return to him at his command. Eph. 1:10 says all things will eventually be "summed up" in Christ. On the map of the universe, every path leads to Christ. Everything began with him and will end with him.

It was all made for his benefit. Philippians says at the end of time "every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord..." (Phil. 2:10-11). Every Christian, every Muslim, every Hindu, every terrorist, every Republican, every Democrat, every demon, every angel, every rich person and every poor person will end in glad surrender to him as Lord of the universe.

E. As the sustainer of all things: Paul sums up the supremacy of Christ in creation by telling us he is the sustainer of all things: "He is before all things and in him all things hold together." Christ is the divine glue that holds it all together. Physicists tell us that among the atom's protons and electrons there is vast space, not unlike the solar system. No one knows for sure what actually holds the atom together, but something with incredible power does it. That power is Christ!

He didn't create the world like a wind-up toy and then leave it to run its course. He continues to sustain it. He keeps the cosmos from becoming a chaos. If he were to remove his sustaining hand from the universe for one second, it would all unravel before the blink of an eye. There is a medieval painting which shows Christ in the clouds, and below him the world of humans and nature. From Christ to every object is painted a thin, gold thread. The artist was saying that Christ sustains it all.

That's Christ as supreme over all creation. Abraham Kuyper wrote, "When Jesus looks at his universe from his exalted throne at the right hand of the Father, and he sees the great galaxies whirling in space, the planets and the people on this planet, and all the minute details of life here including the details of our lives, there is nothing that he sees anywhere of which he cannot say, 'Mine!'"

We might wonder if one as exalted as that could ever really dirty his hands with our lives. But Christ is not just some kind of heavenly abstraction. Paul goes on and tells us this same Christ came down to earth, was strung up on a cross, and spilled blood just for us. The one who is supreme over creation is also supreme in redeeming a new creation for himself. Look at vv, 18-20,

## II. The Supremacy of Christ in Redemption 1:18-20

"He is also the head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the first-born from the dead; so that He Himself might come to have first place in everything. For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven."

A. As the head of the church: He begins celebrating Christ's work in redemption by claiming he is head of his body, the church. The church is not a religious organization; it's a living organism. It's alive. Not only are we inter-connected as members of one another, we're all connected to and dependent on Christ as the Head. To be "the head of the body" means he is supreme over a new creation called the church and he is the source of its life. He sustains and governs and directs us.

Have you ever seen a body without a head? It's a sad sight. But many churches forget that Christ is their head; they act like their head is cut off, or at least dead! In the old days, I'm told chickens weren't bought all nicely packaged in cellophane wrap. You had to go out in your backyard, run one down, and then remove its head. I'm told a chicken with its head cut off acts very strange. It doesn't just lay down and die, but it jumps and runs around for a minute or two, totally out of control. Churches that lose sight of Christ as head are like that. They run around looking for answers, trying all sorts of new church growth programs, trying to figure out who's in charge. They don't know what to do because they have lost their head!

B. As the firstborn from the dead: Christ is head because of what Paul says next. He says, "He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead..." He is the beginning, the church's originating cause and the source of its life. Some people treat Christ like the British treat their monarch - they have great respect for him but they have stripped him of all his power. They don't expect him to do anything of real significance except help an occasional charity and produce a little gossip for the tabloids. Christ is not just a nice figurehead. He is the beginning. He is the firstborn from the dead. His resurrection is the source of eternal life for all who trust him, and that life starts now. This is what sets

authentic Christianity apart from every religion or moral code. Authentic Christianity is not about us following a religious script. It's about us receiving new life from Christ. That's why John wrote, "He who has the Son has the life, and he who does not have the Son does not have life" (1 John 5:11). He might be breathing, but he isn't living! He might be moral; he might be religious; he might be a nice person, but he doesn't have the life only Christ can give.

C. As the possessor of all God's fullness: Christ is also the head of the church because it was "the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in him." The fullness of God Himself dwelt in Christ. There could be no clearer statement that he was God than this. All the activities and attributes of God - his power and holiness and love and mercy - are in him! There is nothing that God is that Christ isn't. There is nothing that God has that Christ doesn't have. He has God's fullness. Put that together with what Paul says next, and you can hardly believe it.

D. As the agent of God's reconciliation: Not only was it the Father's good pleasure for his fullness to dwell in Christ, but also to reconcile all things through him. There is a connection between these two things. If Christ didn't possess God's fullness, he couldn't have been the one who brought reconciliation. He would have been like a bridge that didn't reach all the way to the other side. To connect to man he had to be fully man, and to connect us to God he had to be fully God. Only the God-man could bring man and God together.

Notice God is the one who initiated this. It was his idea, not ours. We were estranged from him because of sin. We were going in the other direction. Yet he came after us. He didn't do this reluctantly. He wasn't pressured into it. It was his "good pleasure" to do it. It gave him joy. He delighted in it. And it's a finished work. Everything that needed to be done for you to be brought back to God, he has done. There is nothing more you can do to add to it. So your reconciliation with God depends not on your achievement of it but on your acceptance of it.

