

Colossians 1:1-27

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Date: 20 August 2017

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[0 : 00] Well, do turn back with me to Colossians chapter 1, which is on page 983 of the Church Bibles. Colossians chapter 1. Now, the Oxford English Dictionary is the authority on the English language, isn't it? Or at least it likes to think it is.

It likes to see itself as documenting the development of the English language, as all sorts of new words come into use and old words fall out of use. And every year, roughly once a year, there's a press release, isn't there, of all the words that have been added to the Oxford English Dictionary this year.

And it is generally a press release designed to annoy people. To those who play Scrabble, it's a bad thing. All these ridiculous new words that no one really uses, do they? All these ridiculous new words have come in and might possibly be getting people double letter scores they should never have got.

But then to the people who actually do use these words, or perhaps did five years ago, the Oxford English Dictionary has just proved that it's irrelevant entirely and already out of date.

It is an announcement entirely dissatisfactory to everyone. But nonetheless, it's quite interesting.

And in 2013, the Oxford English Dictionary, at least the online version, introduced the word FOMO.

[1 : 15] FOMO. Maybe you've come across it. F-O-M-O. In case you're wondering, in my house, at least, if I were allowed to set the rules, that would not score you any points in Scrabble because it's an acronym.

Catherine probably would get points. But it's an acronym, not a Scrabble word. Fear of missing out. FOMO. Fear of missing out. And here is the definition in the Oxford English Dictionary online.

Noun, informal, in case you're wondering. Noun, informal. Anxiety that an interesting or exciting event may currently be happening elsewhere. FOMO. Anxiety that an interesting or exciting event may currently be happening elsewhere.

And it's derived from that experience that perhaps you've had when you've had a really great day. The best day in a long time. You've had a really great time. And you decide you're going to email someone and tell them how great a day it was.

Maybe you're going to upload the photos on Facebook. You go home. You sit down. And you're just about to start documenting that great day. And you see what other people were doing. Maybe in the newsroom you see some event that you weren't at.

[2 : 22] Maybe one of your friends had a party that, because of what you were busy doing, you weren't able to go to. You see what everyone else has been doing on Facebook. And even though you've had a great day, you're worried that something else more interesting or more exciting was happening elsewhere.

FOMO. The word might be unfamiliar, but the feeling isn't, is it? It's not just confined to our experience from social media. When there's the athletics in town and we can't get tickets.

When our friends are having a party. Everyone's invited, including us, but we need to visit our parents. When there's some event that we can't make. Or when our life just looks dull in comparison.

We experience that, don't we? FOMO. The anxiety that an interesting or exciting event may currently be happening elsewhere. It's only introduced as a word in the Oxford English Dictionary in 2013.

But FOMO, the fear of missing out, is nothing new. And actually if we read through the book of Colossians, we find that the Colossian church is experiencing what we might call a kind of spiritual FOMO.

[3 : 28] A spiritual fear of missing out. See there's no doubt in Colossians that Paul is writing to a church of believers. Verse 2 of chapter 1. To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae.

There's no doubt about that, is there? Paul knows he's writing to Christians. But as we read through the book, we find that this church is surrounded by temptations. The city of Colossae is a pagan city.

A city known for mystical religions. Where people would have great experiences of supernatural things. And it's also a city where there seem to be Jewish teachers and Greek philosophers offering alternative truths.

Trying to add things to the message that this church has heard from Epaphras, the missionary who came to them first. As they come to church on Sunday, they're worried that something interestingly exciting might actually be going on elsewhere.

That actually, they're not getting the real deal. There might be something more interesting elsewhere. We see this in Paul's warnings later in the letter. Chapter 2, verse 8.

[4 : 38] See to it, no one takes you captive by philosophy or empty deceit. According to human traditions. According to elemental spirits of the world. And not according to Christ.

There seem to be people who are offering other ideas, other messages. Than the one, the message of Christ they originally taught. Or verse 16. Let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food or drink.

Or with regard to a festival. Or a new moon. Or a Sabbath. Perhaps these Christians are in church on a Sunday morning. But they know that the rest of the town is enjoying a religious festival that they're not at.

Maybe they're missing out. Maybe they're missing out. Or verse 18. Let no one disqualify you insisting on asceticism and worship of angels. Or going on in detail about visions.

Puffed up without reason. By his sensuous mind. And not holding fast to the head. Visions. Asceticism. Angels. All these things sound pretty exciting.

[5 : 37] And the Colossian church is in danger of ignoring what they've already got. They're like us. When we sit down with our Facebook page at the end of a great day. Thinking. I may have had a good time.

