

Title: Christ, the perfect God
Text: Hebrews 1.8
Theme: Christ is God.
Series: Advent 2015
Prop Stmt: The deity of Christ is gloriously terrifying and comforting all at once.

Read Text:

In C.S. Lewis' book, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Lucy hears about Aslan from Mr. and Mrs. Beaver and assumes that Aslan is a man. But when she finds out that Aslan is a lion, she pauses and says, "Then he isn't safe?" "Safe?" Mr. Beaver says. "Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good." He is not safe, but he is good. Hmm. Do those two ideas work together? Do you have a category in your mind for that? You need to. In that series, Lewis created the Aslan character to represent Christ and his depiction is probably as good as any outside of the Bible that tries to grapple with these two aspects of Christ's person. He is good, but he is not safe.

Another example might be helpful, but it is an old one. There is a scene in the movie, "Raiders of the Lost Ark" that depicts the discovery of the Ark of the Covenant. Toward the end of the movie, the bad people seem to win control of the Ark. They tie up the good people and are now seemingly free to do with the Ark whatever they want. And what do they do? They try to look inside of it and when they do, they are consumed on the spot by this torrent of piercing, blazing, burning righteous brightness that functions like a personal nuclear holocaust upon every bad person around. It is a gruesome scene of terror and concludes when the lid of the Ark comes falling back from the sky and lands back in place sealing this burning, divine righteousness inside. And yet, what is the lid? The lid is the Mercy Seat. The contrast is extreme; mercy and unimaginable and terrifying righteousness even for the "good" people. How do you reconcile this terror of burning righteousness being held at bay by mercy?

For the Sundays of Advent I have been preaching a series of sermons from Hebrews chapter 1 on the Supremacy of Christ. Hebrews chapter 1 is like a multi-faceted diamond. Every verse you read is like another facet of a diamond that reflects another aspect of Christ. You cannot just look at one facet and think that you have seen the entire diamond. The beauty of the entire diamond is seen when you allow the light to pour in and bounce around and reflect out of her 58 cuts. Keep that in mind, because one of the reasons why Christ is so misunderstood is because people tend to only look at one or two of his facets. They do not see the entire picture. That is my burden and desire. I want you to see all that Christ is. The challenge is that Christmas tends to cover it up.

Christmas is an enormous holiday and it is not just the planning, parties, commitments and obligations that threaten to drown out Christ. It is tempting to see Christ only as a baby in a manger. It is tempting to let nostalgia and sentiment tell us what happened at his birth. I can promise you that in spite of the song, baby Jesus cried. Have you ever tried to sleep in hay? Yes, he was a baby who was placed in a manger. That is one of the many facets of Christ. But, there is more to see. This baby roars.

Think with me. The book of Hebrews was written to – who? Hebrews, right? This book was written to Jews, many of whom were alive when Christ was alive, and many of them would have either seen Christ or knew someone who did. Now, this letter was written to Jews who believed on Christ and many of them had faced some severe reactions and even persecution because of it. Then, things settled down a bit, but now another round of persecution appears to be coming. So, the author focuses his readers upon Christ by pointing out that Christ is the entire package.

None of us are the entire package. People who are task-oriented (like me) tend to ignore people in the process. People who are people-oriented never seem to get anything done. People who are artsy tend to be moody and yet some of us wonder if people who are engineers even have a soul, right? A person's weakness is generally one of their strengths that are taken to an extreme. Some of the greatest leaders in history had serious flaws.

Students at certain universities are now demanding that buildings that were named for historical persons be renamed because of the revelation of certain unacceptable things the historical person supposedly said or did. If perfection is the standard, then every name on every building has to be removed. At the same time, it cannot be denied that when you get close to a leader and you see or experience some of his or her failures that we are affected and usually we are affected deeply. Inconsistency breeds disillusionment. Broken promises breeds anger. Unfaithfulness breeds discouragement and more unfaithfulness. When someone in your family or close circle of friends implodes, you are left trying to wash the blood and body parts from your life. And even though you try to put all of that in a room in your mind where you close the door and lock it and vow never to return, the room is still there. The writer of Hebrews is writing to people who have experienced some deep sorrows. He does not give them a motivational talk or self-help therapy. He points them to Jesus because Jesus is the entire package. He is the perfect prophet, perfect priest, perfect king and perfect God. The more you know about him, the more amazing, the more beautiful, the most glorious and at the same time, the more awesome and even terrifying he is. He is good, but he is not safe.

1. **Jesus is the Sovereign Lord and Creator of the Universe.**

What I am saying is that Jesus is God. In Hebrews 1.8 God calls his own Son, God. God the Father says to the Son, "*Your throne O God is forever and ever.*" I am calling you to believe what God the Father believes about his own Son. The Father calls the Son God. Therefore, it makes perfect sense that...

A. **Jesus claimed to be God.**

The Bible gives plenty of evidence that Jesus is God with a good bit of that coming from Christ himself. In John 8.58, Jesus famously said, "*Truly, truly I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.*" Jesus did not misspeak and mess up a verb tense. He was doing two related things with that comment. He was saying that he existed before Abraham was even born, and he was saying that before Abraham was, that he (Jesus) was God. When

God appeared to Moses at the burning bush, God's name for himself is "*I am that I am.*" Jesus used that same name for himself. This was not a vague and subtle statement on the part of Christ that caused people to wonder what exactly he meant by it. This statement was bold and clear. No one misunderstood what he was claiming. That is evident because in the next verse, the Jews picked up stones in order to stone him right there!

The same kind of scenario takes place in John 10. There Jesus is talking about his relationship with the Father. In verse 30 he says it plainly. "*I and the Father are one.*" Jesus and the Father are one God. They are each distinct from the other and yet connected in an inseparable relationship. The Bible goes on to describe that this one God is comprised of the Father, the Son and the Spirit. In attempting to describe this, we call this relationship, Trinitarian. It is a tri-unity.

Now, when you tell some people that, they shrug their shoulders as if it really doesn't matter. They honestly don't care. But, for those who understand the implication of that claim, they are either humbled or infuriated. Many of the people who heard Christ say this, were infuriated. In fact,...

B. Jesus was crucified because he claimed to be God.

You have to deliberately misread and twist the Bible in order to miss this important point. Christ claimed to be God. When Christ was on trial before Pilate, Pilate kept trying to find out what exactly Jesus had done that had caused these religious leaders to be so torqued up. They were obviously deeply offended, but at what? The leaders told Pilate that Jesus claimed to be the Son of God. Pilate was already not feeling too good about this whole deal and when he heard that, the Bible says (John 19.8) that he was even more afraid. The leaders were infuriated and Pilate was intimidated. My point is simply this. There is no doubt that Jesus claimed to be God. But there is more to this.

C. God claimed that there are no other gods.

Commandment #1 – You shall have no other gods before me. This command is clear and it is good. It is good to tell people truth. It is repeated and the children of Israel are held accountable to it. In Isaiah 43.10-11 God says, "*Before me no god was formed, nor shall there be any after me. I, I am the LORD and besides me there is no savior.*" Isaiah 44.6 "*Thus says the LORD...I am the first and I am the last; besides me there is no god.*" God is saying that I was here before there was a here. I was before time, space, mass or anything. And guess what? It was just me. I was there. I am the only eyewitness to the beginning of the beginning. I made everything. I am the first. I am before all things. In me all things consist. I hold everything together. There are no other gods. They do not exist. That means...

2. All other gods are imposters.

All other gods are fraudulent. All other gods are figments of someone's imagination. Let's define it. What is a god? What is an idol? A god or an idol is anything that I

attribute meaning, worth and power to that rightfully belongs to God. I remind you (though I probably do not have to) that there is a war that is raging right now on the turf of your heart and my heart between the gods of this world (that I am prone to believe and prone to ascribe value to) and the true God, whom I am not prone believe. I am prone to believe myself and prone to disbelieve God because the default setting of my human condition is the desire to be my own god. I want to rule my own world. I want to make my own rules. I hate it when someone else tries to tell me how to live. The ugly truth is that all other gods are imposters because all other gods are simply my attempts at being god. That will never work, but I am hell-bent on trying. The fact is, what I get most angry, upset and panicked about reveals who or what I really worship because I am angry or fearful that my god has just been threatened. And if my god goes down, I go down and I am terrified by that.

Contrast:

False gods		The True God
Created from man's imagination	vs.	Uncreated; always been
Defined by man	vs.	Defines everything
Possesses only what is attributed to it	vs.	Inherent authority
Relies on props	vs.	Is perfectly self-reliant
Makes promises it cannot keep	vs.	Keeps every promise
- promises freedom (bondage)		
- promises acceptance (fear)		
- promises power (emptiness)		
Tells us what we want to hear	vs.	Tells us what we need to hear
Stays in power through fear and threats	vs.	Is in power

Notice the pattern. We create a god. That is, in rejection of the true God and in rebellion to him, we imagine that there is another god who has the power and authority to do what only the true God can do. We imagine this god. We name and define this god. We attribute power to this god. We pretend that it does things. And we create ceremonies that are designed to empower or please this god so that it does for us what we imagine it will. If what we think it is supposed to do, it does not do, then we imagine that it is angry with us, and we are trapped into doing more and more in order to appease it.

In contrast to that God is the one who spoke everything into creation because he is the uncreated One. He defines everything. He possesses inherent authority and does not derive it from anyone else. That is why Jesus told Pilate that Pilate really had no authority over him at all. God is self-reliant. He does not need to be carried around in a pocket, set on a shelf or in a grove in your backyard.

So, take the OT god of Baal as an example. This god, represented by stone, or wood possessed no inherent power. In fact, someone(s) came up with this god and named this god and attributed power to this god and control over the weather, disease, infestation crop production and fertility. But Baal does not talk. Baal does not listen. Baal only, in a

sense, echoes back what is said to it and what is said for it. But, if you are a farmer and you have to have a good crop in order to live, or a herdsman and you have to have cattle and herd reproduction in order to live, or you want to have a child, and you ascribe to Baal the authority over these things, you are in bondage to Baal. You have to do what Baal wants. So, how do you know what Baal wants? You end up doing for Baal what you would demand of others, if you were a god. That is my point. Idolatry is a thinly disguised veil of the worship of our own selves. It always ends badly because we cannot save ourselves.

These false gods are imposters. They are liars. They only have power to the degree that we attribute them with power. They tell us things that we like to hear because they are an echo of what we naturally think. They make us promises and we believe them and then we follow them because what they say are the echoes of our own hearts. But, they are liars. Our hearts deceive us and these idols cannot keep their promises and now, we are trapped. The very thing that we wanted we don't get, or we get it with a vengeance.

Ok, let's test-drive this. Are you ready? Most of you have not grown up in cultures organized around Baal worship, but you still struggle with temptations to idolatry. Your idols may actually be much more subtle. Let's say that you are a parent and you believe that in order for you to have value and significance that you have to have the affection and the respect of your child. When you do that, you have made an idol or a god out of your child. You have attributed to your child the power to give you value. You have attributed to your child the source of your significance. In your mind and heart you have given them something that only rightfully belongs to God. When that happens, you lose perspective about your child. You lose perspective about God and you lose perspective about yourself. One, you place onto your child a responsibility that he or she cannot possibly bear. You are attempting to make your child responsible for your happiness, your security and your identity. They cannot do that! If they feel the weight of your expectations, which they will, it will crush them. And what happens to your god, then?

Your success is tied to the success of your child. In your mind and heart, they cannot fail and you cannot let them fail. You are tempted to live and die on every grade, every athletic or artistic endeavor, and every social interaction. The world calls it helicopter parenting, God calls it idolatry. It is a fundamental failure to trust God because you believe that your child can save you, will save you or has to save you. But your child cannot save you. Some of you will go into debt in order to buy the affection of your child. You fear establishing clear boundaries and expectations and saying "no" because if they do not like you, then you fear falling apart because your god has just turned on you.

I have seen this happen so many times. Parents, who do not fully grasp their security and identity in Christ, look for it in their children. They are tempted to entrust their happiness to their children. They look at their children as a giant vault or safe deposit box where they have placed their happiness. But, your happiness is not safe with your children. Your child cannot come through for you perfectly. Your child may get a disease, may get into an accident, may face tragedy, may go away to war, etc. If you believe that your child holds all of your happiness then when any of those things happen, your life, feels like it is

over. And often your child will resent you because they cannot give you what you want and will respond in anger. What do you do when your god won't take your calls, answer your texts or pay attention to you? Do you see how kind and good God is, to demand that you worship Him? Nothing and no one else can rescue you.

Let me give you another example. We all have our lives mapped out to some degree. We try to imagine what we will be doing this next year, or 5 or 10 years down the road. Even those who are older and realize that 10 years maybe longer than what you have map things out for your children, or your friends. We have this image of what life is going to be like, right? But, our hearts are tilted toward idolatry. We tend to imagine a life that is not real. We tend to imagine a life that is not difficult, full of struggle, or thorns and thistles. We tend to imagine a life where we are healthy, where we are free, where we are happy, where the people around us are all the same way.

In other words, we tend to create a picture of our life, the way that websites make vacation destinations look. Everyone is happy and the weather is perfect. But that is not reality, and if you go to that destination without realizing that it is possible that it will rain and it is possible that people will get sick and it is possible that there will be complications, chance are, you are going to be disappointed. How have you mapped out your life? What does that look like? Now, here is my warning. We tend to attribute power to that picture. We tend to treat that map as if it were vault that is able to hold our happiness. We tend to treat that plan as if it is our salvation and rescue. But, that plan cannot keep your happiness safe. That plan cannot rescue you. The fact is, you cannot make that plan happen. But, we try. In fact, we are known to try to get God to make our plan happen. But, if we think our plan is our savior, do you think that God is motivated to bless his competition?

Whatever god you come up with is inferior. The god you attribute power to will fail you. The god you imagine will betray you. The god you create and trust will collapse. Put your happiness where it is safe. Put your happiness and security where it cannot be stolen or betrayed. Do you see why we are so blessed to have a God who reveals himself to us? As I alluded to in the introduction, God is so wholly different than we are, that we would have never come up with him on our own. We would not have thought him up because our minds and hearts are not that big. Only God is worthy of your worship because...

3. **Only God can save you from God.**

I want to wrap this up by impressing with you the truth that the deity of Christ is gloriously terrifying and comforting all at once. The author of Hebrews is right to point out the deity of Christ and to remind us that God calls his Son, God. The full expression of his deity was veiled while Christ was on the earth. He was veiled so he could live with us without us being consumed by his righteousness. But, since people saw him veiled, they did not realize who he really was. John did. John describes Jesus in beginning of his letter to the 7 churches in Asia Minor. We call that letter, Revelation because it reveals the glory of Jesus and the plan of Jesus for this world. Both are overwhelming. John says that Jesus *"is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him, even those who pierced*

him, and all tribes of the earth will wail on account of him.” Why do they wail? They wail because this baby roars. This baby in a manger is the Lion of the tribe of Judah. John saw the Lion and felt that roar. In chapter 1, John describes his vision of Jesus beginning in Revelation 1.12. Read Revelation 1.12-16.

How would you respond to this? Standing in the presence of white-hot righteousness makes you tremble as you anticipate your own sinful being about to be consumed. John was so overwhelmed that he fell at his feet as though dead. He had no strength, no confidence, no defense, no argument, and no words left in him. He expected destruction. This Lion is not safe. But right then, Jesus did what he did so many others who humbled themselves in his presence. He touched them. He put his right hand on me, John said. And he said, “Fear not.” And the reason Jesus told John why John did not have to fear is because Jesus had died and had come back to life. He took John’s death upon himself when he died. He took John’s death and the death of every single person who would ever believe on him, when he died. John had no hope to be rescued from the wrath of God if he relied upon his own life or on anything or anyone else. But John relied on Jesus and Jesus was God and as God was able to satisfy the wrath of God against our sin. Only God can save you from God. There is no other Savior. Trust Christ! Trust Christ alone! Trust Christ alone, right now! When you trust in yourself or in anything or anyone else, you will see, on the day that Christ returns that your god will betray you. Like mercenaries who run for their lives in the face of battle, your imaginary gods will only provide an imaginary shelter. On the day when Christ returns, the tribes of the earth will wail for their gods are no gods and they will have no hope. The threat of judgment will be for them a sentenced reality, while the courts of heaven will join the voices of the redeemed and will shout *“Hallelujah for the Lord our God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and exult and give him glory for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and his Bride has made herself ready; it was granted her to clothe herself with fine linen, bright and pure...”* Those words were from Revelation 19. The apostle John goes on to say, *“Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on his head are many diadems, and he has a name written that no one knows but himself. He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, (he is the perfect priest) and the name by which he is called is The Word of God (he is the perfect prophet). And the armies of heaven, arrayed in fine linen white and pure were following him on white horses. From his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and he will rule them with a rod of iron (he is the perfect King). He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty. **On his robe and on his thigh he has a name written, King of Kings and Lord of lords.** He is the perfect God. Trust him. Submit to him. Worship Him and Extol him!*