

His greatness

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Preacher: Edar Chan

[0 : 00] The reading is from Colossians chapter 1. You can find it on page 1183. Colossians chapter 1 from verse 15.

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 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 earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

[1 : 22] 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.

If indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

Good morning. My name is Edar, for those who don't know me, and I'm a regular member here at Grace Church, Deloitte. Let's pray as we begin.

Father God, we give you thanks for the word that you've given us, and thank you that we can be gathered here today to hear from you. And I pray that you will help us by your spirit to hear well and to think about your son's greatness now.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. So it's that time of year again. Three more days until the new year.

[2 : 54] Who plans on making New Year's resolutions? Well, some of you might be too shy to raise your hands, or you have already given up hope.

Whatever it is, I suppose the appeal of setting New Year's resolutions is that they offer us a fresh start, a time to change something about the way we live, so that maybe we can have a better year than the one just gone.

Well, there is a statistic that 88% of people fail to keep up with their New Year's resolutions by the second Friday in January, on what is coined the Quitter's Day.

88%. Now, may I suggest that we don't need to set ourselves up for failure and to contribute to this sad statistic. Let's start the year off with something else.

We're in the first of a three-part miniseries called Starting the New Year with Jesus. And today's focus, as you can see on the outline, is on Jesus' greatness.

[4 : 15] Now, given that we have just spent the past month celebrating the arrival of Jesus as a baby, let's not take a small view of Jesus into the New Year.

Let's look at what our passage in Colossians say about Jesus' greatness to help us start the year right. Now, I appreciate that we're diving right into the middle of the first chapter of Colossians, so it would be helpful to establish a bit of context about this letter.

This letter was written from Paul to the church in Colossae, to a people who were new Christians eager to grow in maturity. And we see pretty clearly later in the letter that Paul wrote to them to give them a warning about dangerous false teachings spreading among them.

There were false teachers who claimed authority with spirituality and with visions. They were teaching people that they must practice certain rituals, follow certain rules, observe Jewish festivals, worship angels, etc., etc.

And these young Christians were being told to do these things to qualify them for salvation. But Paul, in chapter 2, verse 23, sums up the use of such things.

[5 : 56] These things have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body.

But they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh. So, with that context in mind, why is this helpful to consider as we head into the new year?

Well, have you ever thought to yourself, hmm, let me start choosing prayer points that sound holy to share in growth group rather than be vulnerable and share the ugly bits in our lives?

Or let me start a Bible in a year plan and religiously stick to it without fail? Or let me set a new year resolution to not do any work on Sundays, do my own version of keeping the Sabbath.

Now, please don't hear me wrong. The purpose of today's talk is not to make a comment about whether you should or shouldn't start a Bible in a year plan, but the context is helpful to have in mind because those various thoughts would have been similar thoughts to what the Colossians had, but in their context.

[7 : 25] And so, let us look at today's passage in chapter 1, verses 15 to 23. In light of the new year ahead, in light of our sin, in light of the desire to grow in godliness, in maturity, why does Paul tell us about Jesus' greatness?

What does Jesus' greatness mean for us? Let's spend some time dwelling on these verses and look at what they say. And so, my first point, which is on your handouts, is Jesus' greatness as creator and ruler over everything.

Let me just read verse 15 to 17 for us again. 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. So right off the bat, here in verse 15, let us start with Jesus being the image of the invisible God.

[8 : 51] In other words, Jesus reveals what God is like. But what does he reveal about the invisible God? Jesus reveals that as God, he is the firstborn of all creation.

Now, it is more helpful to understand firstborn, here as talking about the rights of the firstborn son. Why?

Because it becomes clearer in verse 16, which says, for or because, all things were created through Jesus and for Jesus.

So how did creation come to be? Jesus as God was the one at the beginning, who is the word that spoke creation into existence.

All things were created through him. And why did creation come to be? Creation was for Jesus, God's son. All things were created for him.

[9 : 54] Now, it becomes even clearer when we see that in verse 13, just before, Paul was making the point that he is talking about the kingdom of the beloved son.

And so it makes full sense that Jesus, the one through whom and by whom all things were created, he alone has the rights as the beloved son of God who inherits all of creation.

Now, when we think about inheritance, we probably think about the inheritance of a big sum of money or inheriting a house from a relative who has passed away.

Now, what happens when that inheritance is passed on to you? It becomes yours to manage and to look after, to do with as you will.

You may want to invest it. You may want to give it to someone else, sell the property on, whatever you wish. The choice is yours. And so it is with Jesus being the firstborn of all creation, he, as the beloved son of God, inherits creation from God.

[11 : 15] He has the full rights to creation as his inheritance. And not only that, he was actually the one who, as God, created it all.