But they're doing something better. Something interesting and exciting is happening elsewhere. And they're in danger of forgetting what they already have. So Paul's antidote to this in the letter of Colossians.

To this spiritual FOMO. Is striking. He doesn't try to offer them anything new. He doesn't say well hey follow me and I'll give you angels. I'll give you visions. I'll give you all these things.

He doesn't offer them anything new. He reminds them of what they already have. God has delivered us from the domain of darkness. And has transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved son. In whom we have redemption.

The forgiveness of sins. Colossian church he says. You already have everything you could possibly need. And more. You're not missing out. You have Jesus. But in case they've forgotten exactly why that's a good thing.

[6 : 37] He gives us verses 15 to 23. To try to make the Colossians. And perhaps us as we sit here this morning. Feel exactly how great that is.

Exactly what we have in Jesus. So hopefully that's what we're going to look at this morning. Paul's antidote to spiritual discontentment. To that fear that there's something better than what we have in Jesus.

And firstly we see in these verses. That Jesus. The Jesus that the Colossian church has. The Jesus that we have. Is the creator God. Verse 15.

He is the image of the invisible God. The firstborn of all creation. Jesus is the image of the invisible God. The firstborn of all creation.

According to the most recent poll I could find on the internet. 28% of British people believe in a God or a higher power. Actually a bit surprised. I thought it would be higher than that.

[7 : 35] But 28% of the British public believe in a God or a higher power. Another 20% just aren't so sure. And there were some other answers up there as well. But I suggest that for most of the British public.

For most people. Including many who call themselves Christian. God is an invisible God. He's not a God who could be known. He's kind of an invisible force.

Who may or may not be behind things that happen. See for most people I suggest that God is a bit like gravity. Gravity is an interesting thing isn't it? We all believe in gravity. I assume we all do. Isaac Newton had an apple on his head. Fall on his head so it must be there. We all believe in gravity. Because we see its effects don't we? We believe in gravity because we see its effects. In fact we rely on it all the time.

Right now as we stand on the stage. As we sit on the chairs. We trust in gravity. But we can't see it. It's an invisible force. We can't see gravity.

[8 : 33] And as a result we can't know it. Can we? We can't know it. We can't have any kind of relationship with it. It's just an invisible force. And I'd suggest that for many of that 28% of the British public.

For many people. And actually for many religions. God is just like that. He's an invisible God. Isn't he? He's an invisible God. And that makes him an unknowable force.

But the striking message Paul brings here. The Christianity of the Bible shows. Is that Jesus is the image of that invisible God.

So if we have Jesus. We don't have an unknowable God. But the invisible God is revealed. Isn't he? He is the image of the invisible God.

So that that force. That power is made known. And is knowable. In Jesus the invisible God is revealed. But I guess the question is.

[9 : 33] How close is this likeness? If Jesus is the image of the invisible God. How close an image is he? Is he just a reflection? Is he just a shadow?

How close is that likeness? Well Paul continues. He is the image of the invisible God. The firstborn of all creation. Now this phrase.

Firstborn of all creation. Has caused some difficulty. When it's been read out of context. If you read it very literally. And without kind of putting it in context of the Bible.

Or what Paul is saying here. The firstborn of creation. Sounds like the first creature. Doesn't it?

Firstborn of all creation. The first one that was born of creation.

Is Paul saying perhaps. Jesus is just important. The likeness of God. Because he was the first creature created. That's certainly what some people have said.

[10 : 30] If you read the Jehovah's Witnesses website. They're quite keen on using that interpretation. But that's not what Paul is saying. In the context of the Bible. Or in the context of his own sentence.

Firstly we have to be aware of the context of the wider Bible. The idea of firstborn. Takes on a much bigger broader meaning. In the Old Testament. The firstborn is the one who inherits. Isn't he?

The firstborn is the heir. The rightful first in line. To the father's inheritance. And because of that.

The word firstborn comes in the Bible to mean first in line.

The most important. The preeminent. The rightful ruler. So in the Old Testament. It's often used as a title. The firstborn is a title.

If you're called the firstborn. You don't actually have to be the first one that was born. That becomes really obvious in Psalm 89. Where God speaks to David. And says to David.

[11 : 26] I will make him the firstborn. The highest of the kings of the earth. Now I'm afraid a literal interpretation of firstborn there is impossible. Because David had seven older brothers.

David was in no real sense. Or no literal sense. The firstborn. What's God saying when God calls David the firstborn here? Well he's saying he's the preeminent. Isn't he? Preeminent amongst the kings.

The king of kings. I will make him the firstborn. The highest of the kings of the earth. And what we find is that when Paul says that Jesus is the firstborn of all creation.

He's using the word in the same sense. He is the image of the invisible God. The firstborn of all creation. And we see this just by reading on the next line. For by him all things were created.

In heaven and on earth. Visible and invisible. Whether thrones or dominions. Or rulers or authorities. All things were created through him. And for him. The claim Paul makes is that all things.

[12 : 26] Everything. Was made through Jesus. And for Jesus. There's no ambiguity there. All things were made through him. So there's no way in which that very basic literal interpretation could be true is there?

He isn't nearly the first creature. Because then you've had to create himself. And that gets all very confusing. No. What Paul's saying when he says Jesus is the firstborn. Is that Jesus is preeminent in all creation.

He is the king of creation. Why? Well because he made it. Jesus is the creator God. You see. What Paul is giving us here is the same as the beginning of John's gospel isn't it? In the beginning was the word. And the word was with God. And the word was God. He was in the beginning with God.

All things were made through him. And without him was not anything that was made. Jesus is the image of the invisible God. Because he's the firstborn of all creation.

[13 : 26] He is the creator God. Notice the scope of this claim. The scope of this claim in verse 16. For by him all things were created in heaven and on earth.

Visible and invisible. Whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities. Now this would be very important to the Colossian church. We've already thought they're worried about other spiritual powers.

They're tempted by the possibility of worshipping angels. And if we look on the Amazon Christian books list. We'll find that that's not really a historical problem with the church is it?

We today still find the idea of angels quite exciting. Might be tempted to worship them. Well when Paul refers to thrones, dominions, rulers or authorities.

He's almost certainly referring to spiritual powers. He doesn't deny that angels exist. He affirms they exist. These spiritual powers exist. But they're all subordinate to Jesus aren't they?

[14 : 23] They were all made through him. And for him. That's going to be important to the Colossian church. So we see the scope there. We also see the time span. The time span in verse 17.

And he is before all things. And in him all things hold together. Do you see there's a big bang moment? He is before all things.

Jesus was there at the beginning. He created at the beginning. But there's a continuous part, isn't there? In him all things hold together. Jesus isn't just the one who created on the first day.

He is the one who sustains now. And continues to hold the world together. I don't think we can have any doubt really, can we? When we read that in its context.

When Paul says Jesus is the image of the invisible God. He's saying he's the perfect representation of the creator. He is the creator God made manifest.

[15 : 21] As the book of Hebrews says it. He is the radiance of the glory of God. The exact imprint of his nature. So if we look at Jesus. We're seeing the creator God.

You can imagine him going to the Colossians and just shaking them. Sorry, you think you're missing out? You think these other teachers have something to offer you? But you have the creator God.

You can see him. You can know him. He's not some invisible force. Some unknowable being. In Jesus you have God made known. As Christians we aren't dealing with some abstract God, are we?

I think sometimes we're tempted to just talk about God in theological terms. Philosophical terms. That's not the God we have. We have a God who is made known in the image that is Jesus Christ. And I think that has practical consequences. When we're dealing with perhaps difficult ideas. Difficult theological concepts.

[16 : 24] Or perhaps things that we struggle with in our own lives. And we're wrestling with God. And not sure what to make of what he's doing. Because sometimes we can be tempted, can't we? Just to go to cold theological ideas.

But they don't bring any comfort necessarily. And they can just come across as harsh. So when we're struggling with the idea of disease. Perhaps ourselves or perhaps in others.

Disease that hurts. That doesn't make sense that it's still there. We can look at the theology of why God allows disease. Or we can look at the Jesus who is the image of the creator God.

As filled with compassion he touches the leper. Can't we? And there we see the creator God in action. We struggle with the pain of death, don't we? But we can look at the creator God.

As Jesus cries for his friend Lazarus. Perhaps we get frustrated by what seems to be a tolerance of religious hypocrisy.

[17 : 26] We'll again look at the creator God. As he makes a whip and clears out the temple. Jesus is the image of the invisible God. So if we want to know how he thinks and feels about this world.

We can look at him. God isn't unknowable. And if we're left with another question. Perhaps. How can the creator God. The one who formed the heavens and the earth.

The one through whom and for whom all things are made. How can he have anything to do with people like me? Well we need to carry on reading. Because what we see in Colossians is Jesus is not only the creator.

But he's also the redeemer. He is the image of the invisible God. The first born of all creation. And verse 18. He is the head of the body. The church.

Remember the challenge the Colossians have. They're worried. They sit in their church on a Sunday morning. And they haven't got the big name preachers. They've not got the new ideas. Or the big experiences.

[18 : 26] Their church experience feels a bit mundane. And actually the Apostle Paul has never been there. He's promised us to visit. It looks like he's going to make a trip. But he's never been there yet.

Epaphras who founded the church. Well he's not a big name. Maybe they're not that special. Well Paul says to them pretty straight doesn't it? Don't worry about Epaphras.

Don't worry about me. Jesus the creator God is the head of the body. The church. The minister of the church I went to at university loved to be asked who is your worship leader.

He loved to be asked that question. Who is your worship leader? Not because he wanted to make a comment about the music style in the church. But so that he could slightly facetiously say back to them with a puzzled look.

Well Jesus is. Who's your worship leader? But that's the kind of point which Paul is making here isn't it? When these Christians gather in their church.

[19 : 25] When they're called to worship. They're called to worship by God himself. The creator God who's made himself known is the one who leads us to worship him.

The creator is the one who's the head of the church. You see God gives us gifts doesn't he? He gives us elders and ministers to teach us and to guide us and to admonish us doesn't he?

And we should be grateful for those gifts. He gives us musicians to help us to sing. To help us to worship. But they aren't the head of the church are they? We could easily get confused. We don't need them to get to God.

We don't need them to be a rung between us and God. We don't need saints. We don't need priests. We don't need angels in between us and God do we? Because God himself, Jesus, the image of the invisible God is the head of the church.

Well, how? How is that possible? How is that possible? Well, again, we need to read on. How is that possible? Well, the simple answer is our creator has become our redeemer.

[20 : 32] And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.

For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. And through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on heaven or on earth, making peace by the blood of his cross.

We tend to think of Jesus as either creator or redeemer, I think. It's quite difficult for us to hold the two things in tandem.

I don't know if you've ever had the experience of traveling through Eastern Europe. If you go to a church in Poland, a Catholic church in Poland, you'll see the images of Jesus are all of him as weak.

He's either dying and being taken off the cross, being looked after by his disciples and his mother, or he's a little baby in his mother's arms. We have him as a weak redeemer, the suffering servant.

[21 : 32] If you go across the border into Russia, you'll find in the Orthodox churches, you'll find him as transcendent. You have the transubstantiation and you have him sitting on a throne as the creator God.

What we struggle with is having the two at the same time. Maybe that's the reason we don't draw pictures, because we're not going to be able to capture it all in one. Paul leaves us with no option here. The creator is our redeemer.

The one who made the world and who sustains it is exactly the same, is identical with the man, Jesus Christ of Nazareth, who was crucified at Golgotha and rose three days later.

They're the same one. That's a terrible irony, isn't it? The creator God is executed for blasphemy. It's a terrible blasphemy. And we might ask ourselves, well, why?

Why would the creator God allow that to happen? Well, that in everything he might be preeminent. He is beginning the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.

[22 : 34] The creator God became our redeemer, that he might have all the glory. Jesus Christ, the image of the invisible God, glorified for being creator, but also for being the recreator, the one that brings us back to God.

There's no one else in the way, that in all things he might be preeminent. So the basic application here is supposed to be amazement. It's supposed to be praise for God.

As Thomas Brooks puts it, that the God of strength should be weak, the judge of all condemned, the God of life put to death. Those hands that freely swayed the scepter of heaven, nailed to the cross.

Our creator has become our redeemer, that in all things he might be preeminent, that he might get all the praise. I don't know if ever you're praying in the morning perhaps, or in the evening, you're reading your Bible, perhaps you're just sitting on the bus, and you worry that God might not have the power to save you.

You know he has the power to save, but perhaps he hasn't got the power to save you. Well, Paul's being pretty clear here. It's the same God who had the power to create, who has the power to save.

[23 : 49] As surely as he is powerful to make the moon and the stars, he's powerful to save you. It's the same God who sustains, the same God who stops the sparrows from falling from the sky, who has promised to keep us to the end.

It's that truth from Isaiah 54, isn't it? Fear not, for you will not be ashamed. Be not confounded, for you will not be disgraced. For you will forget the shame of your youth, and the reproach of your woodhood you will remember no more.

For your maker is your husband, the Lord of hosts is his name, and the Holy One of Israel is your Redeemer. The God of the whole earth he is called. Your maker has become your Redeemer.

That's the truth of the Gospel. Not only is God knowable, not only is the Creator God knowable to us, because he has made himself known in the image of himself, that is Jesus, the Word of God become flesh.

God is knowable to us, but also he is accessible to us. Because Jesus, the Creator God, would condescend to become our Redeemer.

