

Colossians 1:15-23

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- [0 : 0 0] Well, thank you, Benji, for that introduction. Thank you, Eddie, for that prayer. As Benji said, my name is Davis Mooney. I am the RUF campus minister at UTC.
- And as Benji said, RUF, the mission of RUF is to reach students for Christ and equip them to serve. And so what we do at RUF is we talk a lot about God's great story of his love for the world and his love for us as his people.
- And so that's as Benji invited me here to come preach. And I'm so thankful and honored to be here to come preach. That's what I wanted to share with you this morning.
- God's grand story of love for the world and love for his people. And it may be that you have heard that story a thousand times. And you're going to hear it a thousand and first time again today.
- And hopefully we'll see that God calls us to return again and again to that story and to be captivated by it. It may be that you haven't really heard that story a whole lot.
- [1 : 0 8] We're so glad that you're here. Grace and peace. I've heard a lot of great things about grace and peace. And I know that grace and peace loves to talk a lot about God's love for the world and God's love for you as his people.
- So let's dive in to Colossians 1, 15 through 23. I'll read it now. He, that is Jesus Christ, 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.
- [2 : 0 9] 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.
- 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.
- Amen. Friends, this is the word of God for the people of God. Let's pray now. Heavenly Father, we thank you for your word. We need it. We thank you that it shows us the story of your love for us that we don't deserve.
- Father, would you open our eyes to see your word? Would you open our ears to hear your word? Would you open our hearts to believe your word, even this morning? Father, we praise you and thank you. We pray this in Jesus' name.
- Amen. So what's your favorite story? That might not be a question that you get asked a whole lot, but you might get asked a different version of it.

[3 : 13] Like, what's your favorite TV show? Or what's your favorite movie? Or what's your favorite book? We all love stories, right? We'll pay \$10 or now \$15 with inflation, \$10 a month for Netflix or Disney Plus and all of the amazing movies and shows that they offer us and we love.

Or some of us may prefer books, right? Some of us have books that have shaped us in deep, deep ways. We all love a good story. They capture our hearts.

They show us beauty and wonder and sorrow and joy in ways that are otherwise very difficult to describe. I'll never forget the first time that a story really shaped me.

My parents loved the Broadway show Les Miserables. I don't really know how to say that. I think that's the right way to say that. The soundtrack to Les Mis, I'll say that, was one of the three CDs that my dad kept in his car when I was a kid.

And so when I was eight years old in 1999, the cast of the Broadway show came to the Fox Theater in Atlanta. And so my family and I made the drive all the way down to Atlanta to go see this show.

[4 : 29] And I was eight years old. And I'll never forget the end of Les Mis when Jean Valjean dies. Sorry, spoiler alert. But then all of the spirits of the people, they start to rise up and they sing.

Do you hear the people sing? I was eight years old and I was just sobbing. There was just so much joy and hope and sorrow all mixed in together. Stories are powerful.

But here's another question. Who's writing your story? We don't often think about it this way, but our lives are smaller stories that fit in to the larger narrative, the larger stories in the world around us, some of which are true and some of which aren't.

Right? Eddie just talked about this. The culture sometimes tries to drive a narrative, right? Like what's for sale on Black Friday. So, for example, you know, one story, one larger narrative might be that you're the one that's writing your story.

The world is just this kind of cold, meaningless place and you have to do what you can to find meaning and to find joy in your life. Or maybe it's science.

[5 : 43] It's science writing your story. That science can explain how we got here and where we're going. And your story is simply to contribute to the rapid progress of humanity.

I love science. I studied mechanical engineering in college. Science is a good and beautiful thing. I would argue that that's not the kind of story that science is designed to tell.

Or maybe it's social media that's writing your story. Right? You see all of the trends that are going on online. You see what all your friends are doing around you. And so your story is just to keep up with all of that that you see going on.

There are larger narratives in the world around us calling us to see our lives as a part of those stories. So in this passage in Colossians, Paul shows us who's writing our story.