So how much more rights he has over all of it? everything is, therefore, in submission to Jesus.

Verse 17 goes on to say that in Jesus all things hold together. Now, to stretch that illustration just a little bit more, Jesus, having inherited the whole of creation, he hasn't sold it off for some huge sum of money and he hasn't walked away from it.

He is still looking after it, maintaining it, and keeping it going. The world keeps spinning because he holds it all together. So, let's have all of that in perspective as we think about why Paul wrote these

things about Jesus.

All things invisible, it says, well, we think about the air that we breathe, angels, the heavens, and all things visible.

[12 : 36] The skies, the seas, the land, the sun, the governments, our cities, our schools, workplaces, homes, friends, families, you and I.

We, like everything else, we're all made by him and for him. so, what does this mean in terms of the false teachers who were trying to enforce Jewish practices onto the Colossians' lives as a matter of salvation?

Jesus is above them. What about us? What about people who might be questioning our salvation because we aren't, say, fasting or feeling like we're not doing enough?

Jesus is above them. What about the angels that people try to worship? What about Satan and other evil forces that influence people to act in evil?

Jesus is above them. Jesus is above them all. As verse 16 says, all things, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, speaking about the powers of this world, all things were created through him and for him.

[14 : 04] He is the ruler over all people as well as anything that claims any form of authority or power. So, instead of focusing on ourselves, on what we are or aren't doing, let's keep our focus on Jesus because actually, this is all about him.

As we head into the new year, let's make sure that we take with us a view of Jesus that is big. At Christmas, we have been celebrating the arrival of Jesus as the little baby in the manger.

It is very easy to reduce him to a size of a little God. Well, as the verses tell us, Jesus is infinitely bigger.

It's like if we looked up at the sun and then not realized that the sun is actually gigantic. It is actually 109 times bigger than the earth.

It's just that when we see it in the sky, it doesn't look that big. Similarly, when we think of Jesus, the little baby in the manger, we may not remember to think of him as the creator of the universe, the mighty one who holds the universe together.

[15 : 34] He isn't a little God. Jesus made all of this for his inheritance, to rule over, and to look after.

And so, it would be healthy for us to have the right perspective of Jesus, knowing that he is above all in authority and power.

And so, that's one area of Jesus' greatness for us to take into the new year. His greatness as creator and ruler over everything.

Now, what other aspect of Jesus' greatness do we see in the next verses? Coming to my second point, we see in verses 18 to 22, Jesus' greatness as peacemaker between God and man.

So, let me read verses 18 to 22 for us again. And he is the head of the body, the church.

[16 : 38] 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 earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. And you, who once were 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.

Now, Paul shifts the focus from the entirety of creation to just God's people, the church. Jesus, as we firmly believe, is the firstborn from the dead, meaning that he's the first one who has actually come back from the dead and has defeated it.

He is no longer bound by death. That truly makes him preeminent, the greatest in literally everything.

Now, we award the title of goat, okay, or the greatest of all time, to the greatest players of various sports. Two obvious examples, and hopefully not too controversial.

[18 : 09] Messi is the goat of football, and Michael Jordan is the goat of basketball. all, okay, but that's it. They are the, they are only goats of their sports.

Jesus, however, is the greatest. He is the goat in every single thing. Verse 18 says that in everything he might be preeminent.

That means he's the goat of all the goats. There is no sphere in which Jesus isn't the absolute greatest. As we have seen, he is the greatest as creator and as ruler.

In order for Jesus to be the absolute greatest, though, Jesus has proven that he is worthy of that claim because he is also the greatest as the firstborn from the dead.

If Jesus hadn't come back from the dead, then he cannot possibly be the greatest in everything.

Now, how is Jesus able to be the firstborn from the dead, though?

[19 : 27] As verses 19 and 20 goes on to say, it is precisely because Jesus is fully God, he is therefore able to reconcile to himself all things, making peace by the blood of his cross.

Now, Messian Michael Jordan being goats does not affect most people, to be honest, but Jesus being the true goat affects every single person.

How? Well, ever since Adam and Eve's betrayal of God at the Garden of Eden, there has not been peace between God and man.

But Jesus is the one who is the peacemaker between God and man. Who is it, exactly, that has been reconciled to God? Now, Paul was addressing the people of God.

You, as he says in verse 21, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, it is us, God's people, his church, his body, who now enjoys peace with God through Jesus' death for us, in order for us to be presented holy and blameless and above reproach before God.

[20 : 53] Jesus is the absolute greatest because he has defeated death, having paid the price of sin by his blood shed for us on the cross. So, Paul writes all of this to remind the Colossians of the gospel that they know and have believed in.

In the face of people who are basically saying that Jesus' work on the cross is not enough, Paul reminds them that actually, no, Jesus has already reconciled to God all things by his work on the cross.

He is the only peacemaker we have and need between God and man. And because of Jesus' work on the cross, we can be holy and blameless before God.

When God looks at us, we are seen as holy and blameless, not because of anything we have done, but because of Jesus' blood shed for us on the cross.

He's died the death that we deserve and have washed us clean by his precious blood. So how foolish was it that the false teachers were insisting on things like asceticism, which means heavy forms of self-denial, or the worship of angels, or the observance of Jewish festivals and regulations.

[22 : 29] no one, no one can add to the work of salvation that Jesus had performed on the cross.

Nothing could add to that.

Not us going to multiple church services on Sundays, not us trying to stick to a Bible reading plan in the new year, and then feeling all guilty when we fail to stick to the plan.

Not us wondering whether we are saved because we haven't fasted or experienced visions. No.

Can you see in the text? Verse 19, Jesus, in whom all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, he is the one who is the peacemaker between us and God.

He is the greatest, and there is nothing we can do to add to that salvation work. It's like if at Christmas, I gifted my wife a giant, beautiful diamond, the size of a football.

And then after unwrapping the present, she then proceeds to put a big red bow around it, and then sticking tinsel on it, and then taking off all the fairy lights off the Christmas tree and then wrapping it around the diamond.

[23 : 46] And then when she steps back to look at the diamond, to see its sparkle in the light, she just can't see it anymore. well, the best way to appreciate the beauty of the football-sized diamond is to just look at it on its own, without other things on it to take away from its true beauty.

And so it is with Jesus. He is the greatest and infinitely huge diamond. diamond. His work of salvation on the cross is what gives this infinitely huge diamond its beauty.

Jesus and his work of salvation are truly beautiful on its own. So let us make sure that we see

Jesus' greatness for who he is as the peacemaker and what he has done to restore the peace.

Us trying to add tinsel is denying the beauty and denying therefore the power of the cross to save.

We just cannot do that.

And so that's another area of Jesus' greatness for us to take into the new year. His greatness as peacemaker between God and man. So as we step into the new year, moving on to my final point, let us not shift from the great hope of the gospel.

[25 : 25] Verse 23 reads, If indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

us believers who enjoy peace with God because of Jesus, we are seen by God as holy and blameless, if we continue in the faith, not shifting from the hope of the gospel.

As we have just seen, we are saved purely because of the work of Jesus on the cross, shedding his blood for us. This wonderful truth of the good news of the gospel is precisely what gives us hope.

Now, the beautiful hope of the gospel is that we do not need to work for our salvation. The beautiful hope of the gospel is that we do not have to be afraid of death anymore.

The beautiful hope of the gospel is that we no longer have to live wondering whether we have done enough to escape God's wrath on judgment day. Now, trying to add to the great hope of the gospel gives us a false hope.

[26 : 49] The false teachings of spirituality spreading among the Colossians were saying that they could find hope in heavy forms of self-denial or in worshiping angels.

That's a false hope. Us being tempted to think that sticking to a Bible in a year plan to feel assured of our salvation, that will end up giving us false hope.

No, the great hope that we have in the gospel is much more grounded and certain. hope of hope that we have given us hope.

He has given us that hope himself. And so, the appropriate response for Christians would be to continue in faith and not shifting from it.

Now, at this point, I would just like to encourage any non-believers in the room to really consider this beautiful hope of the gospel that we have been thinking about.

[27 : 57] Faith in Jesus is not about doing enough good or appearing holier than other people. I hope I have been clear that the gospel is about Jesus as the absolute greatest in everything, especially as the creator and ruler, and in what he has done to make peace between God and man.

He has done all that is required so that those who believe in him can have a relationship with God in peace. And so, I invite you to join us as we head into the new year, holding on to this great hope of the gospel.

As the rest of us head into the new year, let us therefore know that it is not about our greatness. It is all about Jesus' greatness and holding on to him.

It isn't about appearing more holy and turning other people's gaze onto ourselves. And it certainly isn't about trying to achieve some new year resolution to make ourselves more saved than we already are.

If you are to make any new year resolution this year, may it be about keeping our gaze on Jesus, the truly greatest of all time.

[29 : 25] Taking his absolute greatness in everything, especially him as the greatest creator, as ruler, and peacemaker between God and man.

And let's hold on to that. Let's pray as we close. Let's let's let's bow to God.

Father God, we thank you for giving us your son Jesus to die on the cross for our sins and in him we have peace with you. As we have been hearing about your son's greatness, we pray that you would help us take a much bigger view of Jesus into the new year.

Amen. Amen.