

For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves,¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.¹⁶ For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.¹⁹ For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. (Colossians 1:13-20)

Who is Christ the King?

When I teach a Bible Information Class – the class for adults who are interested in perhaps becoming members – in the first class I ask the participants to imagine that a kindergartner asked them what God is like. How would they answer? Of course, my point is that God is all powerful, eternal, loving, merciful and so forth. In fact, we have a list of words we talk about to explain what God is like. But that conversation isn't just for people on their first day of a Bible Information Class. We will spend our lives growing in our understanding of what God is like and what that means for us. In fact, every year, on Sundays, we recycle that question. Next week is the first Sunday in Advent and we will begin to talk about waiting for Jesus. From there, we'll jump into Christmas and then Epiphany and then Lent and then Easter. We'll spend six months reviewing the life of Christ. Then Pentecost will come and we'll spend six more months talking about how the Holy Spirit works through the Church to lead us ever deeper into the knowledge of God and a life that reflects that knowledge. Year after year, we repeat that pattern. It always ends today. Today is the last Sunday of the church year. It's called Christ the King. Why Christ the King? Why not end with Christ the Good Shepherd or Christ in the manger or Christ dying on the cross? To answer that question, we need to think about what it means that Christ is our king. To put it another way, **Who is Christ the King?**

I.

St. Paul answers that question for us in the book of Colossians. He was writing to a congregation that was wrestling with false teachers who were trying to confuse their understanding of who Jesus is and what he came here to do. God inspired this letter to combat all false notions about Christ, in fact, to answer the question, **who is Christ the King? He's the Creator of all things.**

St. Paul says a number of things in rapid succession here. It's almost like machine gun fire aimed at false ideas about Jesus. He calls him **"the firstborn over all creation."** Now, that might sound like he's saying that Jesus is the first thing that God made. But then he says, **"For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him."** If all things were created by him and for him, then clearly he's not just a part of this creation. He is the Creator.

Now, that might cause us to stop for a moment and scratch our heads. Most of the time, we say that God the Father is the Creator. Even the Bible most of the time says that God the Father created the world. But it never says that he did that alone. There are passages which speak of Jesus and even the Holy Spirit as the Creator of the world. We're talking, of course, about the Trinity, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. He is one God, but he reveals himself in three distinct persons. The ancient teachers of the church observed that when the Bible talks about what God does to things outside of himself, you can't completely distinguish between the persons of the Trinity. The Father created the world. But so did God the Son. And so did God the Holy Spirit.

So Paul says that Jesus created all things **"in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities."** He didn't just make what we can see. He made all the things we can't see. He made heaven itself. He even made the angels – that's what Paul means by "thrones" and "powers" and "rulers" and "authorities." He's talking about the different kinds of angels. I wish I could explain to you what the differences are, but I can't. What I can say is that the Greek words he uses all imply power. The angels are the most powerful beings that God created. Angels in the Bible struck a mob with blindness and destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah and rolled back the boulder covering Jesus' tomb. They have

the ability to make themselves invisible, to take on human shape, to rescue bound men thrown into a fiery furnace. And Christ the King made them all.

In fact, Paul says, **“He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”** Jesus, the firstborn over all creation existed, before there was a creation. And in him this universe continues to exist. We live in a scientific age. Scientists spend their lives investigating how the universe works and what they discover enables them to do things that our ancestors could not have imagined. Today, people have robotic surgeries that minimize the damage the doctors do when they cut you open. Having a worn out hip or knee replaced is a common occurrence. Your cell phone, your ipad, your GPS and almost everything that you use or touch today is the product of applying scientific principles to practical issues in your life.

But the principles that make all those things possible were created by Jesus. And every day of our lives, he keeps them working. He maintains the nuclear explosions that fire the sun and send heat and light to our planet. He causes the photosynthesis that converts sunlight into oxygen so we can breathe. He powers the chemical reactions in our body that use that oxygen. And he keeps radio waves working so that your cell phone gets reception. He keeps the laws of physics going so that all those toys and tools make your life easier and more entertaining.

All that tells us who Christ the King is. He is a real human being. But he’s not just a human being. Paul calls him **“the image of the invisible God.”** We can’t see God. So God came into this world and took on human flesh and showed himself to us. In Jesus, we see what can’t be seen. We see the Son of God. He is the firstborn over all creation not because he’s man, but because he’s God. He is the one who rules all creation – that’s the point of being the firstborn. The firstborn was usually the heir. In Paul’s day, people were losing sight of who Jesus is. So he told them in that machine gun fashion. He drilled it at them: this is the Son of God made flesh for you.

