

SUPERIORITY OF THE PRE-INCARNATE CHRIST

The supremacy of Christ: the title itself seems completely out of step with the way many people are thinking today. In this era, pluralism has become a dominant philosophy, Eastern religions have adopted a strong missionary stance, New Age thinking is making huge inroads into different spheres of western society, and the evangelical movement seems to have lost its cutting-edge commitment to the radical truth of the Gospel. Many strongly disagree with the Christianity's claim to the uniqueness and superiority of Christ. In this presentation, I will seek to demonstrate the supremacy of Jesus Christ (specifically his pre-incarnate superiority), by appealing to the content of the Bible. I will attempt to show that who Jesus was before his incarnation leaves us with no choice but to affirm that he is supreme.

As I attempt that, I will endeavor to establish that Jesus Christ existed as God before his incarnation. If Jesus did not pre-exist as God, he is not supreme overall. Then where did Jesus come from? A person reading the Bible for the first time could easily finish the last verses of Malachi and begin to read Matthew only to feel somewhat blindsided by the sudden announcement and birth of Jesus, called Immanuel, "God with us". From one page to the next, the Messiah appears out of the blue, as it were, the divine abruptly breaking into human affairs.

Of course, this is only a perception by some, not reality. In fact, many Jews of that day, watching the signs of the times, were expecting the Messiah at any time. First-century AD Judea was full of Messianic expectation and fervor. Every few years, a new Messianic candidate would arise, gather followers, revolt against the Romans, and be executed. For instance, in Acts 5: 36 - 37, Theudas and Judas, the Galilean, at separate times, revolted against the Romans. They gathered many people but they were killed and their followers were

dispersed and came to nothing. People thought they were the Messiah but time proved their expectations wrong. There were more who revolted against the Roman rule. One among many examples is found in Acts 21: 38, where Apostle Paul was asked, “Are you not the Egyptian who recently stirred up a revolt and led the four thousand men of the assassins out into the wilderness?” Between the death of Herod the Great in 4 BC and the suppression of the Bar Kochba Revolt in AD 135, as many as eighteen men, including Jesus of Nazareth, were acclaimed Messiah in the region of Roman Judea.

In the midst of this period, the apostle writes in Galatians 3: 24, ““Therefore the law was our tutor to bring us to Christ,” a principle suggesting that the Old Testament is a guide in preparation for Messiah. In this context, it implies that the Old Testament is full of references, allusions, prophecies, and instructions concerning the true Christ. In other words, far from being mostly silent about Jesus, the Old Testament is a vital source of revelation about Him! Jesus verifies this Himself in Luke 24: 44, "These are the words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things must be fulfilled which were written in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms concerning Me" (Acts 18: 28; 28:23).

Most people realize that the Old Testament contains many prophecies of Christ, and in fact, Jesus fulfilled about 300 individual prophetic details. More broadly, however, the Old Testament chronicles, not just prophecies of His coming, but also the historical activities of the One who became Jesus Christ. Unlike other humans, Jesus was not a created Being but God the Word who "became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:1, 14). In short, He pre-existed as God—with all that entails—before His physical life and ministry.

In the famous passage in Philippians 2:5-8, Paul declares:

. . . Jesus Christ, . . . being in the form of God, did not consider it [a thing to be grasped] to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

Clearly, Paul believes that Jesus had existed as a divine Being before His birth, and that He volunteered to divest Himself of much of His glory, power, and prerogatives to become a lowly human being and to die to redeem humanity from its sins. Moreover, the apostle asserts in other places that the pre-incarnate Christ was Creator of all things (I Corinthians 8:6; Colossians 1:16; Hebrews 1:2), that He led Israel through the wilderness (I Corinthians 10:1-4), and that, as "Melchizedek, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God, . . . [He] met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings and blessed him" (Hebrews 7:1-3).

Did Jesus makes similar claims about Himself—that He had existed as God before His birth to Mary? Yes, many times! The Synoptic Gospels—Matthew, Mark, and Luke—contain many claims of divinity and pre-existence, though few of them are explicit. In Matthew 12:8, He proclaims, "For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath," equating Himself with the Creator, who "rested on the seventh day" and rendered it holy (Genesis 2:1-3; Exodus 20:11). When Jesus drove out the moneychangers, He claims the Temple to be "My house" (Matthew 21:13). In lamenting over Jerusalem, He grieves over how He wanted to comfort and protect the people "often" throughout history, but they resisted (Matthew 23:37). After the scribes argue, "Who can forgive sins but God alone?" Jesus specifically says, ". . . the Son of Man has power on earth to forgive sins," a not-so-subtle declaration of His divinity, which He backs up with an astounding miracle of healing – healing of the paralytic (Mark 2:7, 10-12). In Luke 10:18, He tells His disciples, "I saw Satan fall like lightning from

heaven," referring to an event that occurred before man was created (Isaiah 14:12; Ezekiel 28:12-16). Later, under arrest and facing the Sanhedrin, He answers the question, "Are You then the Son of God?" with a firm, "You rightly say that I am" (Luke 22:70).

