



The Pulpit Ministry of

LONDONDERRY FREE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH



Sermon Series:

THE PRE-EMINENCE OF CHRIST

#1: Why Does Jesus Deserve The Pre-Eminence?

**The Name of Jesus is so sweet,
I love its music to repeat;
It makes my joys full and complete,
The precious Name of Jesus ...**

... is the enthusiastic song of the saints of the Lord.

But it travels further than this.

That the name of Jesus is the widest known, the best loved, in fact the outstanding name in the world, not even the most ardent, most bitter atheist can deny.

From every quarter of this globe ascend songs of gladness from the lips of those whose minds have been enlightened and souls captivated with the knowledge of that Name.

It is, of course, the *“Name that is above every name.”*

- Printing presses around this world are constantly printing books and tracts of which He is the theme;
- Poets sing His praises through the means of sacred poetry and solemn hymns;
- Web pages are filled with entries about Him: a quick check today on Google returned the information that 167,000,000 pages feature a mention of this Name;
- On a daily basis, tens of thousands of preachers and teachers go forward into the world to proclaim His name and speak of His dying love – indeed, to join in chorus with Charles Wesley who exclaimed:

**Thee I shall constantly proclaim,
Though earth and hell oppose;
Bold to confess Thy glorious Name
Before a world of foes.**

**Happy, if with my latest breath
I may but gasp His Name,
Preach Him to all and cry in death,
“Behold, behold the Lamb!”**

- Martyrs endured patiently in dungeons, or triumphed in the flames, and innumerable companies of people have

suffered the loss of all things for love of His Name. There is no area of human activity in which the Name of Jesus is not the one of greatest influence and power for righteousness and goodness.

- Even in the realm of science, men of God who were pathfinders and trailblazers in many scientific disciplines confessed Him as the One who taught them to love truth and hate hypocrisy, error, superstition and deception, to judge righteous judgment - for it is on this basis alone that true science can proceed.

J.J. Thomson, famous English scientist who is the 'Father of electronics,' once said that the more he studied science, his studies only served to, "*... deepen the feeling, the truth of which is emphasised by every advance in science, that 'Great are the Works of the Lord'.*"

It is a tremendous claim that **Colossians 1:18** makes concerning Christ: ***"And He is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all [things] He might have the preeminence."***

Nothing noble, beautiful or wholesome exists in this world but it must ascribe to Him the first place in influence and power.

He is the outstanding Figure in History - the greatest Person in the world of men. To use His own words (**John 8:12**), He is, "*the light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.*"

Is there any rival?

Who will step forward to dispute the fact that even now in this sin-saturated, evolution-greedy, atheist-embracing world that rejects Christ's claim, He remains the First, the Pre-eminent One?

What wretched Goliath do the modern Philistines have to put up against Him?

I am not sure where this song fits in the Christian genre, but I understand its sentiments:

He's the all-time undefeated, undisputed, Champion of Love!

But we can reach higher - and dig deeper in this topic. Christ's pre-eminence - His place as the first and the highest in all things in this world is assured - but there are glories far beyond what we have been speaking about in which our Lord stands out pre-eminent and alone.

[1] THE DIGNITY OF HIS PERSON.

Martin Luther insisted: *"On earth is not His equal."*

John Bunyan chimed in with, *"This One hath not His fellow"* – for though Christ is spoken of as "God's fellow" in **Zechariah 31:7**, and is not ashamed to call His people His brethren, yet no-one can claim as He did that he is both God and man.

This was the outstanding wonder in all of God's purposes for this world - that, in order to save lost sinners, He

determined that He who was Himself God should be revealed in flesh and should be found in fashion as a man.

Well does Paul describe this as the great, incontrovertible “*mystery of godliness*” (1 Timothy 3:16).

Throughout the history of our habitation on this planet, a long list of great men of this world have won fame and renown; their names are remembered, honoured and beloved; ... but all of these must give way to Him who is more than man – the Lord of glory, the Heir of all things, the Creator and Upholder of the mighty universe!

[2] THE PURITY OF HIS LIFE.

In a world of sinners, Christ was alone without sin.

