

# No one like Jesus

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[0:00] Earlier this summer I had the pleasure of sharing with the staff and the young people at Teen Ranch.

! Part of that is to lead devotions with the staff every morning. It's an encouraging sight to stand there with 30 or so, mostly young, some not so young people, who have given their time to run this camp so the children who come along can hear the Gospel.

This...oh no, that's not right. OK, sorry about that. I thought I had a picture there but maybe I don't. But anyway, I did share the WhatsApp group if you were part of that on that week, a picture of all that staff team there.

And it was just such a pleasure to be with them. And what we did in the staff devotions this year was to listen to a worship song and then talk together with a few...a theme that rose out of that song.

I'm not an actual music person. Anyone who's ever listened to the live stream when my microphone's been left on during the songs will know that. But thankfully Tamsin is and she gave me some good songs to listen to and choose from.

[1:23] But of course we know that music has the power to draw us close to God and as an aid to help us remember parts of the Bible and the truth that we find in its pages.

Many writers looking at the passage we read this morning think that it's a hymn that the church was singing at the time and that Paul was using it to teach them about Jesus.

Others think that Paul's written it himself on the basis that when someone writes on a subject that's so close to their hearts as Jesus was to Paul, then they become so eloquent and enthusiastic.

One commentator said that probably no paragraph in the New Testament contains more concentrated doctrine about Jesus Christ than this one. Now you might know this, that the last Sunday before Advent, which is 22nd of November, sorry I don't mean to talk about Christmas or almost Christmas already, but it is coming.

But the last Sunday before Advent is called Christ the King Sunday, which I don't know you, but that sounds like the best name for a Sunday you could ever think of. But there you go, Christ the King Sunday.

[2:33] And this passage is one of the most common for people to preach on in that Sunday because of course it's so much about Jesus. But for us of course we are looking at as part of our look through this book of Colossians that we're doing in these weeks together.

Now depending on which version of the Bible you're reading, verse 15 to 20 can read a little differently. Some Bible translations, it's laid out in the same way as the rest of the text, but this one for example, it's laid out more like a song or a poem, which has helped give rise to the idea that that's what it is of course.

Now the eagle-eyed among you may have noticed that we started today's reading with a couple of verses from last week's reading. And we did that because they give us a little bit of context to what Paul is saying next.

So before we start to look at this wonderful hymn, we're just going to take a minute with verses 13 to 14. Now these two verses give us such a clear description of what Jesus has done for us on the cross.

We believe that the world is lost in sin and that is a problem that we can't solve by ourselves. No amount of rational thought or philosophy can answer this problem for us.

[4:02] We need a rescuer and that rescuer is Jesus. We read in verse 13 that he delivered us from the dominion of darkness and that doesn't mean that he took us away from it, it means that Jesus defeated the dominion of darkness.

We see this in 1 Peter 2.9. But you are a chosen people, a royal priest, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession. You were chosen to tell about the wonderful acts of God who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

Also verse 13, we read that he delivered us to the kingdom of his beloved son. Now some writers think Paul was alluding to Exodus here when God took his people from slavery and oppression in Egypt to the land that he had promised them.

They were transferred from one land to a better land. And Jesus doesn't rescue us from one land only to have us wander around aimlessly. He brings us into his kingdom and we share in his victory with him.

Look at John 1.5.45 For everyone who has been born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world, our faith.

[5 : 17] Who is it that overcame the world except the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God? Then verse 14, we read that we have redemption in him.

And of course that word means to release a prisoner by the payment of a ransom. But Jesus didn't pay a ransom to Satan in order to rescue us from the kingdom of darkness. Jesus' death and resurrection met the holy demands of God's law.

Our wrongdoing separated us from God who in his holiness could not have anything to do with sin. But Jesus' great act of love and sacrifice opened up the way for us to know God and to live in a real relationship with him.

That's the reality for you and me if we are followers of Jesus. We are here because of Jesus' sacrifice of love. And it's also true if you are not a follower of Jesus.

All you need to do is accept Jesus, give thanks for what he has done for you and commit your life to him. In the last part of verse 14, we read that we have been forgiven.

[6 : 25] The word forgiveness means to send away or to cancel a debt. Now I don't know if anyone of you will remember this campaign in the year 2000, a movement called the Jubilee Campaign.

This was an effort to get banks and companies and governments to cancel the debts of third world countries and allow them to spend their money improving the lives of their people.

And of course this is based on the Jubilee principle that we read about in Leviticus 25. Every 50th year was to be announced as a Jubilee year. All real property would automatically revert to its original owner.

And those who, compelled by poverty, have sold themselves as indentured servants to their fellow Israelites should regain their freedom. It's really fascinating the few chapters in Leviticus to read through.

Now I was working in church in Selkirk at the time and there was a lady there called Margaret Lee who was very involved in this campaign. Margaret's son worked as something to do with the stock market, I'm not really sure, in London finance or something like that.