In contrast, the gospel of John proclaims the divine nature of Christ from its opening proclamation: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). John shows Jesus doing little to obscure His divinity. Before the first chapter ends, He is acknowledged as "the Son of God" and "the King of Israel" (verse 49), and He Himself declares, "Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man" (verse 51). When in John 5:17 Jesus asserts, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working," the Jewish authorities "sought all the more to kill Him, because He . . . said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God" (verse 18). In John 5:26, He claims to have "life in Himself," that is, inherent life as ever-living God. He informs the Jews that He knew Abraham, who "rejoiced to see My day" (John 8:56), and when they protest that He was far too young, He announces, "Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM" (verse 58), taking upon Himself the divine name of the Eternal God. Later, He tells His disciples, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9), meaning that Jesus is "the express image" of the Father (Hebrews 1:3). In His final prayer with the disciples, He asks, "And now, O Father, glorify Me . . . with the glory which I had with You before the world was" (John 17:5).

These few examples only scratch the surface of the Bible's claims to the divinity and pre-existence of Jesus, hence proving that he is supreme. Our salvation, in fact, depends on it, for if He were merely human, His death would be insufficient to pay for others' sins, even though He never sinned. However, if He were more than human—say, the Creator of all things—His sinless death

would be priceless, more than enough to atone for the sins of all humanity for all time. Only the sacrificial death of the blameless Creator God makes redemption possible, and only His resurrection to life makes salvation and eternal life available to the called and chosen (Romans 3:21-26; 5:6-11). For this, we can truly be thankful.

The Lord Jesus Christ existed from eternity, as a distinct Person in the Godhead; that previous to His assumption of human nature, He dwelt in a state of divine and ineffable glory. Macleod writes, “He existed before the creation of all things, and before His birth as a man in Bethlehem. His existence as a man was continuous with His earlier existence as a heavenly (divine) being . . . The Word who dwelt among us is the same as the Word who was with God. The Christ who is found in form as a man is the very one who previously existed in the form of God. The Christ who lives in poverty is the One who, previously, was rich”. Further, Oswald Sanders also wrote, “If he was not preexistent, He cannot be God, and if He is not God, He cannot be Creator and Redeemer.” And I would add “If he was not a redeemer, he is not supreme, because his redeeming act separates him from all other acclaimed gods and goddesses.” In John 15: 5, Jesus Christ in his high-priestly prayer uttered, “And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed.” In this prayer of Jesus, his own self-consciousness of his pre-existence is manifest. Ryle paraphrases this passage very well;

“Father, my earthly work being now finished, I ask to be restored to that heavenly glory which in an unspeakable manner I had with Thee, as One of the co-equal and undivided Trinity, long before this world existed. The period of my humiliation and self-imposed weakness being accomplished, let Me once more share Thy glory, and sit with Thee on Thy throne as I did before My incarnation”

The Lord Jesus petitions that the Father would glorify Him. He seeks this glorification already having glorified the Father through His earthly ministry in carrying out the work the Father had given Him to do, which will include His dying on the Cross. In this prayer the doctrine of our Lord's supreme pre-existence "shines through . . . unambiguously." Few points can be inferred here:

- He seeks to be glorified with the Father with a particular glory- that glory He had with the Father before the world was. Before the world was, Jesus had glory with the Father. It is this glory which He seeks as He enters into the final and climactic stage of His earthly ministry. This glory is tied to His suffering on the Cross. "The mercy for which He prays is, a manifestation of that divine glory [and majesty] which, as essentially one with the Father, He possessed before the world was . . . a return to that condition of glory (in the presence of the Father) which He possessed before the world existed." It was not new glory He sought but an "original" glory which, since His incarnation, had been veiled and covered.
- That Jesus had glory before the world was is expressly declared in our text. It was a constantly possessed glory. Our text literally reads, "the glory which I was having." It was a glory which He constantly possessed. There was not a time when He did not possess glory. It was a glory He had before the world came into being. It was a "prehistoric" glory, pre-incarnate glory - eternal glory. By this prayer the Lord Christ declares His own pre-existence before there was ever a world.
- It was a personal glory. It was a glory which He had "with" the Father, not "from" Him. It was a co-ordinate and not a subordinate glory. It was an equal glory, a shared glory, a united glory.
- It was a perfect glory. As being a glory with the Father it was therefore a divine glory. It is nothing less that "the glory of the Godhead, the eternal,

divine glory that extends back into all eternity.” It is uncreated glory. Uncommunicated glory. Unlimited glory, Unending glory. Some of this glory “shined” out during the days of His humiliation, but for the most part was eclipsed. In Isaiah 6 the prophet describes a vision he had of the Lord “sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple.” It is a vision of the King of glory in glory, surrounded by angelic beings calling out, “Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of His glory.” Yet John tells us in 12:41 that what Isaiah saw was Christ’s glory!