The holiest of men always have been the first to acknowledge their own sinfulness, and lament over how far short they fall of the glory of God. They know, from personal experience:

- “*There is no man that sinneth not*” (1 Kings 8:46);

- “*In many things we offend all*” (James 3:2).

But ... Christ Jesus is “*without sin.*” Though meek and lowly in heart, He never confessed to sin nor apologised for failure. He only could face His fellow-men, plus the great accuser of the brethren, and charge, “*Which of you convinceth me of sin?*”

His character displayed the perfection of virtue - He had everything in perfect balance.

Rev. George Goodman uses this illustration: *“If a circular disc be painted with the colours of the rainbow in equal proportions, when it is spun round it will appear white, for the rainbow is but a pure white light split by a prism into its component hues. So in Christ all the virtues are in such perfect proportion that as seen in Him none stands out above others; all are merged in perfect white – the beauty of holiness.”*

[3] THE NOBILITY OF HIS DEATH.

Many men and women have laid down their lives in a noble cause. Their deaths are glorious, their memory precious.

But which of them can we set alongside that solemn scene on Calvary?

There was in that death something with which no other could compare. It was a substitutionary sacrifice for sin, such as only a Sinless Victim could offer.

Unlike other men who came into this world to live, the Lord Jesus Christ came to die - as **Hebrews 9:26** puts it, *“to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself.”*

That dark scene was always before Him ... and when the last hour was come, Jesus voluntarily laid down His life. No man took it from Him, except in so far as they fulfilled the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God.

It was not the patient endurance of physical torture, or the example of suffering wrongfully, or the tenderness of the seven famous sayings from the cross, that invested it with its preeminence ... rather, it was the sacrificial character that did it! Christ's death - featuring the Just dying in the place of the unjust that He might bring us to God, gives the cross this unchallengeable pre-eminence.

"Christ died for our sins."

**O Love divine, what hast thou done!
The immortal God hath died for me!
The Father's co-eternal Son
Bore all my sins upon the tree.
Th' immortal God for me hath died:
My Lord, my Love, is crucified!**

Mohammed is often quoted as a rival to Christ.

What about his death?

Mohammed died in a warlike camp, while he was making preparation for an unprovoked attack on a tribe that had done him no wrong, but he was determined to force his religion upon them at the point of the sword. However, before his bloodthirsty purpose could be carried out, he died in the arms of one of his many wives.

When we turn to Calvary, we come to an entirely different scene. We catch the words, *"Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do"* - as the Son of God prayed for those who slew Him.

[4] THE VICTORY OF HIS RESURRECTION.

In this Jesus most certainly has the pre-eminence, because He is the first who had risen triumphantly from the grave, having beaten death by his own power!

There are several cases whose details are noted in Scripture of those who were called back from death ... but this was only temporary. They died again; death would not yield up its claim on them.

But our Lord Jesus Christ is the First Begotten from the dead, because death discovered it to be impossible to hold Him!

**Death cannot keep its Prey, Jesus my Saviour;
He tore the bars away, Jesus my Lord!**

**Up from the grave He arose,
With a mighty triumph o'er His foes,
He arose a Victor from the dark domain,
And He lives forever, with His saints to reign.
He arose! He arose!
Hallelujah! Christ arose!**

He will not die again, for death has no more dominion over Him. Christ is risen - and become the firstfruits of them that sleep (**1 Corinthians 15:20**).

[5] THE VERACITY OF HIS TEACHING.

Many moralists and teachers have populated this earth, trying to raise man to a higher level by their efforts, but

none has appeared whose doctrine was perfect. In the middle of some good statements, they poured much falsehood - and their best efforts were so much mere theory, often false sentiment and untrustworthy exaggeration.

We could not sell ourselves out to any of them!

But the Lord Jesus cuts a stark contrast to each of them, and stands our pre-eminent in this that no word He ever spoke can be challenged as untrue, or weak in expression, or unreliable as a guide in life.

Authority is stamped on His every syllable. Grace and truth exist in perfect balance in everything that He said and did.