Make no mistake, my friends, the world today continues to confuse this issue. Whether it’s nicely dressed young men who knock on your door and try to convince you that Jesus is not really God; or it’s liberal scholars on the History Channel who believe that the doctrine of the Trinity is something the church made up during the first centuries of its existence; or it’s the modern idea that all roads lead to the same God, so it doesn’t really matter what you believe – all these and hundreds of other ideas deny what Paul was telling us: Jesus is the Son of God. This world exists because he put it here and he still maintains it, every day of your life.

II.

Yet, it might still seem like the doctrine of the Trinity is a little too abstract for us. I think that’s the most dangerous temptation for us regarding this teaching. There is a danger that some Mormon or Jehovah’s Witness will talk us out of it or the History Channel will make us doubt it. But even so, I think for most people, the real danger is that we’ll lose it because it just doesn’t seem all that important. What practical difference does it make? That, my friends, is exactly what Paul is talking about today. Knowing who the true King is means knowing where we belong. It means knowing how we’re going to escape from the hold of the devil and reach eternal life. **Who is Christ the King? He’s the Peacemaker for all people.**

Now, I’m not talking about world peace. I’m not talking about ending war on this planet. Sadly, Jesus himself said that there will always be wars. One of the signs that this world is coming to an end is wars and rumors of wars. We’re talking about a far different kind of peace. We’re talking about peace between us and very different enemy. Paul points to this kind of peace in the first words of our text. He says, **“For he 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.”**

Do you know what a dominion is? It’s a kingdom. We used to belong to the kingdom of darkness. We were all born unbelievers. Nobody had to teach us to sin. Nobody had to teach us to be selfish. Certainly, many things in our lives encourage us to be selfish. Many people in our lives give us ideas about new and clever ways to sin. But it’s easy for them to do that because we were born selfish. You have to teach your children to share. You and I have to learn to let go of our own hurts and anger and forgive. And it’s a real battle. It’s easy to hate. It’s easy to hold a grudge – believe me, I know it as well as anyone. Why is that so easy and why is forgiving so hard? Because we’re born sinners. We are born loving ourselves first and foremost. In fact, the way we’re born, we love only people who love us back. We love only people who seem to deserve our love. We love only people who are beautiful or desirable or fun.

We were born in the devil's kingdom, the dominion of darkness. I said before that angels are powerful. Well, the devil is a fallen angel. His power over us was absolute. There was no power on earth that could rescue from his kingdom. So God sent his Son into this world to do what no one else could do. Jesus alone was born into this world with no sin in his heart. Jesus alone of all the people who ever lived, lived without selfishness. He loved God, he loved us, instead of loving himself. Jesus was perfect and because he was God, he gave that perfect life to you and me and to all people everywhere. Jesus died and paid for the sin that enslaves us. He suffered the hell we deserve because we love only ourselves. Because he's God, his payment was enough for the whole world. When he rose, he announced that God had rescued the whole world from the devil's kingdom.

When we were in devil's kingdom, we were God's enemies. We were at war with God and there was only one way that war could end: with us dying and going to hell. But Jesus made peace between us and God. When he died and rose, he took away the cause of our warfare: our sin and guilt. When he entered our hearts with his gospel, he moved us from the devil's side to his side. Only the Son of God had that power. That's why it matters that Christ is true God. Being the Son of God is what makes him our King. Only he could defeat the devil and set us free. Only he could come into this world and die for all of us. Only he could burst out of that tomb and give us eternal life.

Only he could make us his personally. Paul says that Christ the King is the head of his body, the Church. When God came to us and gave us faith, he united us to Jesus. Where he lives, we will live. Of course, he is the head of the body. As the King, he rules in our hearts and he commands us to do his work and to change our lives so that they conform to God's law. But we only obey those commands because we are his by faith. We love to obey because God has made us new.

Jesus makes a special promise to all of us. Paul says that he is, **“the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead.”** This time, the firstborn doesn't refer to his power over creation. It means that he goes first and we will follow. Jesus promises to raise all those who trust in him. We will all follow Jesus out of the grave. The King will lead a great multitude from every tribe and language and people and nation out of death and into eternal life. He will lead you and me.

All that is wrapped into the title of this Sunday, Christ the King. Jesus Christ rules the world because he made it. And he rules our hearts because he bought and paid for them. He fills us with faith and with joy. And he will lead us out of the grave and into eternal life. Admittedly, none of that is anything new. You've heard it all before. But on this, the last Sunday of the church year, it's worth remembering. Next Sunday, we'll start all over again. We'll repeat what we've done year after year. And God willing, we will grow in our understanding of who Jesus is and what he's done for us. And one day, we will stand next to him in his kingdom and we won't need anyone to teach us about Jesus anymore. We will see him as he is. Amen.