[24 : 58] Fear of missing out? Really, Colossian church? Fear of missing out? Your Creator has become your Redeemer. If Paul hasn't already persuaded the Colossian church that they have nothing to be jealous of, that they are not missing out on anything, I think he does it with two words in verse 21.

And you. He, Jesus, is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, and he is the head of the body of the church, he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent, and you.

And you. Fear of missing out? Well, here you are. Here you are, written into the book. This is a biography of the Creator God and his redemptive acts.

And here you are in the epilogue. Fear of missing out? Well, you've been written in. It's like the beginning of a sci-fi film. Forgive me, I've seen too many of these. Pretty much every sci-fi film begins with a skyscape, doesn't it?

An incredible starscape, looking out with all these tiny dots in the distance. And it zooms in to a galaxy, and then it zooms in a little further to a solar system. And then once it's picked one of those planets in the solar system, you see the camera, as it were, zooming down through the atmosphere of that one planet to focus on a little conversation between some robot and a guy in a silly suit.

[26 : 23] That's what happens in sci-fi films, isn't it? This is the biblical equivalent, if you don't mind me saying. We've gone from the cosmic acts of the Creator God, the redemptive acts of the Creator God, to you and me sitting in a church on a Sunday morning.

The Creator God, the image of the invisible God, and you in the same book. I think the first response, again, should be a slight amazement.

Perhaps we're too used to seeing things written about us. Maybe that's another consequence of social media. We expect every post to have us tagged on it. We should be surprised that we come in this book at all.

We should be saying with the psalmist, when I look at the heavens, the work of your hands, the moon and the stars which you have set in place, what is man that you care for him, or the son of the man that you're mindful of him?

We should be surprised that the Creator God pays us any attention at all. Maybe he has some plan for the world as a whole, for the church as a whole, but for me myself? But there we are.

[27 : 26] And you, and you who were once alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless, and above reproach before him.

I suppose our Sunday services may sometimes be mundane. The preacher may be an accountant. But you see, Christians aren't missing out, are they? We are part of the cosmic plan of God. We are part of the work of the Creator. A huge movement that changes the whole of creation into a new creation, in which we have a place.

Maybe there are smoke machines down the road at another church, I don't know. Maybe there are pipe organs that are quite beautiful, and stained glass windows. Maybe there's a new church building to be built that will be genuinely beautiful.

But even without those things, we're not missing out, are we? Maybe there are preachers who can quote this all in Hebrew, maybe there are visions and angels to be experienced, but we're not missing out without them, are we?

[28 : 44] We're not missing out without them. Because we have Jesus, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. But notice in verse 23, there is a condition, there is a condition and a warning.

If indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which is reclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister. If indeed you continue in the faith. Have you perhaps been tempted by some of these other things, looking out around for other ways to meet with God, other than his word, other than looking at Jesus?

Have you perhaps been looking at the church as a whole and thinking, actually there are other places for my spiritual fulfillment? Another religion? Perhaps science?

Perhaps some other way of knowing about the world? Well, you're going to miss out. Perhaps you've never actually trusted in him yourself.

[29 : 46] Perhaps you don't have that faith. Well, the reality of this book is that there are some people who will have FOMO. There are some people who should rightly fear of missing out.

Those who don't know Jesus, who don't know the image of the invisible God, who aren't wrapped up in his redemptive acts, who aren't made one with him. They're missing out.

And I'm afraid if that's you, you are in danger of missing out. As we come to the Lord's Supper today, one of the great things about the Lord's Supper is it is another way in which the invisible God becomes visible to us, isn't it?

The invisible God comes to us in the bread and the wine. Mundane elements. If I'm right, I believe the bread has come from Katie's freezer. And the wine, though we love it, is Chateaufort de Greno. These are mundane elements. But in them, the invisible God becomes real. The invisible God becomes tangible and physical and offers himself out to us that we might know him and experience him.

[30 : 54] That we might feel him as our redeemer. And if, perhaps, we're believers, we have that faith and we take the bread and the wine, knowing those things, I hope you know that you're not missing out on anything in the world, as mundane as it might look, whatever else is going on elsewhere.

But perhaps you don't have that faith and you watch the elements pass you by, the bread and the wine. I hope that as you see those things pass by, you just think for a moment, maybe I'm wrong, maybe I'm nuts, maybe the Bible isn't true.

I don't think that's the case at all. But what if it's right? What if Paul is right? Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. And he is the head of the body of the church.

He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead. Then in everything, he might be preeminent. What if he's right? Consider what you might be missing out on. So for Christians, I hope we can remember this morning, he has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

And there really is nothing more that we should want, or could want. Amen.