

“Jesus: Maker and Ruler of all things”

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

¹⁶ For by[♯] him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. ¹⁷ And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

Why is Jesus so important to us?...I can guess that you have various answers to this question in your mind. Perhaps the first thing that comes to your mind is that Jesus is your Savior and Lord. As we enter into the Advent season and the celebration of Jesus’ birth you may think about the hope that Jesus brings to the world. For whatever answer comes into your mind, we can say in 100% agreement that Jesus is essential to our faith and doctrine. Without Jesus we could have no salvation and no way to stand before God.

As we continue looking at the first chapter of Colossians we are going to look at part of Paul’s explanation of who Jesus is. In the previous section, Paul was praying for the church. Paul doesn’t conclude his prayer with an “amen” because he is writing his prayer for the church. Paul transitions the prayer to a song of praise to the “Beloved Son” into whose kingdom we have been transferred. The questions that Paul seems to be answering are these: who is Jesus and why is he so important? In the few verses we will look at this morning Paul points to Jesus as maker and ruler of the world.

Now, a lot of ink has been spilled over these verses. We cannot hope to cover all the important aspects of the Trinity and the nature of the Son in one sermon. Moreover, it is not my goal to give you a systematic theology lesson. Instead, I would like to call our attention to the importance of the Trinity for Christians and to spur you on in your devotion to the Lord. By pointing to Jesus as the maker and ruler of the world, the Apostle Paul was grounding the CC’s hope in the gospel in the firmest possible ground. It was grounded in the very nature of God. We look to Jesus as our Savior, the one to whom we owe our love and devotion. One more note before we look at our text this morning. These verses are likely some kind of early Christian hymn or confession about the nature of Jesus. They are poetic in nature, and that does explain why some people have been confused by the choice of words. This is especially true for verse 15. My prayer this morning for us is that we keep our focus on Paul’s intention. That is: to keep

our eyes pointed to Jesus in all his glory.

As we turn our attention to the text we need to remind ourselves of the end of Paul's prayer for the Colossians. He prayed that they would give thanks to God who qualified them to share in the inheritance with the saints in light. Paul continues by saying that the Father transferred sinners from the domain of darkness to the kingdom of the Beloved Son.

1. **Firstborn (v. 15)** "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation."

Verse 15 continues the same theme from the previous verses. That is to say that through the beloved Son, Jesus, we have redemption. As Paul continues in verse 15, he changes his emphasis from prayer to explanation. He is saying that the redemption that we received from the Son is secure. We can trust that it will endure because of who the Son is. He is the "image" of God. The Son is the one who shows us God. The Son makes the invisible God visible to us.

The parallel to the Son being the "image of the invisible God" is that he is the "firstborn of all creation." The phrase has caused a lot of confusion in the history of the church because it seems to say that Jesus was created. Before we try to draw out the meaning of the verse, we should say right away that the verse does not say that Jesus was created. It says that he is the "firstborn." *The main idea* of the two halves of this confession is to show that Jesus is preeminent in everything. He is above creation and is the Lord of the new Kingdom. Paul is not teaching that Jesus was a creature like we are. He is saying that Jesus was so much more than another part of God's creation. Let's try to make the interpretation of this difficult verse as easy as possible. Look at verse 16. Immediately flowing from the statement that Jesus is the firstborn of all creation is the word "for" (and in the Japanese "なぜなら"). The connection should be clear to us. Our Lord Jesus is called the "firstborn of all creation" because through him everything was created. All of creation was created by him and for him. From the surrounding verses, Paul taught that the Son can be called the firstborn of all creation because he is the one through whom the Father used to make everything that is. Moreover, Jesus is the recipient of everything. It is all for him.

Being called "Firstborn" and "Image" are powerful statements about the nature of the Son. Our Lord Jesus is the one who makes the invisible visible to us, but he is also the one that made everything that is. So rather than pointing to Jesus as less than God or a creature, verse 15 points our attention back into the counsels of the Triune God. In the wisdom of the Godhead, it is revealed to us that the second person of the Trinity is begotten from the Father. By nature of his being the "firstborn", he is first in position and authority. He is the heir of all things that belong to the Father. In the very beginning before there was anything the Son was there with the Father. The Father and the Son were in complete unity in all things. They were one in essence and will. This is chiefly seen in creation. It was declared very good. To say that God created the world is to say that the Son created everything. He takes the highest place in everything.