The writer of Hebrews, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, teaches that Jesus Christ is superior to angels. The spiritual condition of the Hebrews is parallel to the spiritual condition of many today. They were being tempted to give up their Christian witness, and what they needed, and what many today need, is a fresh glimpse of the Lord Jesus Christ. So, in this section the author shows us the superiority of Jesus Christ over the angels (Hebrews 1: 5 – 9).

Why better than angels? Angels were supremely exalted in the Jewish mind. The Mosaic Law had been mediated by angels. The Jewish people revered and esteemed angels higher than any other created being. So, if the writer is to show that Jesus is a better mediator with a better covenant, he must prove that Jesus Christ is better than angels. Though there may seem many difficulties in this passage, the main emphasis of the passage is clear; Jesus Christ is far superior to the angels.

Jesus Christ is superior to all religions. Man strives by various means and methods to achieve spirituality, peace and piety, but no works or effort by man can achieve them because man is dead spiritually, at enmity with his Creator, and all his efforts at righteousness are as filthy rags before God. Only through being justified by faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ can a person be

made alive spiritually, gain peace with God and have the indwelling Holy Spirit bring about true righteous living.

Jesus is superior to any other so-called gods. Swami Vivekananda, an admirer of Christ wrote;

Jesus Christ was God – the personal God become man. He has manifested himself many times in different forms and these alone are what you can worship. God in His nature is not to be worshipped. Worshipping such God would be nonsense. We have to worship Christ, the human manifestation, as God. You cannot worship anything higher than the manifestation of God. If I, as an Oriental have to worship Jesus of Nazareth, there is only one way, that is, to worship him as God and nothing else.

How wonderful that Jesus is acknowledged as God and worthy of worship. The pre-incarnate Jesus is superior to all other religion founder, because Jesus has no beginning in time and space. The Bible teaches that Jesus existed eternally and had no chronological origin. No other religious leader can make such a claim. Gautama Buddha (560- 480 B.C.), Mohammed (A.D. 570 – 632), Confucius (551 – 479 B.C.), and all other religious founders began their life at birth. Jesus already existed, as deity in heaven, prior to His earthly birth.

I pray along with John Piper (Piper's prayer as he preached on the supremacy of Christ) that "you will press on to know the supremacy of Christ. The supremacy of his deity; equal with God the Father in all of His attributes. The radiance of his glory and the exact image of His nature. The supremacy of his eternality that makes the mind want to explode with the imponderable thought that Jesus Christ never had a beginning. He is simply there, absolute reality with which we reckon must rise to the supremacy of his eternality, while all the universe, including this building and your body, and this earth and all the galaxies are fragile, contingent like a shadow in comparison to the substance of

Jesus Christ. We must know the supremacy of his never changing constancy, oh to have virtues that never change. His character and commitment is constant yesterday, today and forever. And Let us know the supremacy of his knowledge of our Lord. We must know the supremacy of his wisdom that has never been perplexed by any problem what so ever, nor can he be counselled by any person or any being in the universe. We must know the supremacy of his authority. We must know the supremacy of his providence without which not a single bird in the extended reaches of the amazon forest has ever fallen off of any limb, and without which not one hair turns white or black. We must know the supremacy of his word, which upholds the universe by the word of his power, all the galaxies, molecules, atoms, and subatomic realities nobody has yet dreamed of down there where no one has yet looked. We must know the supremacy of his power to walk on water and cleanse lepers and heals the lame and open the eyes of the blind and open the ears of the deaf and cause storms to cease and with two words to raise the dead “Lazarus, COME FORTH!” We must know the supremacy of his purity. He never sinned. He never had one second of bad attitude or sinful lust. We must know the supremacy of his trust worthiness. He never breaks a promise! He always keeps his words, absolutely without fail. We must know the supremacy of his love. There’s no other who has died for the sin of the world. He died for us while we were yet sinners. We must know the supremacy of his wrath. One day it will explode, and all who have rejected him will call for rocks to crush their brain lest they have to face the wrath of the lamb. We must know the supremacy of his grace, which gives to the spiritually dead rebels like us –Life, awakens faith in hell-bound haters of God, and justifies the ungodly with his own righteousness.” The incarnate Christ reigns eternally supreme over all!