

The Prison Epistles 07 col.1:18-Christ Is #1

by David Clifford

The sermon emphasizes the preeminence of Christ and the believer's position in Christ, highlighting the importance of personal faith in Christ for a genuine Christian experience.

Duration: 53:22

Topics: "Christian Living", "Submission To God"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of putting one's heart into living according to the word of God. He discusses the concept of wives submitting to their husbands, husbands loving their wives, children obeying their parents, and servants obeying their masters, all for the sake of the Lord Jesus. The preacher also highlights the significance of continuity in faith as a proof of one's relationship with God. He mentions the concern of many young people in churches who may not have a personal experience with God, as evidenced by their lack of commitment and tendency to move away when given freedom. The sermon concludes with a reading from the book of Colossians, emphasizing the redemption and power found in Jesus Christ.

Transcript

I always thought that in heaven Peter was going to be the choir master, but I'm going to put a word in for Brother Andrew. On the first Saturday evening I was here, last Saturday evening, remember the chairman, our dear brother the chairman, said that I would come to the front and introduce myself. Nobody rebuked me for not doing that.

I didn't introduce myself and I haven't done so yet. I don't suppose I shall by the end of the week. It's very difficult for an Englishman to introduce himself, you know.

If I went over to England and said, I'm David Clifford, they'd say, so what? They would really. But I'm getting into your good American ways, I think that's one of the good ways. For instance, there was one ship went down somewhere in one of the islands of the Pacific and they knew that some had been rescued or found their way to one of the islands nearby and after some months they found four men on the island.

And the Scotsman in the party, they had difficulty in finding him, he was around the other side somewhere exploring. You know how Scotsmen explore, don't you? Apologies to any Scotsman. And the American, they couldn't help seeing the American who's right in the middle of the island trying to build a skyscraper.

But the two Englishmen were still sitting on the beach looking at one another, waiting to be introduced. Yes. Well, you know, we're very, very strict on etiquette in our country and that's why some people think we're a bit stuffy in some ways.

But I'm very glad to come to your country from time to time and sort of let my hair down and be natural. Can't be sharp. Don't be flat, just be natural.

So that's what we're trying to do. Well now, we're going to read together the word and a portion again from Colossians, Paul's letter to the Colossians. Verse 13, the end of verse 13 of chapter 1. His dear son, God's dear son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sin, who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature.

For in him were all things created that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones or dominions or principalities or powers, all things were created by him and for him. And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. 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.

For it pleased the Father that in him should all fullness dwell. I think perhaps we ought to continue the reading. I was going to miss out some verses.

It's difficult to miss them out in this connection tonight. And having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself. By him, I say, whether they be things in earth and things in heaven.

And you that were sometime alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouable in his sight. If ye continue in the faith, grounded and settled, be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven, whereof I, Paul, am made a minister, who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church, whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation, the stewardship of God, which is given to me for you to fulfill the word of God, to fully preach the word of God, even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, that now is made manifest to his saints, whom God would make known what is the richness of the glory of this ministry among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory, whom we preach, warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom, that we may present every man perfect, spiritually mature in Christ Jesus, whereunto I also labour, striving according to his workings, which worketh in me mightily. The beginning of chapter three, please.

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth, for you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall he also appear with him in glory.

Verse 23. Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men. May God bless to us all the public reading of the Holy Scripture, and now our meditation upon it.

I feel I must recapitulate a little for the sake of those who haven't been with us so often. Indeed, maybe some are here for the first time tonight, in my meetings anyway. Delighted to see you.

And we have been discussing together some of the main themes of the prison epistle, Paul's letters to various Christian gatherings and people from prison in Rome, A.D. 62 and A.D. 63. We noticed when we gave the introduction that the Apostle Paul went to prison in Rome in the will of God. There was a lot of blessing through this, and there always is.

No matter where you are, as long as you're in the will of God, there should be a lot of blessing. And there was a lot of blessing for him, a lot of blessing for others, and a lot of blessing for us through the fact that while he was there in prison in Rome, he, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit of God, penned these letters. Four of them have come down to us and have been preserved by the Spirit of God for us.

And we have been looking at some of the reasons why Paul wrote these letters, and some of the main themes in them. And we have found that in the letter to the Ephesians there is a lot of doctrine. About 21 major Bible doctrines are seen in this short letter to Ephesians alone.

