The Pre-eminence of the Lord Jesus Christ

by A. C. Gaebelein

"Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by 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." Colossians 1:15-18.

We meet in this Prophetic Conference to exalt and glorify one Person and one Name, the Name which is above every other Name. And He whom we desire and delight to honor is in our midst, for He has said "Where two or three are gathered together in my Name, there am I in the midst" and again "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." May we remember in each service that the unseen One, our Saviour-Lord is with us.

There was a brief moment in the earthly life of our Lord, when suddenly His garb of humiliation was changed into glory. It took place upon that mountain where He had taken His three disciples. All at once the glory of the Father covered Him. His blessed face shone like the sun and His raiment was white as light. That transfiguration glory was the foregleam of His coming glory. Such is His glory now at the right hand of God; with such glory He is, some day, coming back to earth again.

Yet it was then that human lips uttered words which marred that glory. Peter said "Lord, it is good for us to be here." He suggested to make this glory permanent. He spoke as if there could be glory without suffering, a crown without a cross. Greater still was his mistake when he added "If thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, one for Moses, and one for Elias." What was his error? He put the Lord of glory into the company of mortal, sinful men, such as Moses and Elias were. He lowered His dignity and glory. It was therefore while He was yet speaking that the voice of another was heard. It was a voice which spoke from above. It was the voice of God the Father vindicating the honor and glory of His own Son, the Lord Jesus. Listen! "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him." Not a man like other men; not a saint like other saints; not a lawgiver like Moses; not a prophet or reformer like Elias, but my beloved Son.

What was suggested on that mountain by Peter, to place the Lord on the same level with other men, is the common thing today throughout Christendom. They call Him the carpenter, the man of Galilee, a good man, a great man, the best of man. They place Him alongside of Buddha, Confucius and Socrates. In doing this His fullest glory is denied and the Lord of all is dishonored.

The portion of the Scriptures read at this time tells us that pre-eminence belongs to our Lord Jesus Christ. In all things He has the pre-eminence. Let us then see the sevenfold pre-eminence of our Lord we find revealed in the Bible.

**1. His is first of all the pre-eminence in creation.**

Creation itself is for man an unsolvable mystery. How did the things we see, this earth, the universe the fathomless heavens with their millions of stars come into existence? When and how did it all originate? Is matter eternal or had it a beginning? What is the future of this universe? These are but a few of the many questions which man has asked. Sages and philosophers of all races and ages have been occupied with such questions concerning the origin of creation. It would greatly amuse us if we were to state some of the utterly ridiculous theories which great thinkers of different nations in the past invented to explain how things seen came into existence. Not less foolish is the theory which is so widely taught throughout our country, in our schools and colleges — the so-called evolution theory. It is nothing less than an attempt to find some other cause for the existence of nature than nature's God as revealed in His infallible Word. Without answering the claims of evolution let me give you two reasons why a Christian must reject it.

In the first place the evolution theory makes God the author of evil. He must be held responsible for all the misery, sorrow, suffering and death which are in the world today, for He Himself imparted it when He started the supposed protoplasm evolving. If that were true then God would indeed be the author of all the horrors in the world and man would be without any responsibility at all. And furthermore evolution knows no remedy for the evil which is in creation. It denies and rejects the great redemption as made known in the Gospel of God.

If the creature is to know anything about creation, since searching cannot find it out, it must be made known by revelation. And such a revelation we have in the Bible.

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." Creation is the work of God. When we examine the New Testament Scriptures we discover that creation is ascribed to the Son of God. What a great statement we have here in the Epistle to the Colossians, who like so many professing Christians today, had listened to false teachers and were being misled by evil doctrines. Listen again. "For by Him [the Son of God] were all things created, that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible ... all things were created by Him and for Him." Was this the opinion of the Apostle Paul? How could he ever have made such a great statement unless God revealed it unto him by His Spirit! Nor is he the only writer of the New Testament who makes this known. John in the beginning of his gospel gives the same testimony. "All things were made by Him and without Him was not anything made that was made." And again, "The world was made by Him." John 1:3,10. From these inspired statements we learn that the pre-eminence in creation belongs to Him whom we worship as our Saviour-Lord. Therefore all who believe the Bible believe on Him as the omnipotent Lord, the creator of all things.