Notice also how he did it - through the blood of his cross. The image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, the one in whom and by whom and for whom all things were made, spilled his blood for us. Back in 1993 Clint Eastwood starred in a movie called, *In the Line of Fire*. He played a secret service agent named Frank Horrigan. Horrigan had protected the life of the President for more than 30 years, but he was haunted by the memory of what happened 30 years before. As a young agent, he was assigned to President Kennedy on that fateful day in 1963. When the assassin fired the shot, Horrigan froze in shock. For the next 30 years he wrestled with the question: Can I take a bullet for the President? In the climax to the movie, he did what he failed to do earlier - he threw himself into the path of an assassin's bullet and saved the President. Secret Service agents are willing to do such things because they believe the President is valuable enough to spill blood for. Obviously they wouldn't take a bullet for just anyone. At the cross of Christ, the situation was reversed. The President of the Universe actually took a bullet for each of us, just to have a relationship with us. That's

how valuable we are to God.

And notice what that resulted in. Not just reconciliation for us, but reconciliation for all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven. This is hard to get a hold of, but somehow creation itself was out of harmony with God and somehow the cross brings it all back into alignment with its creator. There is a cosmic dimension to what Christ did on the cross. He's reconciled all things, even evil things, to himself! A day will come when even the hostility of evil against God will be brought to a sudden halt. Evil men and fallen angels will cease in their rebellion and bow before the Son.

Paul has stepped up to the podium and told us about the exploits of Christ. He is supreme over both the old creation and the new creation called the church, made up of all those who accept his reconciling work. The question is, what does this mean to us? How does this effect the way you live?

### III. Application

It may seem like this is stuff for theologians to argue about, but this is stuff that effects you every day. You see, your vision of Jesus Christ will determine whether you view him as sufficient to meet all your needs, or whether you look elsewhere. If you see him as supreme, you will trust him as sufficient. Some people see Jesus as a weak-willed, soft-hearted uncle who is there to pass out candy whenever we visit. Others see him as stern policeman ready to write a moral traffic ticket when we step out of line. Still others see him as a distant and remote CEO who has far more important things to tend to than the details of our life. How do you view Jesus? Is he supreme? Is he sufficient?

Christ is sufficient, first of all, to save you from the eternal consequences of sin in your life. Sin has alienated each of us from God. Christ is all you need to be put together with God because he took our sin upon himself. Because he is fully man and fully God he is the bridge that reaches all the way between you and the Father. Because he conquered death by rising from the grave, he can raise you up as well. Do you want to be at peace with God? Do you want to enjoy eternity with him? All you need is Christ. You don't have to go outside of him. Trust in him.

Secondly, Christ is sufficient to transform you and make you into the person you long to be. What is it in your life that you are battling? Is it sexual temptation? Is it pride? Is it materialism? Is it a bad temper? Is it worry? Is it resentment and bitterness? Life is tough! Sometimes I just want to give up and give in. But how do you fight those battles? Do you try to do it on your own? Jesus told what to do. He said, "Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:4-5). You see, you can't do it yourself. You have to abide in him. A branch doesn't struggle to bear fruit; it just stays attached to the vine. You don't have to struggle to change; just stay attached to Jesus.

ust him to change you. The firstborn of all creation, the One who made all things, the One who is the goal and purpose of all things, he lives within you. "Abide in me and I in you."

Thirdly, Christ is sufficient to carry you through any trial, any difficulty, any infirmity you face. Let me put it this way: If Christ is sufficient to sustain the entire universe, he can sustain you as well. I played golf this week and when I got done with the first nine holes I had to walk into the pro shop for a minute. I walked in and the golf pro who gave me a few lessons this summer saw me and said to me, "How you doin'?" Are you holdin' together?" I said, "No. I'm fallin' apart!" And I was. I needed his help. But what a great question, "Are you holdin' together?" That's what we all need, isn't it. We need to hold together in the crisis and tragedies and even the small irritations of life like a bad slice on the golf course. But how do we do that? A glass of wine after work? A longer and better vacation? Therapy? None of those things are bad, but they can't sustain us; they can't hold us together. Only Christ can hold us together. We need his help. It seems we live in a world coming apart at the seams? How do you handle that? Do you live in fear? Do you trust in the military? Do you forget about it and drown in private pleasures? Only Christ can hold this world together. He's all we need.

Imagine the number of words it took to write the Encyclopedia Britannica. It must be an awesome number, but an even more amazing thing is that only 26 letters were used. The authors didn't have to go outside of the alphabet to assemble that massive collection of knowledge. Just those 26 letters provided everything they needed for the task. Jesus Christ called himself the Alpha and the Omega. He is the beginning and the end of the alphabet, and everything in-between. All creation, all redemption was accomplished through those letters alone. We don't have to go outside of Jesus for anything we need. He is God's "everything" for all situations.

C.H. Spurgeon wrote: There is more in Jesus, the Good Shepherd, than you can pack away in a shepherd. He is the good, the great, the chief shepherd; but he is much more. Emblems to set him forth may be multiplied as the drops of the morning, but the whole multitude will fail to reflect his brightness. Creation is too small a frame in which to hang his likeness. Human thought is too contracted, human speech is too feeble, to set him forth to the full. When all the emblems in earth and heaven shall have described him to their utmost, there will remain someone not yet described. He is inconceivably above our conceptions, unutterably above our utterances.

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