And there is so much about the Church and her union with her Lord, so much about believers and their position in Christ, as well as their practical way of living, and what it should be because they are in Christ and joined to him eternally. Then we have seen in the letter to the Philippians that the Apostle loved them dearly, and they loved him. They had been having fellowship with him from the first day they met him by the riverside in Philippi in Macedonia, where he went in answer to the Macedonian call one night, got in the morning and immediately obeyed the word of the Lord through this man in this vision.

And they gave him some fellowship that first day, and they have been showing him fellowship ever since. Sent a love offering, and he was writing to thank them for that offering, and especially to commend to them young Epaphroditus who brought the gift, and young Timothy who was quite a mature Christian, and had a great burden in his heart for the blessing of the Philippian Christians. And this is what we were talking about last night in relation to Philippians chapter 2 and verse 4. Look every man also on the interest of others, and let this mind for others be in you, this unselfish mind, according to verse 4 in the context be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.

Because he was thinking of others, and he left the realms of glory with you in his mind, and not only came to his sin-cursed earth because he loved you, but he died to save you in his matchless grace. Well, now this morning we were thinking about the person and the work of our Lord Jesus. After giving a formal introduction to the letter to the Colossians, we were talking about what Paul, by the Spirit, was saying about the Lord Jesus, and his glorious person, and his wonderful passion, and his preeminent.

Now, we did not speak about his preeminence, because that is our message this evening, with the help of God's Holy Spirit. You remember, we sought to sum up the second part of the first chapter under the headings of these three parties here. Verse 13, his dear son, his passion and person and preeminence, and you, in verse 21, their alienation, and now their reconciliation.

So, we came around and we met Dr. Dobson, and we saw the property, and we thought it was very good. The next time I visited it, I noticed that we were making up our minds, in the will of God, with his provision to take him for the commencement of the work. This was 26 years ago, 27 years ago.

I remember that we had a look round the garden, and we noticed that there were a lot of daffodils. It was March, and there were thousands of daffodils out, and it was quite a sight. So, I took in this right arm a big bunch of daffodils, and I went over the bottom road into the kitchen garden, and I found there was a lot of rhubarb coming up.

So, I brought in this arm a lot of rhubarb, and I put both bunches in the cart, took them home to my wife, and I said to her, there you are my dear, that is the earnest of your inheritance. And it proved to be absolutely correct, because the next year she was already in there picking her own rhubarb as much as she wanted, and all the daffodils that she could put in the vases that she had. Now, the Holy Spirit has been given to us, and the Holy Spirit is the earnest, the foretaste of what we are to get in a coming day.

Now, that's one of my asides that I was speaking about this morning. I'm trying to think how I was let off the beaten track to get on that subject. But, I was saying to you that we are able to live the Christian life.

We should live the Christian life because we're in Christ, if we're Christians at all. And we're able to live the Christian life because Christ is in, if we're in Christ. The same the other day when the sponge is in the water, the water's in the sponge.

And because Christ is in, that means to say His Spirit is in our hearts, we have the enabling, the sufficiency. All that we need is found in Him for our lives every day. And it's marvellous that these Gentiles who now were in Christ, and Christ was in them, which to them was the hope of glory, and their enabling for their present Christian life, they were once, according to verse 21, they were once alienated, and enemies in their minds to God.

Alienation, you see, is judicial. It is a dismissal from God because of sin and rebellion. And that's where they were.

They were without status, and they were without hope in the world, but now they are not only in Colossae, but they are in Christ, and everything that that means. So, not only His dear son, but and you. And notice what he says there.

And you were not only alienated, but now reconciled. And a definition of reconciliation would be being brought back into the blessings of relationship. And they'd been brought back to God.

They were now sons and daughters of the living God reconciled. And not only so, they were justified, this is what it says in verse 2, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouvable in His sight. Do you know that you, believing in Christ, in one of these days would be presented to God absolutely unblameable and holy, and accounted as though you had never sinned? Because all those who believe in Christ, God justifies them.

He is just, and yet the justifier of the unjust. If the unjust just simply believe in Jesus, and the blessing of clear vindication from the holy God to guilty sinners is because of His death. In verse 22, we owe so much to the shed blood, to the death of Christ, His life laid down.

