

Colossians 1:1-23

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[0 : 00] If you've got a Bible, I'm going to preach to you from the verses in Colossians chapter 1, verses 15 to 18.

! So children, you'll remember them from Holiday Bible Club. We learned that he is the Lord Jesus, he is the image of the invisible God. We learned that during Holiday Bible Club. Well, the year is 61 AD.

Colossae is a little backwater town. In what we would call Western Turkey. And there were Christians there. There were Jewish Christians and Gentile Christians. There were slave Christians and master Christians.

Employer Christians, employee Christians. Children Christians. And like many churches, the Christians in Colossae had fallen into difficulties.

There was the problem of false teachers. There were people who used exactly the same words as they did, but had a completely different meaning.

[1 : 04] And there were people that were giving a really distorted view of the Christian life. Questions of, and what does God expect of you?

How do you make a success of the Christian life? If the Christian life goes wrong, what's the reason for that? And all of those things Paul is addressing in his letters to the Colossians.

He's greeted them at the start of chapter 1. And he's told them that he's praying for them. He's told them what he's praying for them. And then he gets to the end of that bit and he begins to talk about Jesus Christ.

Jesus is mentioned in verse 13 as the one who's taken us from the kingdom of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of light. We're under new ownership as Christians. And we're told that it's in him, in the Lord Jesus, that we have redemption.

And we're no longer slaves. We've been freed in Christ and we have the forgiveness of sins. And then Paul reminds them in our section who Jesus is. Now tonight, is there something wrong with your Christian life?

[2 : 13] Are you aware things are not as they should be? You can't work it out, but you know this is not the Christian life that you should have. What's the reason for that?

What is the reason for that? And I want to argue from these verses that it's always the same reason. When a Christian life goes wrong, it's always the same reason.

And it's this, that you've stopped contemplating Jesus Christ. And if your Christian life is going to be repaired, and you are going to become the Christian that you should be, what must you do?

You must contemplate Jesus Christ. Go to the GP to borrow. He says, you're short of vitamin D. I'm short of vitamin D, doctor.

What do I do? What does the doctor do? Say, he says, well, get out, get out into the sunshine. Get out into the sunshine. And if your Christian life is not what it should be, get out into the sunshine.

[3 : 17] Bathe in what the Bible speaks about the Lord Jesus Christ. If you're discouraged tonight, what do you need?

You need to contemplate Jesus Christ. And if you feel the pressures of this world are just too great, you're under too much temptation, you don't think you can keep going, what is the answer?

It is to contemplate Jesus Christ. Many people in churches up and down this land think that the Christian life is in a mess. Do you know what I need to do? I need to make a list. The power of lists. And my prayer life is in a mess. What do I need? I need a list to sort it out. My Christian life is in a mess. I need to read my Bible more.

My Christian life isn't feeling right. I need to be a better witness. And tragically, even in churches like this, there can be that sort of mechanical view of the Christian life.

[4 : 16] You pull this lever, you push that lever, and hey, Preston, it's back to normal. But let me say this, you can't, you can't, you can't. But if you contemplate Jesus Christ, you will find you've got a new appetite for reading the Bible.

If you contemplate the Lord Jesus Christ, you will have a new spirit of prayer. If you contemplate Jesus Christ, you will find that you will have opportunities to speak of the Lord Jesus.

And so for all the muddle the Colossians were in, the answer was to contemplate Christ. To contemplate Christ in relation to who he is and to creation to the church.

Four things. First of all, as we contemplate Christ, I want us to see his essence. That's his central being. And then secondly, I want us to see his pre-existence.

That is, he existed before the foundation of the world. Thirdly, I want us to see his work in creation. And then fourthly, I want us to see his headship over the church. So let's look at the essence of a divine saviour.

[5 : 23] So in verse 15. He is the image of the invisible God. That's the first thing. Paul says to us about the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Bible speaks with one voice that God is inscrutable. There's no one who has seen God at any time.

Because no man can look upon God and live. And so when people say to us, well if you show me God, I believe in him. What they're asking is something very, very foolish.

Because man cannot look on God and live. His essence is inscrutable. Now something of God's eternal power is seen in creation.

Something of his deity. It's seen there, isn't it? Romans 1.20. You see the footprints of God in creation. You see something of his glory and his grandeur.

[6 : 24] But no more than that. But here, in Colossians 1.15. Paul is saying the very essence of the eternal God has been manifested.

Has been shown in Jesus Christ. He is the image of the invisible God. The writer to the Hebrews says something very similar. He says that Jesus Christ is the radiance of God's glory.

He's the exact image of his personal being. And of course, it's precisely that that Jesus himself says, isn't he? When he responds to the disciples, do you remember?