And it's God through Jesus Christ. God is writing his beautiful, grand, amazing story in the world through Christ. And he invites believers.

[6 : 47] He invites his people into it. So as we read along in Colossians, we learn that the Colossian church came to believe in the gospel, this grand story from a man named Epaphras.

But now there are false teachers coming into the church trying to kind of spin a different narrative, to tell a different story. And we learn that it has to do something with the spiritual realm and may have even included angel worship.

We're not really sure. But Paul is writing this letter to the Colossians to say, Don't listen to that story. Hold fast to the gospel, the story of God's amazing love in the world.

Be captivated by that story. The Bible is a story. It's an absolutely true story, but a story. Think about it.

It has a beginning. It has characters. It has conflict. It has resolution of that conflict. It has an ending. And God was intentional about the fact that he revealed himself to his people through stories.

[7 : 49] He wants the story that he's writing in the world with Jesus right in the center of it to captivate our hearts, to shape who we are, and to respond accordingly.

It's one thing to be told God rescued his people out of slavery in Egypt. But it's another thing to actually go to the book of Exodus and read how God did that with pillars of fire and smoke and mountains shaking.

It's amazing. And it's one thing to be told, to hear God say, I love you, which is absolutely true. But it's another thing to hear God say, let me show you how much I love you.

How I am writing my grandest story in the world, and I sent my son to die on the cross because I love you so much. That's the story that we see in this passage.

We see that God in Christ is writing his story in the world, and he invites us to be a part of that. That he's the one that's writing our story.

[8 : 51] So we're going to walk through this passage, and we're going to see that Paul shows us that Christ is Lord of creation. He's Lord of new creation, and he's Lord of believers. Okay?

So first we see that Christ is Lord of creation. In verses 15 through 17, Paul takes us all the way back to even before creation, the beginning of the story.

He takes us back to when creation didn't exist, and it was just God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit. And so in verse 15, Paul tells us that Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

Let's briefly unpack both of those phrases. First, Jesus is the image of the invisible God. Jesus has always been with God the Father, perfectly reflecting his glory back to him.

God is invisible. He is spirit. But since eternity, it has always, always been Jesus's purpose to make God known.

[9 : 57] To bear his image in the world perfectly, without blemish. Jesus has always been with God. And then Paul says that Jesus is the firstborn of all creation, and that by him all things were created.

And if you're listening carefully, you might think, wait, aren't those two things a little bit contradictory? Like, is Jesus the firstborn of creation, or was he the one that created everything? And we have to actually look at that word firstborn.

Paul is using that word in a very specific way, packed with all sorts of meaning. He's not saying that Jesus was the first thing that was created.

No, he's actually saying that Jesus is supreme. He's preeminent over creation. In those days, the firstborn in the family was the most supreme.

He had the highest place. He got the highest inheritance. That's actually how the psalmist, the psalm writer, uses that term when he's quoting God in Psalm 89, 27, as God describes David.

[11 : 02] He says, I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth. David wasn't the firstborn. He was actually one of the youngest of his brothers. But God takes him and makes him the firstborn, the most preeminent.

That's what Paul is saying here. Jesus is the firstborn in the sense that he's supreme. He's the ruler. He's the Lord over all creation.

Jesus created all of it. By him, all things were created. We go back in Genesis 1 and we read, in the beginning, God created. Here we read, all things were created by and through Jesus.

Because Jesus is God. God the Father, God the Son, Jesus, God the Holy Spirit. We're all there at the beginning, creating together.

So here we see God setting the stage for the story that he's writing in the world through Jesus. The beginning of the story matters. It sets the theme for the rest of the story.

[12 : 08] And what we see here is that God created everything. Visible, invisible, everything. And he rules over all of it. Jesus is the image of the invisible God.

He created all of creation so that God's glory could be magnified and radiate throughout the universe. All of the best authors and storytellers know that the beginning of the story is extremely important.