Indeed, we owe everything to this. On the golden streets of heaven all men hope to walk some day, yet so many are not willing to accept the living way. And while others build on good works or opinions, if they may, hallelujah, I'm depending on the blood.

In the soul-cleansing blood of the Saviour, I've been washed in the crimson flood. Though the world may say there is hope some other way, I'm depending on the blood. We have redemption through His blood, having made peace through the blood of His cross, reconciled in the body of His flesh through death.

Notice in verse 23, it says, if you continue in the faith grounded and settled. Now I understand we believe, if you don't, I do, if you'll accept my apology for putting it that way, in the eternal security of the believer.

He will never, never let those who trust in Him go.

He will never lose their hand. He saves them eternally with eternal life. They are partakers of the divine nature without becoming divine, but they will live forever in Christ.

And this, of course, isn't a conditional if at the beginning of verse 3. You see, continuity is the proof of reality. And if they did not continue in the faith grounded and settled, and if they were moved away from the hope of the gospel, this would be a sure sign that they were not the Lords at all. And this is what we have to face in America today.

I know in the few months that I've been here, and my nine or ten appearances in this country, I know what the position is. And same as it is in our country, there are many young men and women in our churches and assemblies today who have not personal faith in Christ, having not really had a personal acquaintance and meeting and experience with Him. Now this is proved by the fact that many of them, when they get their liberty, they go to another state or to a college or go to another country, they just leave the assembly, they leave the church and give up their profession, showing that they've just been brought up in a Christian home without having a Christian experience themselves.

Let us face the fact and lead our boys and girls to Christ before they leave home. That's our responsibility as parents. Remember Mrs. Zebedee? Well, I call her Mrs. Zebedee.

She was the mother of Zebedee's children. I don't call Mrs. Clifford Mrs. Clifford. I call her other things, of course, but Mrs. Zebedee, you know what she did? She had two sons.

And they were grown-up sons, twenty, twenty-one years of age. She was still in their confidence, talking to them and they to her about spiritual things, about the things that matter most. And do you know what she did? She brought them both to Jesus.

How about that? I hope you can still talk to your boys and girls about the Lord Jesus. And it's your responsibility as a father and mother, not just to send them to Sunday school, but to bring them to Christ in time. So I hope you just go home and lead your boys and girls to the Lord Jesus.

Do that, will you? You can. Lead them to the Saviour tonight. They want to be saved.

They want to be ready for heaven. And this is our responsibility. And that's what Mrs. Zebedee did.

Well now it says, if you continue in the faith grounded in faith, continuity is the fruit of reality. We are longing to see that our boys and girls are genuinely born again by the Spirit of God. And as they go on with the Lord, trying to serve Him.

Not just wanting fun in life, but wanting to serve Jesus in life. Not just out for parties and picnics, but out to glorify Christ in their bodies and spirits which are His. That's the cry in America today, before all our churches and assemblies.

Get the young people to serve the Lord Jesus. Most of them, it seems to me, in our country, it's just the same if not worse. Out for parties and picnics and fun.

Brethren, if we're Christians at all, we are here to put Christ first. And that's our message tonight from this chapter and from this epistle. To put Christ first and glorify Him and serve the Lord Jesus and wait for His coming in that way.

You don't wait for the coming of Christ by just having fun. And so continuity, I say for the third time, continuity is the proof of reality. Well not only His dear Son and you, but I Paul.

This is in verse 23. Here he says, The gospel has been preached to you and to everybody, whereof I, Paul, am made a minister. You'll notice that he's not only a minister of the gospel in verse 23, and a minister of the church in verse 25.

See the last verse of verse 24, which is the church, whereof I am made a minister. But you'll notice also in verse 28, whom we preach. He was a minister of Christ.

Notice it was not what we preached, but after going into such great detail about the glories of the eternal Son of God and about the wonders of His matchless work upon the cross of Calvary, shedding His blood, he didn't say what we preached, he said whom we preached. And he was getting on and it was spiritual advancement when he said, I'm not only a minister, a servant, that's what the word means simply, it's not only a servant of the gospel and a servant of the church, but I am the servant of Christ whom we preach. Now, any man who is a minister of Christ ministers Christ.

I told you the other day what Whitfield used to say, preaching Christ is the greatest means of converting sinners and of building saints. And this is what Paul said, whom we preach. Warning every man and teaching every man in all wisdom that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus.