They ask him, show us the Father and we will be satisfied. What does Jesus say? Jesus says, he who has seen me has seen the Father. That's what Paul means when he says, the light of the knowledge of the glory of God, which man cannot see, has become visible in the face of Jesus Christ.

So the New Testament is clear that Jesus, as he is in his person and nature and being, is the very image of the invisible God.

[7 : 30] So when people ask, well, what is God like? Maybe you're asking that. How are we to know what God is like? How are we to imagine him? We do not, do not, do not think up something in our minds to help us imagine God.

So when people say, well, I like to think of God like this, or I prefer to think of God like that, or I don't like to think of God that way. It's ridiculous because there is one clear way to look upon God in his glory, and that is to gaze at the Lord Jesus.

Because he has given us in Jesus the image of the invisible God. Now there's something absolutely amazing when you think about this. Let's try and think about it a little bit more deeply.

When, whatever else the New Testament apostles believed this, they believed that this person, Jesus of Nazareth, was, as the Athanasian Creed says, very God of very God.

That, that person in history, Jesus of Nazareth, was actually fully and completely God. He was divine in his being and his essence. No one has ever seen God, but the only Son has made him known.

[8 : 50] John 1. There's also a reference, isn't there, in these verses to creation, where man himself is made in the image of God.

And that leads us to the second phrase. He is the firstborn of all creation. And that moves us from his essence, as the very nature and being of God, to his pre-existence. He is the very image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

What does firstborn of all creation mean? Well, we know what it cannot mean. It cannot mean that Jesus Christ was the first of all created beings.

What it means is in verse 17 to 19, he is before all things. He is in the beginning. He is the firstborn from the dead.

Think with me about this for a minute, all right? If the Son of God is the exact image of the invisible God, and if the invisible God is eternal in his nature, and if Jesus is the exact image of God in his essence, and if God is eternal in his nature, then it follows, isn't it, that Jesus must also be eternal in his nature.

[10:08] And that is what the Bible teaches, that he was there before creation. It was through him and for him and by him that creation came into being.

And that puts the creation of man and the birth of Jesus into their proper context. Jesus Christ is eternally the image of God.

He bore that image before creation. And when God made man in Genesis 1 in his own image, that was an earthly shadow of a heavenly reality that already existed in Christ.

Because in eternity, the image of God in Jesus Christ who existed from all eternity. And when God made man, it was a shadow of an already existing glory.

The glory that Jesus had with the Father before the world began. And man, human beings, men and women, were made in that image. And then it came a point in history where the Word became flesh.

[11:31] John says we beheld his glory. The glory of the one and only. The glory of the one begotten of the Father. Because Jesus Christ is the supreme manifestation, the supreme showing of that image of God.

That is our Lord's essence or deity. His pre-existence in eternity. And what Paul is pressing to these Colossians is that this Jesus, who's been brought before their eyes as the Saviour, is sufficient for every need of his people.

And this Jesus who they've believed in is the one who in his essence is God in his nature. And who from before the foundation of the world had eternally been the Son of God. And that's the significance of this phrase, the firstborn over all creation.

It means he is the head. The one who was really there before creation. And so Paul speaks not only of a divine Saviour and of an eternal Saviour, but then thirdly of a Saviour who's active in creation. Look at verse 15. For by him all things were created. What he's saying there is this, that Paul finds in Jesus Christ the key to creation.

[12:59] He looks at the world and he says, all of this that you can see and know is there because of Jesus Christ and with Jesus Christ in view. And that is precisely what the rest of the New Testament tells us about Jesus.

It tells us that not only is he the Redeemer of man and the Saviour of sinners, not only is he the author of a new creation and of the church as the new creation, but it tells us that he is the author of the first creation.

Because without him, nothing was made that has been made, John 1. In him, by him, all things were created.

So the son is not just the father's agent in redemption. He is first of all the father's agent in creation. What does this tell us?

This tells us that when the word became flesh, when the Son of God became incarnate and walked on earth, there is nothing surprising about the mighty works of Christ in the world, is there?

[14:15] What happens in the Gospels? The creator is entering into creation as its Lord. And he speaks the word and it is done.

And that's why Jesus comes to people in particular need and he doesn't cast some spell, he doesn't say some incantation or something special. He speaks to them.

He tells a dead man to come out of the grave and the dead man comes out. He stands on a boat in the middle of a storm and he says to the storm, Hush, peace, be still.

And the storm, the wind and the waves, they die down. What is it that gives Jesus' word such authority? It's that he is the creator God.

The really surprising thing in the Gospels is how few miracles there are, actually. Not that there are miracles. The amazing thing is as the creator walks amongst them incognito, the whole universe acts as it normally does in the presence of Jesus.

[15:30] Because this glorious fact that the creator God is standing in the midst of them. And whatever word he speaks, creation must bow before him.

And that is the redeemer that we have tonight. That is the Jesus that we're speaking about and singing of. He is the Lord of creation who, with the Father, spoke into the formless void and said, let there be light and there was light.

And what this means for us tonight and what it meant for the Colossians is that there is nothing that is beyond the scope of such a saviour. And when we grasp something of the cosmic dimension of his glory and character, that not only is creation made by him, he is the agent of it, but it also says creation was made for him.

He is before all things. All things were created through him and for him. So the whole of creation finds its significance in him. It was not only originated by Jesus, it exists for Jesus.

And when people say that they can live their life without Jesus, they're fooling themselves because he is the one for whom they exist. And he's not only the creator of the visible world.

[16:53] Paul says, can you see it? He's the creator of all things 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. It seems, if you read the book of Colossians, that the teachers in Colossae were making lots about angels and spirits and so on.

And Paul is saying, the angels and the spirits, they bow before Jesus. He made them, he owns them, he created them, he's Lord over them. The other thing we're told about Jesus here, which is astonishing, he's not only before creation and above creation and the end of creation, he's the one sustaining creation.

So look at verse 17. In him, all things hold together. It is Jesus Christ alone who gives coherence and significance to the universe.

It is the presence of the Lord Jesus at the right hand of the Father that makes this universe cosmos, a cosmos rather than just chaos.

[18:08] And what prevents the universe from becoming chaotic? What prevents this universe from spiraling out of control and becoming chaotic? It is not the mind and the brilliance of scientists or the power of politicians, it is the presence of the Lord Jesus Christ.

At the right hand of the Father, he holds all of this together. That's what Paul is saying. And these truths of who Christ is tonight have massive implications for us.

They deliver us from three really basic things. Paul is saying he's the image of the invisible God, he's the firstborn over all creation. By him all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible thrones, dominions, principalities.

They were made through him and are for him. Three truths to help us. First of all, they deliver you and I from a wrong kind of despair or fear.

There are some of us out there we despair of ourselves or about the future. It's really easy to do that culturally at the moment to just despair.

[19:19] What is going to happen? And when we do that, it's because we do not have an adequate view of the glory of our Saviour. And some of our fears about ourselves or our world or our children for some of us and we fear, can I really trust the Lord Jesus to keep hold of me and us?

Well, let's try and apply this from what we've learned tonight. If Jesus Christ holds together the universe, is he able to hold your world together?

If he holds this world, this universe together, is he able to hold your life with all its complexities and pains and to steer it to a place of glory?

Is he able to do that? And that's what takes our fears and our anxieties that many of us have and it puts them into context, doesn't it?

Who is the Lord of glory? Who holds our life in his hands? Because he's got the whole world in his hands. And he is the one Paul says, by whom all things hold together.

[20:47] Can you really believe that the one who created and formed and maintains the universe on its cause is incapable of dealing with your situation? Secondly, these truths keep us from a wrong despising of God's creation.

They deliver us from a wrong despising of God's creation. One of the issues in Colossae, there were those who were leading the church into a kind of asceticism and a kind of holding back from enjoying the ordinary blessings that God gives to us.

churches like this can be really prone to be like that. To be truly religious, to be truly full on, you go without marriage, certain foods you don't have.

You see it in verse 21 of chapter 2. What was it like to be in the church in Colossae?

Well, you bop it, the game bop it, where it shouts at you, pull this, twist this, punch that. That's what it was like in Colossians. Look, do not handle, do not taste, do not touch.

[22 : 12] It's all physical things there. Can you see that? Bop it Christianity, rules, lists, do not, do not, do not. But the doctrine of the Lord Jesus as the creator and lord of the universe, it enables you and I to enjoy the blessings of the created order.

The earth is the lord's and the fullness thereof. It's been one of the lovely things, isn't it, about Ecclesiastes.

Ecclesiastes can be a miserable book, but Ruben has shown us that it's not a miserable book, that actually there are things in life which are to be enjoyed. The work that God has given you, the wife that God has given you, the family, those are good gifts from God to be enjoyed.

And as Christians, we hold them in the right way, that we ought to be able to enjoy this world in a way that unbelievers can't. That this creation that belongs to the Lord Jesus, he has given us and the benefits and the blessings of it.

And many of these colossi people were kind of confused about this very issue. The Lord Jesus Christ, when you have him as your Lord, he expands and he enlarges your life.

[23 : 39] He doesn't shrink it. Do you hear that, young people? He doesn't shrink it. the devil tells you, if you live for the Lord Jesus Christ, he'll make my life dull and boring.

The opposite is the case. And we will discover ourselves able to give thanks and enjoy the good gifts that God has given us in creation and to glory in God as our creator as well as our redeemer. They deliver us from a wrong despair of ourselves and a fear of our circumstances. They deliver us from a wrong despising of God's creation. And then they deliver us from a wrong kind of diversion, a diversion from Jesus.

So these people in Colossae, they're being diverted. The teachers in Colossae were saying, listen, you need something else that you've not experienced.

The Christian life is a code of doing this and not doing that and doing this and doing that. And being diverted from all sorts of things away from the centrality and supremacy of the Lord Jesus.

[24 : 51] It is only an adequate view of the Lord Jesus and his glory that will deliver us from the kind of diversion. And so if the Lord Jesus ceases to be supreme and sufficient and exalted you will find yourself being tempted and drawn away and diverted.

You'll be tempted to believe, like some of you are tonight, that you will not find your total sufficiency in him. and what you need is to grasp and to view his glory, to see his preeminence as creator and as redeemer.

Paul goes on to say that Christ as God in his essence, who he is and in his preexistence and his creatorhood and then he shows us this, that Christ is the head of the new creation, which is the church, verse 18.

He's the head of the body and the church. he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.

The church is Christ's body, that's a picture that if you've been in church a while, you'll know that picture. It's used in a number of places in the New Testament. And mainly when the picture of we are Christ's body, it's used to show our interdependence.

[26 : 37] And so there's various members of the body and each have their own role to play. And so we're all part of Christ's body.

Sometimes the picture in the New Testament is you're an arm or you're an eye, you're a leg, we work together. But that isn't the picture here. That's not the emphasis here.

Paul wants you to see that Jesus Christ is the head of the church and he is the eternal creator God who upholds the universe and he is head of the church and he's head of the church in two senses. First of all, he's the head of the church in the organic sense. That is, he shares his life and we derive our growth from him.

The emphasis is not on mutual dependence of the members but the total dependence of the members on Jesus Christ. And so there is no true life in the church except being derived from him.

[27 : 43] There's no true growth in the church apart from him. Chapter 2 and verses 18 and 19 are really helpful. Let no one disqualify you insisting on a satism or worship of angels going on in detail about visions being puffed up without reason by the sensuous mind and not holding fast to the head from whom the whole body nourished and knit together through its joints and ligaments grows with the growth that is from God.

The point is this, true growth, true blessing, true nourishment of the church derives from Jesus. from Jesus being recognised as the head of the church.

And that's why it's so important, isn't it, that when we come together it is Jesus who we exalt. It is Jesus who should be raised high in our midst because our life as a fellowship derives from his headship.

He is the head of the church. He is the Lord of the church. He governs.

He reigns. Do you think that if Jesus Christ is Lord of the church and he is the head of the church and he loves his church, do you think that he would leave the government of his church and the way that his church is governed up for us to decide?

[29 : 22] Do you think that? Do you think he might have laid that down? He's not only the organic head, he is the ruling head.

And we do not just depend on him for growth, we depend on him also for government over our lives. And so what gives the church its true unity is a common obedience to its ruling head.

God's great aim in the church and in the world is what? To make Jesus preeminent. May Jesus Christ be praised.

He's the head of the body, the church, the beginning, the firstborn, from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. Here's the lesson that we need to learn. So that we should be delivered from despair about ourselves and our circumstances, delivered from a wrong despising of God's creation, that we be delivered from being diverted, but here God has taken this Jesus who is the author of creation, the essence of God and his being, and he's made him now head over all things to the church, so that here, so that in his church, from all the places in the universe, here in his church he might have preeminence and God's purpose for the universe is to be seen here and now in his church, that Jesus would be exalted to a place of absolute preeminence.

That preeminence is primarily seen in a kind of moral preeminence and the preeminence of Jesus in his church means that the government is truly seen to rest on his shoulders that he reigns.

[31 : 14] that the knees of his people gladly bow to him, that the wills of his subjects are gladly offered to his service, that Jesus Christ be praised.

That elders lead and shepherd and govern, that Jesus Christ be praised. That wills of how is this glorious saviour in all his cosmic wonder exalted in the church?

It's not an emotional thing though God knows our emotions need to be aroused by the sheer wonder of who he is. But the essence of the way that Jesus is exalted is by our moral obedience to his will.

And that's what, this is when Jesus takes the preeminent in place among his people. And so the question for you and I tonight, for me, is does Jesus Christ have the preeminence in my life?

So that he is unquestioned and he is unrivaled in this whole area of life. The question for us as a church is does Jesus Christ have the preeminence?

[32 : 44] does his word have the preeminence? And so may it be that God in his grace will see his son exalted.

You see, what do you need tonight as we come to the Lord's table? What you need as you come to the Lord's table is exactly what you're given in the Lord's table.

they are visible signs and seals of the Lord Jesus Christ that he has given himself for you.

He has shed his blood for you. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, 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 and he is before all things and in him all things hold together and he is the head of the body, the church.

He's the beginning, the firstborn from the dead that in everything he might be preeminent. Let's pray.