And I would argue that Christian authors are masters at this. They see God's beauty and creation and how it gives glory to God. And so they, in their own finite and fragmented way, set the stage for their stories too, right?

So one of the masters of this is C.S. Lewis, right? He wrote this beautiful creation story for Narnia in his books, the Narnia series.

And the creation story is in *The Magician's Nephew*, which is the sixth book in the series, but it's kind of the prequel to *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*. So in the story, two friends, Digory and Polly, at one point they find themselves in a dark void, and they're trying to figure out where they are.

[13 : 19] And here's what C.S. Lewis writes. In the darkness, something was happening at last. A voice had begun to sing. Sometimes it seemed to come from all directions at once.

There were no words. There was hardly even a tune. But it was, beyond comparison, the most beautiful noise they had ever heard. And then the stars come into being, and there's light.

And he goes on. The eastern sky changed from white to pink and from pink to gold. The voice rose and rose till the air was shaking with it. And just as it swelled to the mightiest and most glorious sound it had yet produced, the sun arose.

And then finally we see the earth. The earth was of many colors. They were fresh, hot, and vivid. They made you feel excited until you saw the singer himself. And then you forgot everything else.

It was a lion, huge, shaggy, and bright. And it stood facing the risen sun, and its mouth was wide open in song. Of course, that lion is Aslan, the beloved Christ figure in the Narnia books.

[14 : 26] And as you read that, you just know that something amazing is going to happen in this land that he's created. And Aslan is going to be right at the center of it. Friends, Jesus is God.

And he was there creating with God the Father and God the Spirit at the beginning of time. Jesus sets the stage for the story. And the theme of the story is God's lordship and glory and love.

Go read Psalm 19. C.S. Lewis called it the greatest poem ever written. And it's just this beautiful love story to creation and how we see God's glory and creation.

So who began your story? If the world is just meaningless and no one's writing the story, what part do you have to play in that?

Or if a few particles collided in a godless void and humans kind of popped out, what is your brief life? But what if, and I know this to be true, what if someone spoke and the story began?

[15 : 31] And that someone knows you and loves you. Do you see God's glory and creation? And are you compelled, are you captivated by the beginning of the story?

So we've seen Jesus' lordship in the beginning of the story. And now we see the middle of the story. This is the conflict and the resolution. We see this in Jesus' authority over the new creation in verses 18 through 20.

It says that Jesus is the head of the body of the church. And Paul goes on to say that he is the firstborn from the dead. He has authority even over death. And he's reconciling all things.

And here's where we see the conflict in the story. Jesus is the firstborn from the dead. He's supreme over death because death entered conflict, entered the story at the fall.

Jesus is the reconciler because the world became fractured and broken at the fall. Back in the beginning, God creates everything and calls it very good.

[16 : 34] But then in Genesis 3, Adam and Eve, they sin. They disobey God. They eat the forbidden fruit. Conflict. And so the consequence of that is thorns and thistles.

And even more than that, death. Humanity turned away from God. Rather than reflecting his glory and creation, we now often work for our own glory.

And Jesus was there. Jesus knew even before creation that he was going to come do something about that. Just like he's the firstborn supreme over creation, he would come and be the firstborn supreme over death.

That he would die to redeem his sinful people. That he would reconcile all things making peace by the blood of his cross. That's the great resolution, the great climax of God's great story of redemption in the world.

And at the center of that story, the climax of the story, what do we see? We see Jesus hanging on the cross. The story is all about Jesus.

[17 : 44] And just a brief aside, which will lead us to an important point. We have to understand what Paul means when he says that Jesus will reconcile all things. He's talking about the scope of Jesus' reconciliation.

Just how big and grand it is. It touches everything, in earth and in heaven. This doesn't mean that everyone will be saved. This isn't like universalism, that all paths lead to God.

No, what this means is that Jesus is going to restore all of his creation. All of the brokenness and fracture and sin, that sin brought into the world.