Well now, you see, later on in Colossians chapter 3 we find that the Lord Jesus is seen as the very life of the believer. The apostle here is continuing with the subject of his dear son and the preeminence of the Lord Jesus. And in chapter 3 he speaks of him being preeminent as the very life of the believer.

Verse 3, For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God, when Christ, who is our light, shall appear. Now, the Lord Jesus, after his resurrection, it's said of him that he revealed himself to his own in another form. Before we go any further today, I want to ask you a very personal question, if I may, in the name of the Lord Jesus your Saviour.

I know that the Lord Jesus has revealed himself to you as your Saviour. He saves you from hell, from the consequences of your sins. Has he ever revealed himself to you in another form? Have you ever known him reveal himself to you as the King of your life? As your Master to serve? As your Lord? Has he revealed himself to you as the very God of your life? And even more, has he ever revealed himself to you as the Light of your life? So that you do not yourself struggle to imitate Jesus, but you rest in Jesus, who is your light, and allow him to live his own life through you, to the praise and glory of his name.

Dr. F.B. Meyer was travelling on a train towards London once, and he saw a very nice gentleman sitting opposite to him, a young fellow, reading that very, very good book, Imitation of Christ, by Thomas Acampis. He got into conversation with the young man, and said, now that's a very nice book you're reading there. He said, it certainly is.

Well, he said, I've read that and I enjoyed it. He said, yes. Well, he said, now listen young fellow, I'm going to show you a better way.

And he told this young man something, although he'd been a Christian for many years, that he'd never known. That God had given Christ, by his Spirit, to indwell his heart and life, to live his own life through him. So that the Christian life was not imitation, but indwelling.

For you have died, you have been crucified with Christ, and that was the end of you. That's all that God thinks of you, and what you can do in the Christian life. He crucified you with Christ.

Now he's given you a new life in his risen Son, and your life is hid with Christ, in God and Christ who is our light. Your life is the treasure with Christ. He's the treasurer in God, and that is the treasury.

And what a blessing it is, when in experience, Christ is the very life of the believer. So there you see the preeminence of Christ as the life of the believer, and the practice of the Christ life, from verse 5 to verse 16 in chapter 3, the practice of the Christ life. And then, the results of the Christ life as seen in natural relationships.

I don't think we'll ever get to this tonight, so I'll just give you very briefly the idea here, in my own words. Because you see in verse 17, the apostasy, whatsoever you do, in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus. That is for the sake of the Lord Jesus.

And he bears this out again in verse 23, saying something similar. Whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men. Put your heart into it.

And this is what he's saying. Wives submitting for his sake, because it's preeminent in your life. Husbands loving for his sake.

Children obeying for his sake. Do all for the sake of the Lord Jesus. Fathers encouraging for his sake.

Servants obeying for his sake. And the beginning of chapter 4, that verse which really should be at the end of chapter 3, as we all know, Masters giving, that which is just and equal, for his sake. So we see the results of the Christ life, as seen in natural relationships.

Now my burden this evening, probably, I think I'm a long time getting to it, and I'm sure that's quite right, you're right I am, and I apologise for that. My main burden is to show you what the Apostle wanted to show the Christians at Colossae, that because God has made Christ number one in every way, they themselves, the Christians at Colossae, should do the same in their church and in their individual lives. And that's the key phrase then, that in all things he might have the eminence.

So you'll notice he's reminding them, very graciously and tactfully and diplomatically, as we saw this morning. As they were not giving to Christ his rightful place, at least some of them in the church, at Colossae, he said, I want you to know that God has made Christ number one in everything. He goes on to say, we should do the same.

Well now he says, Christ, the Lord Jesus, is pre-eminent in creation. This is verse 15. He is the firstborn of every creature.

Now this is saying exactly this, that he is pre-eminent in creation. How does it say that? Well you see, the word firstborn does not mean born first. It's not talking about the Lord Jesus being born first of all that have been born in God's creation.

It's not saying that at all. But firstborn is a title of dignity and not of time. It is simply saying that he is number one in all creation.

It is not saying that he is a created being in the sense that you and I are. Because in verse 16, it goes on to explain, for in him were all things created. They were created in him, they were created by him, that's at

the end of the verse, and they were created for him.

In him, that's the beginning of creation. By him, that is the means of creation. And for him, that is the end of creation.