“Search those words such as never man spake and you will find nothing light or careless; nothing sentimental or foolish; nothing uncertain or hesitating; nothing proud or puffed up; in bold denunciation evil nothing cruel or unfair; in gracious words to the sinful, no excuse for or palliation of sin.”

In His words ...

- what comfort for the weary,
- what solemn warning to the rebel,
- what hope for the sinful,
- what promises for the seeker,

- what assurance for the believer,
- what wise counsel for direction in life,
- what prospects for the future!

The beauty of Jesus' words are unparalleled in literature; the convicting, or comforting, power of them cannot be found in other writings! Browse through the myriad books of this world and see if any of them can hold a candle to the pre-eminent teachings of Christ!

[6] THE BEAUTY OF HIS SALVATION.

The promise was made prior to His birth: "*He shall save His people from their sins*" (**Matthew 1:21**).

Just think of it ... what a unique and outstanding claim that is! Did any man ever propose to save someone else from their sins?

- Mothers would willingly die if by their death they could reclaim a sorry prodigal back to the path of purity.
- Fathers would gladly pay their last penny if salvation could be purchased for a wayward child.

But it cannot be done.

In this act, Jesus most certainly has the pre-eminence!

And the claim is true. Thousands of millions since the day when the angel brought this message to Mary have testified of Jesus that He has saved them from their sins.

How hopeless this sin-stricken world would be if there were no Saviour for sinners!

A.T. Pierson (for some time a successor of C.H. Spurgeon at the Metropolitan Tabernacle, London) put it like this:

How helpless and hopeless we sinners had been, If He never had loved us till cleansed from our sin!

It is Christ - and no-one else - who comes to our rescue and redeems us.

He Himself made these quite extraordinary claims:

- in **John 10:9**: *“I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved”*

- in **John 14:6**: *“I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me.”*

Who else could give this invitation to his fellow-men (**Matthew 11:28**): *“Come unto me, all [ye] that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest”?*

On the lips of any of us, that would be outrageous nonsense!

And what about this even more extraordinary claim, in **John 11:25**: *“I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live”?*

But One walked our earth who uttered these words in all sincerity, gentleness and faithfulness. We must ascribe to Him the pre-eminence!

[7] THE GLORY OF HIS HEADSHIP.

A headline in the Daily Telegraph today stated, 'Gordon Brown's invite to Pope Benedict XVI leaves Church anxious about costs' ... a reference to an impending visit of the Pope of Rome to the British Isles.

“Concern has been heightened by memories of the first papal visit to this country, in 1982, which left the Church heavily in debt.”

My concern, in addition to any potential bill the taxpayers of this country will be forced to foot for the 'pleasure' of the Pope's company on our islands (I jest!), is the fact that this impostor comes here, as he does everywhere, as the Head of the Church, the Vicar of Christ on earth. He is no such thing!

When our Lord walked this earth during the days of His humiliation (no private jet, top-notch security, or £20 million bill to pay as a result of His visit!), as a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief, He declared (**Matthew 16:18**), *“I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”*

He foretold its course back then ... *“a stormy, persecuted one, hated of all men, yet overcoming and spreading to all parts of the earth, until a company that no man can number should be gathered out of every tribe and kindred and nation, forming an invisible spiritual*

organism of which Jesus Himself would be the unseen yet living Head; in which the Holy Spirit whom He would send from the Father should abide as in a temple, sanctifying and guiding it in its course in the world.”

This is what is happening in this world today!

A company of redeemed and ransomed people, breaking through the boundaries of nationality and language, confessing Christ's Name, and walking in love and good works before God - yet persecuted and downtrodden, but conquering in His Name over everything that is wheeled out against them.

In this, as in everything else, we learn that Jesus has the pre-eminence.

“And He is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all [things] He might have the preeminence.”

And, God willing, over the course of the incoming weeks - quite likely throughout 2010 - we will be examining different aspects of this Pre-eminent One.

May our desire be:

**More about Jesus let me learn,
More of His holy will discern;
Spirit of God, my teacher be,
Showing the things of Christ to me.**

[Message preached by: Ian Brown / January 2010]