Jesus is going to reconcile all things. To restore creation to what it was meant to be. To bring reconciliation between God and his people who he loves so dearly.

That's why Jesus is the head of the body, the church. The church is the beginning of that new creation. The church is meant to be the body, the community, where Christ's reconciliation is known and believed and experienced.

[18 : 52] The church, which of course is grace and peace, and then RUF actually gets to be an extension of that on campus. It's the new creation that tells God's story in the world, right?

Of his work in the world and lives in that story. It's the community that's captivated by that story. The locusts, the center of the work that Christ is doing in the world.

Because of what Jesus did on the cross, we worship him as firstborn from the dead. And know that we will rise one day too. We hold him as preeminent.

We know that he surpasses all others. We know that he is God, that all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell in him. And we praise him that he is reconciling all things.

And believers get to respond by striving to be a community where reconciliation and fellowship is happening together. Like Chris said, making room for one another to tell that story.

[19 : 55] Because Jesus made peace on the cross, we get to seek that peace with those around us. Friends, God doesn't just give up every time humanity sins and messes up.

No, he remains faithful to what he has created, to the story that he's telling. Because he knows that the whole point of his story is his glory and his love for his people and his son's glory.

All throughout the Bible, there's this pattern of God's faithfulness, but the humans sin and obey. But then God comes and does something new out of the old. God never gives up on his world, his creation, and God never gives up on you.

And Jesus is the ultimate picture of that pattern. And the church is the new creation, the place where we see that Jesus is never going to give up. That he's working in and through his people to make his reconciliation known throughout the world.

Okay, so Jesus is Lord over creation. He's Lord over the new creation. And now Jesus is Lord over believers. This is what we see in verses 21 through 23.

[21 : 06] This is actually the conclusion of the story. So Paul has spent the last five verses laying out the story for the Colossians and us. And showing us that Jesus is supreme in that story.

And now he says something amazing. He says, 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.

That's amazing. Here's God's grand story of love for the world with Jesus right in the center of that, the climax of the story. And then Paul says, And you, you get to be a part of that story.

He does it all for you. He dies to reconcile you. And he works in your life to write his story. And he's going to finish that story.

Again, God never quits. Paul says, In order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard.

[22 : 06] As he brings us to faith in Jesus, as we hold fast to the hope of the gospel, he is working in us to make us holy and blameless, to shape us to who he created us to be.

He's writing our story, and he weaves our story into the magnificent story that he's writing in the world. And one day for all eternity, we'll stand before him and dwell with him, holy and blameless.

Jesus began your story, he's writing your story, and he is the end of your story. This brings up an important point for believers. What's the story of your faith?

What's the scope of your faith? Is your faith, Jesus died on the cross, Jesus saved me, and Jesus will take me to heaven. That is not wrong at all.

In fact, that is very true, and we should give thanks for that. But what if the story is that our Trinitarian God, God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, created everything, and then we as humans messed that up, we disobeyed him, but God never gave up, and so he sent his son to die on the cross to reconcile all things for us, and he is building his new creation on the world, and by grace through faith, I get to be a part of that, right?

[23 : 28] Do you see the difference there? We get to see our story, the story that God is writing in our lives, as a larger part of the story that he's writing in the world, and he's writing in the church, his new creation.

It's beautiful. Are you captivated by the story? I want us to be like my son, Winston. He's five years old, and he was very brave, and just went out to the children's worship with everyone else, but about a year ago, Winston was in a huge, curious George phase, right, as many three- or four-year-old boys do, and we have this book that has lots of different curious George stories in it, and we read Winston a story every night before bed, and we let him choose, right?

And every night, he was pulling curious George off of the bookshelf. He could read those stories again and again and again. We actually had to let curious George go on a little bit of a summer break.

He went on a vacation so he could mix it up a little bit, but Winston loved those stories. He was captivated by them. Friends, Jesus wants us to return to the story of the gospel over and over and over again, to be captivated by it.