2. Maker (v. 16) “For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. “

The Lord Jesus is the maker of all things. This is clear from Genesis 1 and John 1. One of the most unique things about these verses in Colossians 1 is that they make clear that the Son is the creator of all things. That is to say, he is the creator of all things whether they be visible or invisible. To say “by him” all things were created means that the Son did not need any other power to create the world. There are no human parallels to this power. When an artist creates a work of art they use materials. When a new building is built they use materials. One might say in a sense that the painting was made by the artist, but what they really did was arrange the materials in such a way that it represents what the artist was trying to recreate. With God it is not like this. The Son did not make a representation of what he wanted to create from raw materials. The Son made the world and everything in it.

Up to now we have focused almost exclusively on the visible material universe. This is so natural for us because we have been taught to only think of this world in natural and physical terms. In previous ages of the world, people spoke and acted like the spiritual world was nearer to us. Modern people with modern medicine and modern technology don't like to think about there being powers and rulers that they cannot see. Even Christians forget the spiritual powers. I believe the reason Paul includes this section about the invisible powers is to say that nothing is equal to Jesus. How can creation be equal to the One who created it? The invisible powers at all levels of creation are book ended with the power and authority of the Son. All of the created world exists by, through, and for the Son.

3. Ruler (v. 17) “And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”

All of creation is to be seen as sitting underneath the mighty power and glory of God. Even though man's rebellion with sin has marred this world and made it full of grief and turmoil it is still under him. There are many people who lament the state of this world. Some question God's existence because there is so much trouble in the world. When reading verse 17, we get a sense of why people are so quick to make this connection. If God is so good and so powerful why does he tolerate the brokenness of the world? The answer lies here in verse 17.. The Son is before all things and in him all things hold together. In other words, the world has an end in sight (at least in God's sight) and all of the current stability is due to God's control, not in spite of it.

God made everything good. The fall of the angels and mankind into rebellion and sin meant that suffering and grief were let loose in the world. The serenity of the world was destroyed and all this world's evils began to grow. Just after the fall, jealousy and murder could be found. God told Adam and Eve that if they ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil

they would surely die. Death's introduction into the world was part of the judgment for sin. Now I say all of that to say this: nothing that is happening in this world is outside of God's power. Nor can we really say that there is nothing good in this world. There is so much beauty and general goodness in the world. The natural world, though marred by sin, is relatively harmonious. Despite the fall into sin, humans all over the world from all cultures still value truth, goodness, and beauty. These things are all evidence of God's hand. The world holds together because the Son holds it together.

Conclusion

Here is a question for you: can we go too far in ascribing power and authority to the Son? Generally speaking, there is no way to give too much credit or too much glory to Jesus. The Son is not the Father, but they are of the same essence. One is not superior to the other because they are co-eternal and co-equal. Whatever we can say about the Father we can say about the Son except that the Son is eternally begotten of the Father. We really cannot esteem Jesus too much because in him all the fullness of God is pleased to dwell (Col 1:19). Let me add one more thing: getting a solid grip on the doctrine of the Trinity is really important for you. If you are vague on this issue you might not sense that you are missing out on anything. The doctrine of the Trinity is complicated and full of nuanced language. It is easy to deny the Bible's teaching or fall into some ancient heresy. However, the doctrine of the Trinity is the most fundamental doctrine of the Christian faith. One of the things that God is concerned with is our worship. How can we even be sure that we are praising God if we are denying things about the very nature of God himself? I want to offer some caution to you as you think about your faith. We live in an age of the church where people often say that theology doesn't really matter. They do not want to get caught up in the details of theology because theology is too complicated or maybe it seems like some academic discipline. The study of theology can be difficult, and depending on how you study it, it very well may be boring. However, the truth is God is not boring. His power, sovereignty, and goodness has no equal. While some say that this world is all there is, we know better. God has revealed himself. He is the king of creation and the ruler of all things. When the end comes, do not be found living like this world is all there is. Give your full trust to the Triune God.

Lastly I will say this, worship and honor is due to the name of Jesus. As the incarnate Son of God, our Lord Jesus is truly God. We can praise him as such. We put our faith in him and in his promise because God never lies. We have everything we need in the Triune God. When we are scared, beat down by life, and unsure what the future holds, we can look to Jesus. He is the maker of this world and he rules it. He holds this world together. He is coming back to bring his kingdom. We wait for that. As we wait for the kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven, we give praise to his name.