So in other words, the Lord Jesus himself was the creator. And this is why he is pre-eminent, he is the firstborn, number one, in all creation. When the apostle says that in all things he might have the pre-eminence, this is what he's saying, that he should be simply number one.

The subject here, really, if I can coin a word, is about the firstness of the Lord Jesus Christ. God has made him first, the pre-eminent one, not only in creation, but in conservance as well. This is verse 17.

He is before all things, and by him all things consist. As it says in another part, he upholds all things by the word of his power. All authority has been given to the Lord Jesus, in heaven and in earth, all power it is in the universe, and by him all things consist.

And if the Lord Jesus took his pierced hand away from the control of the universe, it would collapse tonight. He is overall in the universe. He is number one in conservance as well as creation.

He's also number one in the church. It says in verse 18, he is the head of the body, the church. The Lord Jesus, according to Ephesians 1.22, is the universal head.

God gave him to be head over all things to the church. He is also the head of the local company of believers in 1 Corinthians 12.27. Now, he is the body of Christ and members in particular. He's the head.

Ephesians 5.23 is the head of the whole body, the whole church. Just as the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ is the head of the church. Ephesians 5. And then, of course, he's the head of the individual member in the church, your head and mine, according to 1 Corinthians 11.3, head of every man, that is, every believing man, is Christ himself.

Though there's no doubt at all about it from other scriptures which confirm this is true, the Lord Jesus is preeminent in the church. Then, in the middle of verse 18, it says that he's preeminent in the resurrection as well. He's the firstborn from the dead.

You see, not that he's first to be raised from the dead, or the first of all those that have been raised from the dead or will be raised from the dead, but it's simply saying that in the resurrection, the Lord Jesus is number one. He is preeminent in all things. God has made him so.

And then, later on, of course, in verse 27, Christ in you, the hope of glory. And this is what the apostle wanted to get over to the Colossian Christians, because, you know, they were suggesting, or some of them were, one man in particular, as we noticed in chapter 2 this morning, this one man in particular was trying to bring this doctrine that there were many other intermediaries between sinful man and a Christ Holy God, and the Lord Jesus is only one of many, you know. But how can that be when we read about the Lord Jesus, who was far greater than all the angels in Hebrews 1, being so much better than the angels? He's obtained a more excellent name than they.

Unto which of these other intermediaries has the false doctrine said? Unto which of any of these did God say, Thou art my son, this day have I begotten thee? When he brings his firstborn into the world, his first begotten into the world, he said, let all the angels of God worship him. Now, his angels are ministering

spirits, but to the son he said, Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever. Thou hast anointed him with the oil of gladness above his fellow.

None can with him compare. So the apostle, in a very delicate and gracious way, but definite way, was setting Christ in his rightful place and making him to be, as he indeed is, number one, and making him to be that in the sight of the Colossian Christians to whom he was writing. Now, the Lord Jesus, in Mark chapter 1, comes into Peter's business life, into Peter's church life, and into Peter's home life, all in Mark chapter 1. And, in each case, the Lord Jesus is given the right of way, he is obeyed, he is given the pre-eminence, he is recognized as number one, trusted and followed, and, in every case, the blessing.

The Lord Jesus came into his business life and said, Now you come after me, and I'll make you fishers of men. And he followed the Lord Jesus and thousands turned to the Lord through Simon Peter's teaching. And he came into his church life, and there was some trouble there.

There is sometimes a little bit of trouble in our church life. In this one, there was a man with an evil spirit, but the Lord Jesus came. He was given liberty, given the pre-eminence, and he commanded the unclean spirit to come out of the man.

And peace was restored in the church that day. There was a synagogue in his church. And then, of course, he comes into Peter's home life, because Peter's wife's mother lay sick of a fever.

Peter's wife's mother. Now, there are some of our separated brethren who say that Peter was never married. Well, if he had a mother-in-law without having a wife, he was a very lucky fellow.

And it was Peter's wife's mother who lay sick of the fever. And anon they, that is, Andrew and Peter, tell him Jesus of her, the old lady. And you remember, they opened the door and invited the Savior into the home.

And they made him feel at home. And they gave him the pre-eminence in the home, as Peter did in his business life, and in his church life. And what a blessing! You know what happened? Well, he immediately went to where the old lady was, on the couch, lying sick of a fever.

He lifted her up, and the fever left her. And then we read, "...she ministered unto them." And then we read, "...all the city was gathered together at the door, and then the man with the palsy was brought of four and let down through the roof." You remember all that? And it all happened through this, that Peter gave to the Lord Jesus the pre-eminence. There was a lot of blessing for his mother-in-law.

She was restored. A lot of blessing for him and his brother, and his wife. Because, you see, now, instead of having to work hard doing the cooking, there was she and they, sitting at the table with the Lord Jesus.

And the old lady, having been ill for so long, was only too pleased to do a bit in the kitchen, cook the fish that Peter had been fishing for, and the chips as well. You call them French fries, I know. And bring them in, and they were sitting there with the Lord Jesus.

So they had a blessing, resting, communing with the Saviour. And then, of course, all the city heard that he was there, and they all crowded to come in, and they all heard the gracious words that proceeded out of his mouth, and never man spake like this man. This was the God-man, declaring that the prophet of God, the will of God, and bringing the salvation of God through his atoning death.

And the people were gathered around to hear. And then they brought the man sick of a palsy, and the Lord Jesus didn't see his face. They were healed, but he saw their face.

He didn't see them. They were on the roof, but he saw their face. He seeing their face, said to the sick of the palsy, Son, thy sins thee forgiven thee.

And what a blessing in our church life, and in our home life, and in our business life, when the Lord Jesus is made number one, and given the preeminence. I want you to close this evening by illustrating the key text, that in all things he might have the preeminence in this way. In Luke chapter 22, the Lord Jesus, or they said, the disciples said to the Lord Jesus, where shall we go and prepare the Passover that we might eat it with you? And he said, now you go to the city, and you'll find something rather unusual.

You'll find a man doing some work, because over there the ladies do all the work, you see. The ladies usually carry a pitcher of water in and out of the city gate. Now you'll find a man doing it.

That's the man I want you to follow. If you follow him, he'll go into the city and into a certain house. And when you get into that certain house where he enters, you'll find another man.

He is the good man of the house. And you shall say to the good man of the house, where is the guest room where I shall eat the Passover with my disciples? And he shall show you a large upper room furnished, there made ready. And they went, found the man.

He became, unconsciously, I suppose, their guide, just as you and I unconsciously are guiding others day by day. And I hope we're guiding them the right way. And he led them to this house, and they found the second man who was the good man of the house.

And then they found the upper room, and they found everything ready, just as the Lord Jesus had said unto them. You shall say to the good man of the house. Now, this is an old English word which was used in the year 1611 when this translation was made, which simply means the tenant of the house.

Might have been the owner, but more probably the tenant of the place. He was unconscious. He was living there.

You should say to the good man of the house, where is the guest room? But what I'm trying to show you is this. Although that's all that it needs, it's a very, very good illustration of our key text of the season. Because, you see, this man was a good man in a scriptural sense.

Because only a man who does what he did can be good. Do you know what he did? He got a place ready for the Lord. And it was a preeminent place, the best place, ready for the Lord.

And only those who do that can be good. Now, you see, we can never be good by trying to be good. We can only be good by having the good Saviour come into our hearts and lives and live His own life through us.

When He's given the preeminent place, then outward goodness will result. We read of Barnabas. He was a good man, we read Barnabas was, full of the Holy Ghost and of faith.

Well, of course he was a good man if he was filled with the Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost is the Holy Spirit of Jesus, the God and blessed Saviour. He was filled with Him.

That's why he was good. Now, this is where Luther's maxim comes in. Luther used to say, we never become righteous by doing what is righteous, but having become righteous in His righteousness, we begin to do what is righteous, or use the word good if you like.

We don't become good by doing what is good, but having become good in His goodness, we begin to do what is good, that is, by His life and His goodness within us and from us and through us. So, he said to them, you should say to that good man about this man was a good man in a scriptural sense. He had a place prepared for the Lord.

And David one day said, I will not get sleep to my eyes or slumber to mine eyelids until I have found out a place for the Lord. Habitation for the mighty God of Jacob. God had found a place for him and he was determined to find a place for the Lord.

So, they went, found the good man and they found the room. Now, when this good man was thinking, one day, before this happened, of the possibility of the Master coming his way, perhaps he sat down in the armchair and thought to himself like this, well, John, they say the Saviour is moving around Galilee and Judea and if this is the Saviour of the world and He comes your way, John, you'll have to do something about it. Let Him into the home, find a place for Him, get a room ready for Him.

I know what I'll do, perhaps he said to himself. There is a room down the yard, a shed we used to use for lumber. We'll get that cleaned out and sorted out and whitewashed and we'll put a chair in there and that will do for the Master.

Did he? No, sir! He said, I have a room upstairs which is my best room, it is my biggest room and when the Lord comes, that's the room He's going to have. Some of us are sitting at the table in some fancy place and we're having lots of laughs. All time the Spirit says in all things, Christ must have a pre-eminence, a first place, number one.

They went and found a large upper room and you remember the Lord Jesus said to them, you should say to the good men, where is the guest room? And He shall show you a large upper room furnished. And they went there and what did you think they found? When this man was talking to himself, as all good businessmen do, I'm quite sure he said to himself, or did he? Well, when the Saviour comes this way I'll give Him my best room upstairs. I'm afraid I shan't be able to leave all that furniture in that room.

You see, some of that furniture is good stuff and I wouldn't like the disciples to use that. They'd spoil it. Some of them are only fishing anyway.

So I'll move some of that out and I wouldn't like the Lord Jesus to look in that top drawer on the right. I'll either have to take that whole piece out or else lock that drawer up with a key. Did he say that? No, sir.

All the furniture was left at the Lord's disposal. I'm asking you tonight, is all your furniture at the Lord's disposal? That, in all things, He might have at the end. Well, you say, yes, after last night I went home and I gave my carpet to the Lord and my sideboard to the Lord and my dining table to the Lord, it's all at the Lord's disposal.

Now, did you do that? Well, if you've given what you've missed, my word, what you've really missed. You know you can entertain angels sometimes. They may be elephants with me.

Angels are no heirs. Try giving hospitality to some poor soul who is the Lord, or some servant of the Lord passing by. Anyway, all the furniture, is all your furniture at the Lord's disposal? Now, I'm not asking you to take it literally.

I asked you that last night, but you can take it literally again tonight if you like. I mentioned the other night, in another connection, a friend of mine, Arnold Pickering, one of the editors of Echoes of Service in Bath, England. And, you know, one day, he came home from a Sunday school.

Well, it was actually, I think, from Bible class, which we used to have in those days on a Sunday afternoon at three o'clock. And he said to his wife, he said, I don't feel that I'm doing enough for my young people in the Bible class. Well, she said, you're there regularly every Sunday, you give up all sorts of things to be there.

Well, he said, I only see them one hour in the week, and that's not enough. Well, she said, what are you thinking of doing? Well, he said, I'm thinking of staying here on a Sunday night, instead of going out preaching so much, and inviting them to come to the meeting, and then I'd love to bring them into the home and ask them into the front room. She said, you don't mean the front room, do you? He said, yes.

She said, do you mean on that carpet? Yes. And, you know, she was a bit doubtful, so he said, let's go and have a look at the carpet. So they went on and on and on into the front room, and now he said, I'm going to suggest, my dear, that we kneel on this carpet and give it to the Lord Jesus.

Close to the door. They knelt together and asked the Lord Jesus to take this carpet and make it his own and use it for his Lordship. And then, while they were on their knees, they gave the Lord every bit of furniture in the room as well.

And then, next thunder, the young people came. And he said, it was marvellous how the Lord looked after his own property for months and years. Marvellous how the Lord looked after his own.

So you can take it literally if you like, but that's not really my message to make. I want you to take this. Is all your furniture at the Lord's disposal? Has he got the pre-eminence with you? All your gifts and powers and talents, not for your own selfish ends, not in the general rat race of this materialistic age, for your own engrandisement and home comforts and blessings and bank balances and so on, but all for Jesus, all my beings' lands and powers.

How poor, how spiritually poverty-stricken you will be unless all your furniture is at the Lord's disposal. You remember, in the Song of Solomon, chapter one, he came to her place and she had no fruit to give him. And it was a vineyard and she was ashamed, nothing there.

But in between times she'd learn to follow him and to trust him and to love him and to love him supremely and to give him the first place in her heart and life. And at the end of chapter seven, what a contrast, she took him by the hand and said, come, my beloved, come into the vineyard. In chapter one, she's trying to keep him out.

In chapter seven, she's trying to bring him in. She said, come, let us go into the vineyard. Let us see if the vines flourish.

She knew very well the vines were flourishing. She said, let us see whether the tender grape appear. And then she went on and said, you know, at our gates are all manner of pleasant fruits, new and old, which I

have laid up for thee, O my beloved.

All for Jesus. All my being's ransom power. It's going to make such a difference.

Fruitless nests are fruitful nests when we learn to love the Saviour supremely and give him the eminence. So it says in Luke 22 that they found exactly as the Lord Jesus said to them, they found the man carrying a pitcher of water, they found the good man of the house, they found the upper room, and they found the furniture all intact, ready for the Lord to use. And when the hour was come, he came in with them and tapped them.

And he said, with desire, with desire, so he just tapped over with his little arm. You notice, by, by finding a place for the Lord, they, he found a place for the Lord as well, those who were with the Lord. And it's no good you saying you love the Lord if you don't love your brother.

And if you find a place for the Lord, you should find a place for those who are the Lord as well. All to know something of the breadth of the love of Christ in experience, reaching out to all his help. None excluded, all included, because we're all one in Christ Jesus, bound together in the bundle of life with the Lord our God.

And this church, in this assembly here, is a fine expression of the oneness of the body of Christ, which I love, and I'm sure that all of you have this passion for the heart. And now, they found exactly at his bed, and the Lord Jesus came in when the hour had come. Notice the text says, when the hour had come, he sat down.

You know, in South Wales, in one of the assemblies called Adam's Down, in Cardiff, they have one of these old clocks, very ancient thing, I should say, I get absolutely a lot more at an antique dealer's shop, with a pendulum underneath, and a glass, you see, and the brethren painted a text on the glass, and that's the text they put on there, when the hour had come, he sat down. Now, you might think that's a hint for the preacher to shut up when it's time to get home, but it wasn't a hint for the preacher at all, it was really a hint to the Christians to be there on time, you know, and meet the Lord when it's time for the service. But you know, there's more in the text than that.

When the hour had come, it seemed to me, as I read it, to be the hour for everybody. It was the hour for communion for the disciples with their Lord, and instead of being taken up with Him and giving Him the pre-eminence, they were taken up with themselves, and who was going to be the greatest, and that sort of thing. No wonder the Lord Jesus said, if any men come after Him, they'll let Him deny His self, and take up His cross, and follow Thee.

It was the hour for communion, I didn't make a note of it, and it was the hour for the Lord Jesus, the hour for sacrifice. He said, for this purpose came I unto this hour. He went out from His upper room and gave Himself into the hands of simple men who crucified Him, nailing Him to the tree, and He came into the world for that particular hour.

When the hour had come, He was ready and not found wanting, but it was another hour. It was the hour for the good man of the house. The hour in His life He would never forget.

When He prepared His best room, His first place for the Master, gave Him the pre-eminence, and all the furniture at the Master's disposal, and when the hour had come, He came in and sat down. You will never forget it tonight. You will thank God for all eternity for tonight, if tonight you decide in the quietness of your

own heart to make Jesus number one in your heart and mind.

Just simply that, number one. Number one, not number two, not even number seven, or even number three, not even number two. Firstborn means number one.

It is a title of dignity that in all things He might have the pre-eminence, the firstness it is in God's heart. God has made Him number one in creation and in conservance and in the church. God wants to make Him number one in your heart, and when you let Him in, give Him the pre-eminence and the pre-eminence and all the furniture, all your powers at His disposal, then God will be glorified in you by the life of Jesus in His rightful place in your heart and mind unto Christ, the glory in the church by Christ.

Let us pray. Let us take a moment of silent prayer. Before I pray, publicly, I wonder if we might like to pray inaudibly for a moment, every one of us.

Perhaps we want to confess our failure or even selfishness. Maybe we want to get right with the Lord tonight and ask Him to come into our hearts and lives and be the life of our lives. Lord Jesus, come in and live your life through me.

That's the prayer we are praying now. Maybe you want to pray and say, Lord Jesus, the preeminent, the number one in my heart and mind, take me and all my powers and use them all for Thy glory. Bless Thy word to our hearts, O God.

Reveal Christ to us in another form as a preeminent one for His name. May the grace of the Lord Jesus and Thy love, our God, the fellowship and enabling of the Holy Indwelling Spirit be with us all tonight and always until we see the Saviour's face. Amen.

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