[7 : 36] And I remember them discussing this campaign where Margaret would say, well, why can't they just say, okay, we'll forgive the debt? And her son getting more and more exasperated saying, mum, it's just not that simple.

And back and forward they would go all the time. Now Margaret's son could not conceive of how these debts could just be forgiven. And maybe it wasn't that simple, I don't really understand that, I must admit. But for Jesus, making it possible for us to know forgiveness was the whole reason he came to earth in human form.

And it was by no means easy for him and all that he went through in his trial and crucifixion to pay our debt. But it was not too hard for him. In fact, only he could do it.

And the Bible tells us that even in the anguish hours before his arrest, he gave himself willingly. And reading that wonderful passage in Philippians 2, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on the cross.

We did not deserve to be forgiven, nor could we ever have earned our forgiveness. This came about through an act of grace, the unmerited favour. But knowing we are forgiven means that we are no longer defined by our sin, but by his great victory.

[8 : 54] And so now we come to the hymn that Paul quotes in our passage. And there's an interesting phrase at the very beginning of verse 15. He is the image of the invisible God.

Now this can be one of those phrases we pass over as we read them. But if we stop to think, it doesn't seem to make sense that someone could be the image of something that's invisible. And we

often hear people say of a child that they are the image of their mother or father.

And one of my aunts used to say, I was always the spitting image of my dad. Oh, he's feeling like his dad. That's what he used to say. Now, at the time I would look up at my dad and see this guy with not much hair and a bit of a big nose, and I would think, not too well of that.

But now I look in the mirror and I think, oh well, never mind. But as the image of God, Christ is an exact as well as visible representation of God, illuminating God's presence.

Later on in this passage, we read that in verse 19, that in Jesus all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. What a great phrase. And in Colossians 2.9, we read that in Jesus the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.

[10 : 10] So we know from these two verses that when Paul said Jesus is the image of God, it doesn't mean a copy, but that Jesus is God. That Jesus and God are one and the same.

The other half of this verse says that he is the image of the invisible God. Now, we've already seen that Jesus being described as the image of God means that he is one with God. But how can anything be an image of something that's invisible?

In using the word invisible here, Paul's not saying God is non-existent or unable to ever be seen.

We read in Exodus 33 that Moses asked God to be allowed to see him.

But God tells Moses that he could not look on him because his glory would be too much for him for the human eyes or the human mind to comprehend. So God puts Moses in this cleft of a rock, as the old version says, and puts his hand over Moses' eyes until he passed by.

And Moses only caught a glimpse of God's back. And later we read that his face was shining so much from just that small peek at God that he had to wear a veil or people couldn't bear to look at him.

[11 : 20] But what Paul's saying here in equating Jesus as the image of the invisible God is that in Jesus we do see God. Jesus himself said this in John 14 9, Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.

So putting the whole thing together, when we read that Jesus is the image of the invisible God, we know that something amazing has happened. God has come down and walked among us in the person of Jesus.

The second part of a half of verse 15 described Jesus as the firstborn of all creation. And now that seems to have turned all we have just said on its head.

If Jesus is God, how can he be born? And what Paul means here is not that Jesus was born, but that he has the rights of the firstborn. That he was of first importance and of first rank and firstborn of all creation means that he is prior to all of creation.

Jesus is not a created being. He is the eternal God. And moving on to verse 16 and 17, we read, For by him all things were created.

[12 : 29] And some writers have said that instead of for at the start of this verse, we could use the word because, since it follows on from the previous verse.

Jesus is the firstborn of all creation because he created all things. Look at the gospel stories. The wind and waves will be his voice. Disease and death fled for him because he is master over all of it.

A wonderful passage at the start of John's gospel tells us in verse 3 that all things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made.

Paul then gives a pretty comprehensive list in the verse of 16 and 17 just for the avoidance of any doubt. In heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, thrones and dominions, rulers and authorities. And just in case he missed something, he rounds the verse out with, And all things were created through him and for him. Wherever you look or whatever realities you think of, material or spiritual, everything in creation owes its existence to Jesus.

[13 : 40] They are his handiwork. And this is another affirmation that Jesus is God. Only God existed before creation and only by God does creation remain.

Paul is also talking about the perfection of creation. We know that if we watch nature documentaries on TV where someone like David Attenborough will marvel at how different creatures are uniquely suited to their environments.

And they put it down to adaptation and change. But we know that the guiding hand of a loving creator was behind it all. And now let's move on then to verse 18 where we see Christ as the head of the church.

When talking about the church as a body in Romans 1 and 2, Romans 1 and 2 Corinthians, Paul emphasises that there is one body and many parts or members, stressing the role that each believer must play in the life of the body.

But here he's stressing that there is only one body and one head of that body, namely Jesus. The church has its origin in him and it is sustained by him.

[14:50] As head of the church, Jesus applies it with life through his spirit. He gives us gifts and places us in his church so that we might serve him when and where we are needed.