He wants for it to move our hearts, to move us into action, and to love and peace and reconciliation, to respond with wonder and joy and delight.

[24 : 55] He wants us to see the work that he's doing in the world, and he invites us to play our little part in that. Now, just briefly, and this could be a totally different sermon on its own.

I'll spend just a tiny bit of time here. What if you don't like the story that Jesus is writing in your life, right? Many of us feel that. We feel the brokenness.

We feel the difficulty. Friends, there is hope. Reminds me of, there's a scene in The Lord of the Rings early on when the hobbit Frodo is carrying the ring, and he is tired, and he's exhausted, and he's carrying this burden, and he sits next to the wizard Gandalf, who's kind of the Christ figure in The Lord of the Rings.

He says, Gandalf, I wish this ring had never come to me. And Gandalf says, Frodo, you are in the middle of the story, and oftentimes the people in the middle of the story can't see the end of the story, but don't lose sight of that.

There is hope. Friends, there is hope. Jesus is at work in the world. Jesus is supreme, and he has a supreme love for you. He is writing his story of love for the world, and he is actively writing your story.

[26 : 05] Christ is Lord of believers. All right, as we conclude, I want to tell you about one more movie. I like movies a lot. It's called Stranger Than Fiction. It tells the story of IRS agent Harold Crick, who's played by Will Ferrell.

And one day, Harold Crick wakes up, and he hears an author, a narrator, narrating the story of his life, right? And we come to find out that the narrator is famous author Karen Ifill, played by Emma Thompson.

And so Harold visits a literary professor to try to figure out what's going on. And this professor tells him that Harold has to figure out if his story is going to be a comedy or a tragedy.

If it's a comedy, then he's going to live happily ever after. But if it's a tragedy, then Harold is going to die. But Karen Ifill only writes tragedies.

So in a moving scene, Harold actually gets to go meet the author of his life, Karen Ifill. And she's not quite done with the manuscript of his life, but she can share it with him, right?

[27 : 14] And so she gives this manuscript, even though it's unfinished, to Harold. And Harold takes it and sits on a park bench and reads it. And he reads that, yes, he will most likely die in this story.

But he sees that the ending that she's written, the death that she's written for him is beautiful, and so he accepts it. Well, the next morning, he wakes up, and he's on his way to work, and he sees a ball kind of fall out, bounce out into the road, and a little boy chasing after it, and a bus coming.

You can see where this goes. Harold jumps out, and he throws the boy out of the way, and he gets hit by the bus. But the very next scene, we see Karen Ifill sitting at her computer, and she can't bring herself to finish the sentence declaring Harold dead.

So Harold wakes up in the hospital room, and Karen has to live with the fact that her story is just a little bit weaker without Harold's death in it. Friends, Jesus is the author and the narrator of the story.

But he doesn't sit up in heaven with his finger over the smite button. No, Jesus is the author who enters his own story. He left heaven to come dwell with us.

[28 : 31] He knew that death was the price to be paid for sin, so he enters the story and dies for us on our behalf because of his amazing, supreme love for us.

And he does that so that we can finish the story with him, so that we can be reconciled to God, so that one day we can stand holy and blameless and above reproach before him.

And until then, we get to tell and be a part of the beautiful and amazing story that he's writing in the world. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we thank you for the amazing true story that you're writing in the world and that you're writing in our hearts.

We thank you that we get to read about that story and read about your love for us in the Bible, in your word. Father, we thank you that it shows us that you sent your son to die on the cross for us because of what you're doing in the world and because of your amazing love for us that we don't deserve.

Father, would you help our hearts to be captivated by the beauty of that story? Would you help us to see that our lives, we get to be a part of that. You invite us into that story and you invite those around us into that story, Lord.

[29 : 43] Would you shape us in that story? Father, we praise you and thank you. We pray all of this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen.