

Evening Service | 19th Dec | Colossians 1:15-20

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Preacher: James Ross

[0 : 00] Now again, we'll turn together in our Bibles to the book of Colossians. Colossians chapter 1, and we'll read from verse 15 to 20.

And we'll consider Jesus as Lord of creation and new creation. So again, let's hear the word of God. The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

For in him all things were created, things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities, all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church.

He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood shed on the cross.

[1 : 29] Amen. So I can still remember the very first time in Bible college many years ago, my mind was blown by a new truth about Jesus.

We were in a class thinking about the doctrine of Jesus Christ, and our lecturer was using some works from early church fathers and was helping us to see that the Christ child in the manger, that tiny, vulnerable little baby, at one and the same time was sustaining the universe.

And that wasn't something I'd thought about before, and that was a remarkable truth. And it made me realize then, and I hope I still realize now, that my view and our view of Jesus constantly needs to expand.

We will never come close to grasping the full extent of the glory of God, of the glory of the Lord Jesus. Even in all eternity, we will never cease to discover more of that glory.

It's a glorious passage, isn't it? And it's written to a church in Colossae of young Christians, of Christians who were under pressure, hearing false teaching, tempted to look away from depending only on Jesus, to add some other rules and regulations.

[3 : 02] And here's Paul's wonderful response. And there's such wisdom here, and Paul could easily say, just don't do that, that's just a really bad idea to try and add anything to Jesus.

But what he does instead is he looks to give them this wonderful reminder of just how great Jesus is. He gives this wonderful Christ hymn for them, to say to them, Jesus is supreme.

There is none greater than him, therefore don't seek to add to him. Jesus is sufficient. To have faith in him means you don't need to have anything else for your salvation.

And this has always been the confession of the church. This was a hymn already, it seems, in circulation. So within a matter of decades, this is what the church has been singing, testifying about Jesus.

He is supreme. He is fully God. He is the only Savior. Your Jesus is Lord. Our starting point this evening is that I'm confident that we all need this text.

[4 : 13] We all need to be reminded about the glory of Christ, because like the church in Colossae, we'll all be tempted in different ways towards taking our eyes off Jesus. Perhaps for some of us that will be because of the pressures of life.

Sometimes it will be the temptation towards sin. Perhaps it will be because of questions or doubts or fears. And we can stop looking towards Jesus.

And we also need this, because like me, we always need to be reminded, and to use the glasses or the binoculars of Scripture, to have an appropriate vision of Jesus.

To recognize that Jesus is not small. He's not a Savior that we can control. Rather, he is the Lord of the universe. So this hymn is written as a gift to the church to tune our hearts, to sing the praise of

Christ.

It's a wonderful text to study as we approach Christmas. A text that shows us the extent to which Jesus is Lord over creation and Lord over the new creation, and to help us to begin to think why that matters for faith and life.

[5 : 22] So let's think, verse 15 to 17, let's think together briefly about Jesus as Lord of creation. Two phrases to pick out, to focus on.

The first, at the beginning of verse 15, the sun is the image of the invisible God. As B.B. Warfield, the American theologian, said, Jesus makes the invisible God visible.

It's a wonderful reality, isn't it? And this was Paul's teaching. Throughout his letters, we can turn, for example, to 2 Corinthians 4, and verse 4, and we hear Paul say this, the God of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

So in the gospel, we discover that Jesus is the image of God, and we discover the glory of Christ. And sadly, the devil wants to keep people from believing that. Then verse 6, for God who said, let light shine out of darkness, made his light shine in our hearts, to give us the light of the knowledge of God's glory, displayed in the face of Christ.

We see the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus. That's the testimony of John in his gospel.

That's why we read his introduction. The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us, and we've seen his glory, the glory as of the one and only Son, full of grace and truth.

[6 : 59] We've been thinking about it for the last few months in John's gospel. We've been hearing the words of Jesus. He who has seen me has seen the Father. I and the Father are one.

Jesus makes the invisible God visible. And also, when we think of that idea of image, the image of God, maybe for many of us, our minds go back to Genesis 1, where Adam and Eve are created in the image of God.

And their role was to rule and reign for God, to spread, as it were, the image of God in creation. But, of course, we know from our Bibles that Adam and Eve fell into sin and failed to do that in the same way as we fail to do that. But here is Jesus, and he is the true and better Adam, who does come bringing in the kingdom of God, who does restore the reign of God, who does spread the image of God in the world that he created.

So Jesus is the image of the invisible God. But then in verse 15, there's also that significant phrase that the Son, Jesus, is the firstborn over all creation.

[8 : 16] And this is a phrase that we need to be careful with. Jehovah's Witnesses, for example, would use this text to say, well, here's proof positive that Jesus was the first created being.

How do we respond to that? Well, we can perhaps, to just think about the tone and the teaching of this text, what's it saying about Jesus? It's saying something far beyond that, isn't it? It's expressing the fact that Jesus is fully God.

The fullness of God dwells in him, that he is eternal, that he is before and above all. Rather, the idea of firstborn has to do with rank and place.

Think about the firstborn child. They were the heir. Here is Paul's way of saying, remember, all creation belongs to Christ because he is firstborn in rank, first place.

In the Old Testament, God said that Israel was his firstborn in Exodus 4. The Davidic king, Psalm 89, is God's firstborn. Kings or nations chosen with a special place and a special role.

[9 : 27] Jesus is God's firstborn in the sense that he perfectly represents his rule. He is uniquely, eternally loved by his father and he is the heir of all things.

He has ultimate rule and honor is the idea. And that's made clear from the phrases that follow. So again, if you have your Bibles, take a look at these phrases.

Verse 16, For in him, in Jesus, all things were created. Jesus is the agent of creation.

God created through Jesus his word. And look at how comprehensive the list is. Things in heaven and on earth, visible, invisible, thrones, powers, rulers, authorities.

All things have been created through him and for him. Jesus the Son is acting with God the Father and as God in creating. And we also discover that Jesus himself is the goal of creation.

[10 : 27] All things have been created through him and for him. Verse 17, He is before all things. He is the eternal Lord.

He's not part of the creation. He was there before. There was anything other than Father, Son, and Spirit. And verse 17, In him, all things hold together.

He is the Lord who sustains the universe he created. He is the one who controls. Jesus is the unifying theory of everything.

Now, Paul is saying these verses. Our Christmas carols, they sometimes ask the questions, What child is this?

Who is he in yonder stall? Look at the size of the answer that Paul gives here. Jesus is the perfect revelation of God in all his glory. Jesus is the Lord of the universe, the universe that was created by him, in him, and for him.

[11 : 34] For a church under pressure, for Christians like us, here is hope. Here is hope when the world perhaps seems to be spinning out of control in our own experiences as we look around society.

Jesus is in control. Jesus is on the throne. Jesus is working out his purposes. Here is hope when our faith feels weak, when we wonder if we can keep going and we remember that our faith is dependent on Jesus, the one who is strong enough to create this world, is strong enough to establish new creation life in us, is strong enough to keep us in our faith.

Let's hope for us as well to recognize it's this Lord, the Creator Lord, who has entered into his creation in order to save us. his cause for praise.

So Jesus is Lord of creation, but he's also, as Paul moves on, he's also Lord of the new creation. So let's again look at some key phrases in verse 18 to 20.

He begins there, he is the head of the body, the church. Now, boys and girls, your classes are over for the term, but let's do some very basic biology.

[13 : 00] If you think about it, we can lose a toe, we can lose an arm, we can lose a leg, we'd have pain, but we'd be okay. But if we lose our heads, then we have nothing.

Jesus is the head. Jesus gives life to the church. Jesus is our command and control center. Just as our brain functions to control our bodies, Jesus is Lord over the church.

And so it is vital for the church, it was vital for this church that Paul is writing to, to stay connected, united to him, just as it's vital for us to be connected to Jesus.

Verse 18 goes on, he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead. To help us to think about this, a chap called Athanasius wrote a book on the incarnation back sometime in the 4th century, I can't remember exactly when, but he said this, wonderful, helpful phrase, I think, there is no inconsistency between creation and salvation for the one father has employed the same agent for both works.

So let's just stop there. Athanasius is reminding us God's agent of creation is Jesus, God's agent in salvation is Jesus.

[14 : 27] So the father was effecting the salvation of the world through the same word who made it in the beginning. So that same word, Jesus, who gives life to creation is the same word who gives new creation life.

that phrase, the beginning, I guess, makes us think of Genesis 1, in the beginning God created. Jesus is the one through whom God creates a new spiritual life.

And he is the firstborn from among the dead so that in everything he might have the supremacy. So again, firstborn has that idea of first in rank, first in authority.

Why is Jesus the firstborn from among the dead? Tom Schreiner says, well, Jesus rules over death because he was the first to conquer death. And as it goes for Jesus, so it goes for his followers. Being the firstborn from among the dead at the resurrection is proof. Jesus is the author of life. proof positive that Jesus has the power to give new life, the promise of resurrection life for all who trust him.

[15 : 48] We don't need to look to anyone or anything else. Verse 19, God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him.

Everything essential to being God is found in Jesus and belongs to Jesus. the same words, same ideas, anyway, in chapter 2, verse 9. For in Christ, all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form. And then he goes on to say, in Christ, you've been brought to fullness. Because you're trusting in a saviour who is fully God, you can believe that you have a full salvation and you're not lacking anything.

Perhaps, again, boys and girls, we can think about this by thinking about a bike. If you've got a bike or you can think about a bike, for a bike to be full and complete, it needs every part, doesn't it? It needs a saddle, it needs a chain, it needs pedals, it needs brakes.

Otherwise, it's not complete. The Bible is teaching Jesus isn't partly God, Jesus isn't mostly God, Jesus isn't sometimes God, Jesus is totally God, while also being totally man.

[17 : 05] Jesus is eternally God. All that is essential to God is found in Jesus. It's a reminder, in the context of their false teaching, if there's nothing missing from Jesus, why would they try and add to Jesus?

And then verse 20, through Jesus, God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood shed on the cross.

The Lord Jesus came that first Christmas and he came to bring peace on earth. We learn some wonderful truths about reconciliation from this verse here, verse 20.

We learn that reconciliation is God's work. A work of reconciliation, making peace between two parties who are at enmity with one another.

God takes the initiative to make peace. The coming of Christ is all of grace. We learn, too, that reconciliation is a completed work.

[18 : 17] It was completed at the cross. Peace has been made. Jesus said, it is finished. The sin barrier is broken down. That sin that would separate us from our God that has been dealt with for those who trust in Jesus so that we can enjoy peace.

So reconciliation happened at the cross. How does God make peace? Through the blood of his son, Jesus.

He makes peace by way of sacrifice. Again, there's a reminder of why there's no room for pride in the Christian life. It took the giving of Jesus, it took the death of his perfect son, God the Father's perfect son, in order to reconcile us to himself.

And also, we're reminded in this verse that reconciliation takes in all things. It takes in the church, the people of God, but also the creation, the creation that is under the curse, that's been under the curse since Genesis 3, the creation that is groaning in Romans 8, waiting for full and final salvation of the people of God when the new heavens and the new earth are established when Jesus returns. So here to this group of young Christians under pressure to listen to false teaching, Paul gives them this wonderful hymn.

[19 : 52] Let's just, before we close, let's think about some reasons why this hymn matters for you and me as we think about the glory of Jesus that it might increase our worship and increase our joy.

Let's just remind ourselves that when we're thinking about Jesus, considering Jesus, we are recognizing that Jesus truly reveals God as creator and redeemer.

It has been well said that if God were our creator only and we just thought of God as almighty power, we might run from him in terror.

But that God is our redeemer through the work of Christ, that produces a different kind of fear, that fear that is awe and wonder and worship that God would love so much.

Again, to go even further back in early church history, second century, Irenaeus, like this, God who formed us in the beginning also formed us in the womb, personal creation, not just universal creation, God created each one of us and that same God sought us out when we were lost, won us back for himself, carries us home on his shoulders.

[21 : 26] How do all those wonderful pictures of salvation come to fulfillment? fulfillment? They come to fulfillment through Jesus, the Son of God who is conceived in the womb of the Virgin, made one of us in order to redeem us.

Jesus reveals to us God as creator and as redeemer. This hymn also reminds us importantly that Jesus is Lord over all of life.

Perhaps we have a tendency to put God in a box, a tendency to compartmentalize our lives.

Perhaps we can think in terms of spiritual and secular or regular.

Jesus gets one but not the other. And whenever we're doing that we need to understand that our God is far too small. the creation and the new creation are His.

He is Lord not just over some but over all. Every part is His. And spiritual wisdom recognizes that and looks to live in dependence on Christ because of that so that we might live to His praise and glory in all the circumstances of life.

[22 : 46] So whether we're thinking about how do I approach life at home or how do I make sure that my conversations are pleasing to God. How do I face my work tasks?

How do I spend my money? We need to take all of these before the Lord Jesus to not lean on our own understanding but to lean on His wisdom because He's Lord not just over some but over all of

our lives.

We're also reminded here that the church exists by the grace of God shown to us in Christ. Again, Paul said in Ephesians 1 that God's people are chosen in Him, in Jesus, before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless, predestined to be adopted as God's children.

The church is God's plan. The church is the house that Jesus came to build. And the Son of God saves His people.

He gathers them to Himself. He makes sure that we persevere in our faith. He is the one who promises to bring us home to our Father.

[24 : 02] The church doesn't rest on human authority, doesn't rest on human traditions, additional regulations such as the false teachers would add. the church is built on Christ, the truth of the gospel.

And to find ourselves part of the church is to find ourselves united. First of all, united to the Lord Jesus, He is our head, but also united to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ.

Here is the basis for our unity. Here is the basis for our love for one another. And then finally to think about this, that faith, our faith day to day, it depends on this Jesus as Lord.

Now we are being reminded here that Jesus is the one who saves. He is the one who comes to establish peace through his blood.

Our contribution to the work of salvation, salvation is to bring our sin and our guilt and our need and to acknowledge that we cannot save ourselves and to trust in the one who has come to save us.

[25 : 21] We are called again to recognize the only proper object of our faith is the Lord Jesus and that atoning work that he came to do. We are being reminded that Jesus is a sufficient savior.

We don't need to add anything to him. We need to look for anything more than him. He is God's gift of grace to us. And so our salvation rests and receives by Jesus alone for salvation.

And to also remember that this Jesus who's been described here, he's the one who sustains faith.

The same Jesus who's sustaining the universe by the word of his power is sustaining his church.

We look to him to keep us, to keep his church and to bring us home. So as we get ourselves ready for Christmas, I hope that this wonderful hymn will serve to expand our minds and our faith and our hearts as we look to prepare and as we look to worship.

Let me pray briefly for us. Lord, our God, we recognize that your glory is so great that we are only ever seeing glimpses of it, that we're only ever scratching the surface of your truth and your beauty and your majesty of your lordship.

[27 : 12] of your grace and mercy. But Lord, we thank you that those glimpses that we see are capable of filling our hearts with joy, of putting songs in our mouths, of giving strength to our faith.

And so we thank you for this wonderful Christ hymn. And we pray that you would help us to appreciate and draw deeply to ourselves the truths that are contained in it so that our lives would be built on Jesus, our Lord and Saviour, so that we would be sustained in our faith as we are resting and trusting in him alone.

Lord, we pray that this would be a time in our life of growing in our faith, of growing in our love, of growing in our hope and our joy, as you continue to show us wonderful things from your wonderful word.

And we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Now, we are going to sing together as we close the hymn Behold Our God.

And we are without musical accompaniment, but should be on the video, so we should be all right, so we can stand and we can sing together Behold Our God. We're going to sing together Behold Our God.

[28 : 49] Amen. Thank you.