Nor must we forget how wonderfully He manifested the Creator's power and the attributes of the Godhead when He walked among men in deepest humiliation in the form of a servant. That humble Nazarene, as they called Him, displayed omnipotence. Look at Him as majestically He spoke to the waves and the wind with His command "Peace, be still." The wind was hushed; the waves became a calm. Who else but the Creator, who made the sea, could do this? And so it took the power of an omnipotent One to change the water into wine. And look again and see sickness and pain banished by the loving touch of His hand; and more than that He raised the dead. How great too was His omniscience! He knew the secret thoughts of His disciples and the plotting's of His enemies so that His own confessed "Lord, Thou knowest all things." Away then with the miserable and lying inventions of the enemy, so prominent in the twentieth century, by which it is claimed that Christ was only divine in the sense as every other human being possesses divinity and other inventions which deny His Godhead and rob Him of His highest glory.

**2. He also has the pre-eminence as the Upholder and Sustainer of all things.**

The Bible tells us that "by Him all things consist" and that He "upholds all things by the Word of His power." It means that He sustains this universe, that without Him all would collapse. He occupies a throne and in His hands rests all power. Well may we remember this in days when thrones crumble into dust, when everything is shaken, and testing times are upon man and man's government as never before, that there is a throne which cannot be shaken, nor can it be affected by what is going on down here. His throne is an everlasting throne of righteousness, and ultimately righteousness will be victorious. The Son of God our Lord has the pre-eminence in government, upholding and sustaining His creation. And think of it child of God, that He is your Lord. The hands which uphold all things uphold His people down here in conflict, in sorrow and in every trial.

**3. But furthermore He has the pre-eminence in the Bible, the revelation of God.**

And well it is that we speak of this blessed Book as the infallible, the inerrant Word of God. How tersely it was put some two years ago by our good President Mr. Woodrow Wilson when he penned the inscription for the soldiers New Testaments, beginning with this statement "The Bible is the Word of life" and closing with the testimony "The Bible is the Word of God." Well said — the Bible, the Word of Life and the Word of God. Many voices throughout Christendom ridicule and deny these statements, which embody the faith of our fathers. They tell us that perhaps the Bible contains here and there some kind of a revelation, but they claim it takes scholarship to ascertain what is really truth and what is merely human opinion, myth or legend. And blessed little scholarship some of these critics possess. The solid truth the Bible is the Word of God, as God's people always believed, has been changed to a statement of camouflage — the Bible contains the Word of God. How prominently the horrors of the past four years are connected with the rejection of this Book divine as God's Word and God's revelation must be clear to every thinking Christian. Destructive Criticism and the new Theology robbed Germany of the faith in the Word of God and the Gospel of Christ; and then they were, under Satanic delusion, plunged into that which outraged the laws of God and man. Let a nation stand by the Bible as the Word of God; honor the Bible, read the Bible, believe the Bible and its message of God's love in His Son and that nation will always prosper. And here permit me to say that we have a message to give from the President. We wrote Mr. Wilson asking him for a message to this Bible Conference. His Secretary replied that on account of the pressure of his official life he could not do so, but sent instead the copy of an address he delivered several years ago, with the permission to use anything of it. Let me then read to you this sentence and let us consider it as his message. "I have a very simple thing to ask of you. I ask every man and woman in this audience that from this night on they will realize that part of the destiny of America lies in their daily perusal of this great book of revelation — the Holy Scriptures."

Our good Vice-President Mr. Thomas R. Marshall sent from Washington to the speaker a direct message. He writes "Out of the Babel of tongues now in the world proclaiming — Lo here is salvation, lo there is salvation — all history proves that the only sure salvation for the individual or the nation is the knowledge of and obedience to the revealed Word of God. Read it. Strive to obey it."

In this wonderful Book the Son of God, our Lord Jesus Christ has the place of pre-eminence. Years ago a certain father brought home to his children a children's game by which he intended to teach them the geography of our land. It consisted of a paste board map of the United States, cut up in small pieces of different shape. They were to fit piece to piece till the map was reconstructed. It took them five minutes to complete the task. And when the father inquired how they succeeded so soon, they turned the map over. On the other side was the figure of George Washington. All they did was to put the man together, the arms and legs, hands and feet; and thus the difficulty of the map on the other side was completely solved. In this Book of all books there is revealed a Person, the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God. He is the key to the Scriptures. Not "Science and Health" as it is claimed is the key to the Scriptures, nor the mad ravenings of Russellism, or any other ism, but the Lord Jesus Christ is the key to the whole revelation of God, the key which unlocks the treasure house of God to the human soul. Wherever we turn in this Book, which has outlived every attack, the anvil upon which infidelity has broken its hammers, we behold this majestic Person and all His glory.

From the Book of Genesis, the book of the beginnings of all things, to the great capstone, the Book of Revelation with its unveiling of the future, He stands out in solitary majesty. Moses speaks of Him; every prophet tells out His matchless person, His work and His glory. We see Him and His work in the offerings and sacrifices, in Israel's earthly worship, in historical events — His face may be seen on every page in this Book. And then the names He bears! Hundreds of names which tell out His worth, His love, His grace as well as His glory.

Christian! Whenever you read your Bible, and daily you must read it prayerfully if your Christianity is to be a reality, look always first for Himself. Remember the written Word makes known to your soul the living Word, the Son of God. He Himself said concerning the Scriptures "They testify of Me." Approach then this Book with the simple prayer "Father by Thy Spirit show me Christ and His glory, show me Him who is altogether lovely." Pray this and you will never pray in vain.

**4. But let us see next His pre-eminence in Redemption.**

Man is the lost creature of God. Man is a sinner and alienated from God, destitute of righteousness; he is in the place of death and therefore on the road to an eternity of darkness and separation from God. Man therefore needs redemption. He cannot redeem himself. Well did Job cry out, uttering the old, old question "How should man be just with God?" And afterward he confessed the hopelessness of his own efforts when he said "if I wash myself with snow water and make my hands never so clean, Yet shalt thou plunge me in the ditch and mine own clothes shall abhor me." Job 9:30-31. Nor can an angel or any other created being redeem and save man from the horrible place into which sin has brought him. If man is to be redeemed, God must do it Himself. The One who alone is able to redeem and to save man is the Son of God, the Lord of Creation. To accomplish the great work of redemption He left the bosom of God. He left the glory behind and came down to this earth of sin and death. He who was rich became poor. Born of the Virgin He became man and as the God-man He lived that perfect life, that holy life, that blessed life, that life of trust and obedience and in it all He made God, the invisible God known to man. He brought God to man but to bring man back to God something else besides incarnation and a holy life was needed. Redemption could only be procured for a guilty race by the Cross. On that cross, He who knew no sin was made sin for us. There He met and owned God's Holiness and righteousness — there He took the sinners place in judgment. On that cross He was forsaken of a holy God and all the waves and billows of divine judgment passed over His head. On that cross He paid the price of redemption and shed His precious blood, by which the believing sinner is cleansed from all sin and put beyond condemnation. Oh that wonderful Cross with its wonderful work!

A few months ago I looked once more upon that great, majestic mountain on the pacific coast, Mount Rainier. Twilight came on. And then the great giant, towering almost fifteen thousand feet above sea level, with its summit capped in eternal ice and snow, was suddenly glorified by the rays of the setting sun. The summit seemed partly bathed in blood red and over yonder the red merged into a tinge of yellow like shining gold. And as I looked upon it the Cross came back to my mind, the cross on which the Lord of Glory died. Calvary is such a peak reaching from earth to heaven. The blood was given there and the glory secured. In that cross His glory as the redeemer is made known, the Lamb of God who meets perfectly God's righteousness and reveals His great love. What a glory then is His through the work of the Cross! He has, by His work, procured the power to bring sinners from eternal night to eternal light, from eternal shame to eternal glory, from the dunghill of sin and death to the throne of life and glory. And that cross can never lose its glory. It can never be dimmed; its glory will never diminish; it can never be forgotten in all eternity, even as it was known from before the foundation of the world.

And therefore He has the pre-eminence in redemption. There is no salvation in any other "for there is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." Acts 4:12. There is but one way to glory and that is the way of the cross, to believe on the Son of God who died for our sins. All who will be in the Father's house were brought there through the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. Every other gospel, so called, salvation by character or the new thought gospel, or anything else is a miserable counterfeit. And that includes the foolish invention, which for a time became so popular in Great Britain, that the soldier who dies on the battlefield goes straight to glory because he gave his life in a good cause. No! a thousand times No! Christ alone can save. His then is the pre-eminence in redemption.

**5. There is another pre-eminence, His pre-eminence as the risen Man in glory**.

We speak of the created heavens. But there is also an uncreated Heaven. God is a Person. He has no beginning. For Him there must have been a dwelling place before all time and all creation. That place is the third heaven, the uncreated heaven. When the Son of God had finished the work and God raised Him from the dead, He passed through the heavens and entered into the heaven of heavens. There He received as the risen Man, in His glorified body the highest place which God could give to Him. He seated Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality, and power, and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world but also in that which is to come. He put all things under His feet. And now as the glorified Man He fills the throne, angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto Him. There too He receives the homage of the heavenly hosts. All heaven glorifies and adores Him. In such glory John in the isle of Patmos beheld Him when He saw Him in the midst of the golden candlesticks. Wonderful sight to see the One whom Isaiah announced as the Wonderful, the Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace, to see Him, who was once made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, to see Him as the Priest in yonder Holiest ever living and interceding for His own blood bought people.

**6. There is also His pre-eminence in the new Creation.**

The old creation has upon it the stamp of sin and death, the new creation is life and glory. The only way which leads into this new creation is the new birth. To belong to the new creation one has to be in Christ. "Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold all things are become new." 2 Cor. 5:17. He is both, the author of this new creation, and the Head of it. All sinners saved by grace form the body of Christ, which is the church and He is the head of that body. He sustains and keeps and ministers to this spiritual body as He sustains His physical creation. And some coming day this new creation will be complete. The redeemed body will be joined to the glorified head, the Lord Jesus Christ. All the redeemed will share His glory.

When that blessed consummation comes then His pre-eminence in that new Creation will be acclaimed in that never ending glory song "Thou art worthy ... for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And hast made us unto God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth." Rev. 5:9. And hear how this hymn of worship and praise increases, rises higher and higher in the coming day of glory. "And I beheld, and I heard the voice of many angels round about the throne and the beasts and the elders: and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands; Saying with a loud voice, Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing." Rev. 5:11-12. Such is His glory which He will receive as the pre-eminent One in the new creation, the head of the body. And this is the glory which awaits all who are in Christ. Oh, the blessed thought that some day we shall see Him as He is! Oh, how it thrills the heart to think that we shall look into that face of glory, that we all shall have a face to face meeting with the Lord of glory, the pre-eminent Christ! And what a destiny it is to be ultimately like Him, to share the vast inheritance of glory with Him and to live on, and on, and on in the glory fellowship with the Lord.

**7. Finally He will receive the pre-eminence as King of kings and Lord of lords over this earth.**

This is His coming, future glory. What will the future bring for this earth and the human race? This has been and is still the important question all thinking people ask. Throughout the past four years of the world war with its unspeakable horrors and suffering, uncountable thousands have asked "what shall be the end of these things?" And now that victory has come, autocracy is dethroned and democracy is enthroned, we still have our questions concerning the future. Will the coming league of nations maintain peace on earth? Will the sword never again be unsheathed? Listen to wise words of another, I believe spoken from the platform of this great hall. Col. Roosevelt said: "Let us never forget that any promise that such a league of nations or any other piece of machinery, will definitely do away with war, is either sheer nonsense or rank hypocrisy." Very true Mr. Roosevelt! What about the dark shadow of lawlessness, the beast of the pit which despises all government and would sweep away every law and order? Indeed never before in the history of this age has the human race faced such problems and perplexities as we face today. It is as our Lord told us. "...Upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth..." Luke 21:25-26. What then is the future to bring for this earth and the people upon it? No Christian needs to speculate about it, for we have a sure word of prophecy in which the Lord, who knows the end from the beginning, has revealed the future. Oh! the pity that the church of Jesus Christ has neglected this magnificent portion of God's holy Word, so full of light, of hope and comfort.

This Word tells us all about the things to come. It tells us that the time will come when Monarchies and democracies will give way to another form of government. God Himself will set up on this earth a Kingdom, the Kingdom of heaven, the Kingdom of the Son of His Love, the Kingdom of righteousness and peace. A Kingdom will ultimately come into which all the nations of the earth will be gathered, a Kingdom which extends from sea to sea, in which nations learn war no more; a Kingdom in which God's will is done as it is done in heaven. And God's Word is equally clear how that Kingdom comes. Not by the efforts of man; not by the progress of civilization; not by reformation or education. Not even by the work of the church. That Kingdom comes when the Lord Jesus Christ comes back to earth again. Some day these heavens will be covered with His glory and He who lived once upon this earth, who died the sinners death, was raised from the dead and ascended upon high, He who is now at the right hand of God, yea this same Jesus, will come again. Then He receives that Kingdom and the glory time for this poor world will come. But above all it will be His glory time, for He who was once crowned with thorns will then be crowned the Lord of all. These great, forgotten and neglected truths will be more fully unfolded in this conference. Before our brother Dr. Torrey speaks to us on "that blessed Hope" let me ask you this question. In all things the Lord Jesus has the pre-eminence, have you given Him the pre-eminence, the first place in your life? He is your creator, your sustainer, your Saviour, the Lord who loves you. Why then is He not the pre-eminent One in your life? No real happiness, no real peace and joy can you know till you give Him the pre-eminence, as your Saviour and your Lord. All our troubles and difficulties in our Christian lives have but one source — we have never crowned Him Lord of all in our lives. This very first meeting give Him the pre-eminent place in your heart and life.