

“Lord of All Creation”

Introduction: Last Monday evening I had the opportunity to attend the divorce care workshop that we are offering this winter and I was truly blessed in being there. I was blessed as I saw the wonderful resource this 13-week workshop can be to help those going through the pain of divorce or separation begin to find some traction on the long road toward hope and healing. In this regard, a comment made by one of the video presenters struck me. It was that in the face of human rejection, we need to cling to God’s promise that he will not leave us or forsake us, but that we are his beloved sons and daughters. The road to healing, in other words, and the road of faith, really, begins with understanding our identity, who we are, in God’s sight.

Identity is a topic we’re pondering as we explore Paul’s letter to the Colossians. Who do we, as a church community, think we are? That is the overarching question we’re asking as we come to this letter. Last week we heard Paul answer this question by declaring that his readers are citizens of the kingdom of God. Just before our reading for this morning he puts it this way: “For [God] has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins” (1:13-14).

This is a key identity for us to rest in, no matter what we’re going through in life. But, well might we wonder, what is this kingdom all about? How secure is it? Is this where we want to hold our passport? How do I know God will never leave me or forsake me? In response, Paul goes on in our passage for this morning to say in effect, “Let me tell you about this kingdom by telling you about its king, the king we come to know in and through his Son, Jesus. He’s not just one of a number of spiritual possibilities in the cafeteria of religions; he’s the supreme Lord of All [the words “all” or “everything” appearing 8x in vv. 15-20]. There is no better identity to have than that of a citizen of his kingdom.”

Paul unfolds this answer in highly poetic form. Some think he has inserted here in vv. 15-20 an early Christian hymn or confession of faith. Others simply see him breaking out into poetic language, employing a genre appropriate in trying to describe all that the Son of God is. Whatever the case, we can break these verses down into two major stanzas, the first declaring and describing that Jesus is Lord of all of God’s creation (vv. 15-17), and the second that he is Lord of all of God’s new creation (vv. 18-20). Paul then concludes with a kind of case study in vv. 21-23. Today, we’ll look at the first stanza and consider the four aspects of what it means to understand Jesus as Lord of all God’s creation.

I. The Son is the image of the invisible God

A. At first blush it might seem strange to think that something that is invisible can have an image! But the word “image” here captures the sense of a reproduction or representation. In that sense, the Son makes the Father visible.

Illustration: You might imagine driving in your car on the highway and wanting to pull out into the left lane in order to pass a car in front of you. How do you know what’s behind you so that you can safely pull out? Are you just left to guess? No, you have a rearview mirror that gives you a “visible image” of what’s back there. Jesus is that mirror. He is the mirror-image of God. He makes God known.” God was pleased,” Paul says in another way in v. 19, to have all his fullness dwell in him.” “The Son,” affirms the writer of Hebrews, “is the radiance of God’s glory, the exact representation of his being” (1:3).

B. In Jesus we see the picture of who God is, what God is like, and what God does. Significantly, in revealing himself, God not only gave us words that described him, but the Word

became flesh and walked among us (John 1:1-14). God came to us in personal, human form. Therefore, to know what God is like, we need not wonder or guess or speculate. We have a God, the Son reveals, who does not remain hidden or aloof but has made himself known

II. The firstborn over all creation

A. Who else is the Son? Paul goes on, secondly, to tell us about the relationship this Son has with God's creation. He is "the firstborn over all creation." Typically, we associate "firstborn" with birth order. While it can mean that, when it is applied to things that God is up to, it more often refers to status, that is, it names that which is preeminent or supreme, regardless of order. So, for example, in Psalm 89, which is speaking about King David, v. 27 says this: "And I will appoint him to be my firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth." And Exodus 4:22, referring to Israel as that people group through which God was going to bring redemption and healing to the world, identifies Israel as God's "firstborn son."

B. So, "firstborn" is not identifying Jesus as a created being like the Jehovah's Witnesses want to believe, but as supreme over all creation and the one through whom God is accomplishing his redemptive purposes. He is the ultimate king from the lineage of David, and the true Son that fulfills what Israel was to be all about. So, importantly, the Son is not part of God's creation but distinct from it.

III. In him all things were created

A. This distinction is given further voice as Paul records a third aspect of the Son, and that is that he is the agent, or the means, through which God brought the world into existence (vv. 16-17a):

For in him all things were created, things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things...

As the one who is supreme and exalted over creation, the Son also existed before creation came into being, and he was intimately involved in what developed. Without going into the nuts and bolts of creation, which God's word doesn't seem too interested in, being far more concerned with the "who?" rather than the "how?" we have the emphasis that whatever we have, it somehow came from the hand of God and that the Son was an integral part of this "who?" .

B. Hebrews 1:2 confirms this. It declares that the Son is the one "through whom [God] also made the universe." And we can't leave out the writer of John who declared "Through him [the Word made flesh] all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (John 1:3).

Heady stuff, to be sure, but all highlighting that fact that the Son, the king of this kingdom that we, as Christians are identified with, is in complete control of all that is around us, whether in heaven or on earth, whether visible or invisible, whether thrones or those who sit on them. Why? Because all things owe their existence to him, were made to glorify him, and exist to serve his purposes.

IV. And in him all things hold together

A. To confirm this control, Paul closes the first stanza of his poem with the comment that in this Jesus, all the things that have been created through him and for him hold together in him.

Now, if you are a serious bicycle rider, you aren't just interested in having a serviceable bike to ride. You are way into all the components that are a part of your bike. You care what kind of derailleur you have, how your brakes are designed, what kind of seat and handlebars and shifters you have, the composition and design of your wheels, and even the composition and tread pattern on your tires! Of course, even if you have the best of this stuff that your bank account will allow, it's all meaningless without the frame. You need a frame to hold all of the various components together. Without it, the best components in the world will get you nowhere.

B. Jesus is the frame for our life. He holds everything together. He brings meaning and purpose, guidance and direction, to all that is. He is like, to use another illustration, the operating system of our life. It manages our hardware and software and enables our applications and programs to run. Another image Paul uses in Ephesians 2 is to picture Jesus as the cornerstone of the temple that is being built with each and every one of us. Without that precious stone, the building will not stand properly or long-term.

C. Now let's pull these thoughts together by pondering the question: How does God relate to his world? There are a few options we might consider.

1. On one end of the spectrum is the view known as pantheism, or "all is God." It holds that God is everything and that everything is God. God is not outside our world; he is the world. Therefore, our main task is to somehow get in touch with the divine that is in our world, and even in us. This was a popular belief in the first century and it is today as well.

2. On the other end of the spectrum of thinking about how God relates to his world is what is known as deism. Deism declares that God and his world are not one, but are in fact billions of miles apart. God got this whole creation thing going, but now he's somewhere far away in his heaven and not very interested or involved in what goes on in our realm of existence.

The struggle both of these views leave us with is that they cannot cope with evil and sin and brokenness of the world. If God really is everything and everything is God, then we have no higher court of appeal or hope of rescue from outside of ourselves or our issues. It's all up to us. On the other hand, if God is distant and aloof, he may be able to come and rescue us but chooses not to. Either way, we're sunk!

But in this ancient Christian text we see something very different. We're not stuck with either of these extremes. A reflection on his Son reveals that God is not equal to his creation but very distinct from it. And God is not unconcerned or uninterested in his creation but has come in his Son to mix it up with us and experience all that we experience, ultimately with the intention of rescuing and restoring us. This rescue and its implications form the main theme of stanza two, which we'll pick up with next week. For now, let us celebrate that the Son reveals a king who is involved, and who is in control. There could be no better kingdom in which to hold our citizenship!