The implication is that if you're sitting here today in this part of Christ's body, it's for a reason. And that reason is to serve. And from time to time, of course, it's a good idea for us to come before God and ask him if we're doing all he would want us to do to serve in this fellowship and the worldwide body of Christ.

The last line of verse 18 is perhaps the most important in the whole passage and could be said to sum up the whole book of Colossians. That in all things, he might be preeminent.

In 1893, the World Exposition was held in Chicago and 21 million people visited the exhibits. One of the features of that exposition was what was called the World Parliament of Religions.

The next aim was that representatives of all the world religions would meet together, share their best points, and out of this would come a new religion which the whole world could agree on.

[16:06] On one hand, you have to admire their optimism. And on the other hand, what were they thinking? One of the things they discussed though is that each religion or religious figure was an emanation of God and that each one was equally valid.

And of course, that's an opinion you'd find in a lot of people even today. But back then, one man decided that he was going to take advantage of the exposition.

And this was the great evangelist D.L. Moody or Dwight Lyman Moody or D.L. Moody as he was known. Now that's a picture of him which hangs on the wall of Teen Ranch. Sorry, I'm bringing another mention of Teen Ranch but I do like that place.

And that picture there hangs on the wall along with many other drawings of prominent Christians from history. And these are drawn by a good friend of mine who worked here for a time, a guy called Dean Simpson.

And the meeting was full of these wonderful drawings. But D.L. Moody, instead of attacking the Parliament of Religions, as he was encouraged to do, said he was going to make Jesus so attractive that people would turn to him.

[17:16] Instead of Jesus being one of many so-called emanations, he would show that he was preeminent. And in verse 18, Paul leaves us in no doubt.

As 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 we could say so much about these titles this morning.

But what Paul is saying is not that Jesus should be preeminent or that he has the right to be preeminent, but that he is preeminent. And that's a worldwide gathering of religious leaders or anyone sitting here makes no difference to this essential fact.

The first commandment we read in Exodus chapter 20 is, you shall have no other gods before me. I heard someone say once that God does not want you to be, that God does not want to be number one in your life on a list of things that are important to you.

God wants to be number one in the list of one. He wants to be preeminent in our lives, living our lives completely for him. And as Jesus says in Matthew, seeing everything else fall into place.

[18:37] Matthew 6, 33. But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. It's not an easy thought. Giving over control is not something that comes naturally to us.

But God knows that, and he's promised that if we put him first, if we seek his kingdom and righteousness, then all the other stuff will be added. And of course, it's not something we can just do.

We can't switch it on. It's a process that's going to last through our whole lives as believers in Jesus, as we walk with God. And each time we trust him, we'll know his faithfulness and grow closer to him.

And each time we fail and then turn to him afresh, we'll know his forgiveness and loving forgiveness and rededicate ourselves to him. Our last and very brief section is verse 19 to 20.

Throughout this passage we've seen, Paul's been very clear that Jesus is God. Here he mentions it again, but we really need to take both verses together.

[19:41] When he says in verse 19 that in Jesus all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, then says in verse 20 that he reconciles all things to himself.

The two things follow. He's able to reconcile only because in him the fullness of God is pleased to dwell. He's talking about Jesus' saving work on the cross and the fact that if he had not been God, he could not have saved us.

That's the very essence of the incarnation. Jesus was God in the flesh. If he were not fully man, he could not have been our representative on the cross. And if he had not been fully God, then his death on the cross would not have paid for our sin.

I have the privilege of going into Oxbang's primary around Christmas time each year to tell the children about the Christmas story. And no matter how I tell the story, and of course we're always thinking of new ways of trying to tell the same story, I always end up really saying the same thing. Jesus chose to come be one of us so he could show us how we can know God. And he did that by choosing to give himself in our place. That's what it means to be loved.

[20:50] We can have no doubt that the children and young people will have their fill of all the other stuff that happens around that time of year, rightly so. But we want to make sure they know about God coming to earth as one of us in the person of Jesus.

Of course, Paul's not talking about Christmas here or about Jesus' birth, but he's putting together the two things. The child who was born and the man he became is God.

And because of that, we are all saved. If Jesus is to be preeminent in our lives, that means every day, not just Christmas and Easter. If the people around us are going to know that the baby grew up and died for them, then it will be because we tell them.

If people are to recognize that the man who walked the dusty roads of Palestine can have relevance to the lives of the people surrounded by technology in a fast changing world, it will be because we bear witness to his presence through lives of faith and hope and love.

And help others encounter him in the way that we live. Let's make every day a Jesus day and every season a Jesus season so that we will grow closer to God and so that the people around us can know him as their Lord too.

[22:03] Let's pray together. We thank you, Lord, for Jesus and all his coming means to us. Help us to put him in his rightful place in our lives and in your church.

Help us to be witnesses to all he's done and to shine the light of his love in this place where you have called us to serve. In Jesus name. Amen.

We finish our service this morning by singing together the hymn, Christ Triumphant Ever Reigning.