

'Life's About ...'

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Preacher: Andrew Price

[0:00] This morning, Andrew will give us a Bible talk on what's life about, which is the start of a three-week mini-series on membership.

And next week, it will be on what we are about as a church. And after that, it will be what membership is about in the following week.

The Old Testament reading, Genesis 1, page 2, verses 26 to 28. In verses 20 to 25, we read that God made the birds, the fish, and every creature that moves upon the ground.

Then God said, let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea, and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.

So God created mankind in his own image. In the image of God, he created them. Male and female, he created them.

[1:15] God blessed them and said to them, be fruitful and increase in number. Fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, and over every living creature that moves on the ground.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. The New Testament reading comes to us from Colossians chapter 1, verses 15 through 23.

The sun 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 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.

[2:50] Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. If you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel, this is the gospel that you heard, and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

This is the word of the Lord. Well, welcome again. It's great to have you with us. And as Peter said, we're doing a three-week mini-series, thinking about membership, what life's about this week, what we're about as a church next week, and then what membership's about the third week.

And I wanted to start today by talking about spinning plates and rotating planets. Now, I'm sure we're familiar with rotating planets, you know, where the planets rotate around the sun.

I think we're now down to eight planets. When I grew up, there was nine, but poor Pluto has been reclassified as Plutoid, and now no longer counts, apparently. Either way, we're familiar with this idea of planets rotating around the sun.

And then there's spinning plates. You know, where people, well, spin plates. Like this guy who has a bit of trouble. Do not try this at home.

[4:45] Go to a friend's house. And so, I've got some sticks here, and what I thought I'd do is... No, no, we're not.

Some of you thought, anyway. But the point is, we often try and live life like we're spinning plates, don't we? Where we're juggling all these things that we're chasing after.

Good things, yes. But we chase after them so much so that they become the most important things, and we turn the good thing into a God thing.

I mean, that's what God is. He's meant to be number one, the most important thing. And so, there are plates in life, like keeping with the letter P, prosperity, where we chase after wealth or plans to do this or that, live here or there, or possessions like a better car or better clothes or better phone, at pleasure like good food or travel or sport, physique like our health so that we can live longer and look younger, or at least look as good as we can, which is why all of you looked in the mirror before you came to church today, except for... No, I won't say that.

Or progeny, which is just a fancy P word for kids or grandkids. I was just trying to keep it with the letter P. Now, none of these things are bad in themselves.

[6:17] In fact, they're important things, and God has given these things to us to enjoy with thanksgiving. It's just that we turn these good things, as I said, into God things by prioritising them, even above God, focusing on keeping them spinning as though the most important things, as though life is only about these things.

But that's not what God says. God says there is someone even more important than all those things, and that's his son, Jesus. Life's meant to be ultimately about him.

So rather than spending our lives spinning plates, we're actually meant to be more like rotating planets, where our lives revolve around the sun, such that his priorities become our priorities. And that actually frees us from frantically trying to keep all these plates in our lives spinning and feeling despair when some of those plates will inevitably fall or fail.

Though for the Colossians, their plates were different. Paul is writing to the church in Colossae, which is in modern-day Turkey, and they were being tempted to add different P words to Jesus. They were tempted to add different philosophies and religious practices, which is why Paul tells them in chapter 1 that the sun is supreme.

[7:51] And so if they have him, then they will... It's like they have connoisseur ice cream. You know, the supreme ice cream, which at \$13 a litre ought to be supreme, wouldn't it?

But to add these other philosophies and practices to the sun who is supreme is like adding tomato sauce to connoisseur ice cream. It's just nuts.

You don't do it. But so too is it nuts to think that our plates of prosperity, plans, possessions, pleasure, physique, progeny are all more important than the sun.

Because not only do those plates let us down from time to time, you know, we lose prosperity, our possessions break, our health gets poor. They let us down from time to time.

God has actually made his son supreme in this life. And so he ought to be, number one. Point one, verse 15.

[8:54] The sun is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. Here we see that God has made his son the ruler of this creation, this world, this life.

That's the first thing it means to be in the image of the invisible God. It means to reflect God's rule over this world. You see, an image represents or reflects someone.

So two years ago, this image in statue form was unveiled to represent the late Queen Elizabeth with her corgis down the bottom. And in the ancient world, they had these images, whether they were statues or pictures of engravings or even on coins, the emperor's face on the coin.

Again, these images were everywhere to remind the people of the king or queen or emperor's rule. It's primarily what it means for us to be made in the image of God, as we heard in our first reading, to represent or reflect God's loving rule in this world.

That we haven't done a great job of doing that, have we? People tend to exercise a selfish rule rather than reflecting God's loving rule. But not the son.

[10:10] He perfectly reflects God's loving rule over creation. It's just that people choose not to submit to his loving rule and prefer their own. But the son perfectly reflects God's loving rule because he is God, which is the second thing the word image means here.

Because did you notice that while we are all made in God's image, the son is God's image. He is God.

That's why Jesus could say in John's gospel, in John chapter 14, whoever has seen me has seen the father. And so if you want to know what God is like, then you look at the son.

But the point is, in verse 15, to be the image of God means the son is God and rules over creation for God. And that's kind of what firstborn means here towards the end of verse 15 there.

The word firstborn can either mean the one who is born first in the family, which is normally how we use it. Any firstborns here today? Some, some. I was actually a secondborn.

[11:21] And as a secondborn, I was often overlooked and hard done by. I bet all the other secondborns here can relate. Yeah, exactly. Exactly. And so firstborn here can either mean the one who is born first, or it can mean the one who has first importance in the family, the one who has the highest status in the family after the parents.

And the two often go together. That is, even today, the one who is born first is then given more responsibility, entrusted to look after the younger kids, don't they?

You know, look after your younger brother or sister and so on. And in the ancient times, they were also the ones to receive the inheritance too. Well, here the word firstborn in verse 15 is used in just that second way.

The son has first importance, the highest status, the one who is entrusted with looking after and ruling over creation. It's why our Bibles say he is the firstborn over creation.

So like image, firstborn also means ruler of this life. But why is the son ruler of this life? Well, verse 16 goes on to tell us. It starts with the word for or because, giving the reason.

[12:37] Because 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.

Jesus is first in importance over life because he created life. A creation happened in him. That is in reference to him, which is then explained in terms of all things being made through him.

Now, we just said a moment ago in the Nicene Creed that we believe in one God, the Father Almighty, who is the maker of heaven and earth. And that is true.

But God the Father created all things through God the Son. Much like an architect might create a building through his builder.

And since the Father created all things through the Son, then the Son always existed. That's what it means when we also say in the Creed that he is begotten, not made.

[13:42] Now, if he created all things, then he cannot create himself. He's not made. But he's begotten in the sense that he's always been the Son throughout all eternity.

Yes, he took on human form when he was born of Mary, but he was always God the Son through whom all things were made.

But also notice in verse 16 that all things were not just made through him, but also for him. And so the Son is the purpose of all creation.

God made everything, including us, for him. I remember being at a wedding of a friend, and the bride had just walked down the aisle, dressed up looking stunning, and the groom was beaming. People were oohing, and everyone was smiling. And then the minister asked everyone to please be seated. He looked at my friend Dan and Chrissy at the front, and he said, people often say at weddings that they are made for each other.

[14:46] And looking at these two, let me tell you that that is not true. Boo! You could hear a gasp in the room. Especially the parents-in-law.

But then he quickly went on to say, they are made firstly for Jesus, and they make a great couple too. And he's right. I'm not sure I would have said it like that, but he's right.

The point is the Son is the ruler of this life because he is the creator of this life. All things are made through him and for him. And secondly, because he's the sustainer of this life as well.

Verse 17. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. Jesus the Son causes our Son outside to rise each day.

He maintains every heartbeat in this room, even if it's through a pacemaker. He holds everything together. Do you see how supreme the Son is?

[15:49] How important he is? Why life is meant to be about him above all other things, all of our other plates? And in case we're not convinced,

the Son is also supreme, not just of this life, but new life.

Point to verse 18. Paul goes on to say, Here the Son is the head of the body, the church. He's the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

Here the Son is firstly head of the body, the church. In the Bible, the church refers not to a building, of course, but to Christians, us. Those who believe in Jesus and have started new spiritual life with God.

And one picture the Bible uses for the church is, of course, the body of Christ, because we are all united together as one, not by our DNA, but by our Lord Jesus, where he is the head of the body or church.

And head means ruler, loving ruler of it, much like heads of state, or the way our head ought to rule our bodies and determine our actions.

[17:06] So the Son is head or loving ruler of his body, us, the church, those who have started new spiritual life. And so you see, he is ruler over this new spiritual life.

But he's also the ruler of new physical life too, because it goes on to say, he is the beginning and firstborn from among the dead. He is the beginning because he is the first to rise physically from the dead.

It's what we will celebrate in exactly three weeks' time today. Can you believe Easter is only three weeks away? But beginning also suggests there will be more to come, like us.

When Jesus returns on the last day, he will raise our bodies from the dead and make them perfect bodies that will never ache or age. Won't that be nice?

But he's also the firstborn, where the emphasis is again, like firstborn before, on being first in importance. The one who has been entrusted in looking after and ruling over all others who will be raised from the dead too.

[18:17] New life physically in the world to come. He's ruler over that life as well. And we know that's the emphasis because that's the purpose in verse 18.

So that in everything, this life, new spiritual life, new physical life, everything, he might have the supremacy.

The son is supreme over all life, which includes our lives, such that his priorities ought to be our priorities. I still remember a family from their 1030 service whose non-Christian parents would often put family events on Sunday mornings, right when church was on.

And after attending a couple of them, they ended up saying to their parents, look, we love you guys, but church is important to us. And so we'll come to the event as soon as it's finished, as soon as we can.

You see, they were like rotating planets around the sun such that his priorities were shaping their priorities in life. I know of someone else, in fact, one person just last week who had an event, a special event that they couldn't miss rather than just an ordinary family event.

[19:34] It was a special one. They couldn't miss. And so they came to this service rather than the 1030 service. They came to this service because they knew that church was still important to Jesus.

And so here's another way they were rotating around the sun, a living life where his priorities were shaping their priorities. But why is the sun supreme in everything?

Not just in this life, but in new life too? Well, verse 19 goes on to tell us. It's like we saw before with verse 16. This one starts with the word for a because.

Because 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.

You see, the fullness of God dwelt in the sun as we've already seen. He is God's image perfectly. And being fully God and fully man, Jesus reconciled all things to God by making peace through his death on the cross.

[20:44] All things? Hang on a second. Not everyone is reconciled to God, are they? Because aren't there still lots of people rebelling against God? And not all places are enjoying peace, are they?

We only have to turn on the news to see there is war. And so what's going on here? Well, it's talking about how the cross is the decisive moment that brings peace and order to our world in part now and fully later.

And so the reconciliation of all things has already been won, if you like, at the cross. It's just a matter of timing now. That is, we can either enjoy the reconciling of forgiveness of Jesus now or experience the reconciling judgment of Jesus later.

But either way, the reconciliation of all things has been won. And so there will be peace in part now and fully later.

It's a bit like what happened in the Second World War. The decisive moment has become known as D-Day, which was the invasion of Normandy on the 6th of June, 1944.

[22:03] That was the decisive moment that allies won the war against the Nazis and brought order and peace to our world. But complete order and peace wasn't felt until VE Day, Victory in Europe Day, almost a year later on the 8th of May, 1945, when the Nazis were finally forced to surrender.

Until then, they still fought some fights, even though it was futile because they had already been beaten on D-Day. Well, the cross is like D-Day.

The decisive moment when the Son paid for sin and conquered death, bringing reconciliation and peace to our world. But we don't yet feel the full effects of it until VE Day when He returns and all people are forced to surrender to Him such that there will be world peace.

Until then, people will still continue to rebel against God and sadly wage war against one another. But the point is, the Son is supreme of new life because by His death He won the peace needed to give us that new life.

peace with God which comes with new spiritual life now and the guarantee of new physical life later in the new creation where there will be no more war.

[23:33] In other words, the Son is supreme over new life because He died to give us new life. Verse 21, once you were inalienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior, but now He has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you whole in His sight without blemish and free from accusation.

Our sin once made us enemies with God but through Christ's death we have forgiveness and now peace with God. And this peace incredibly comes with being presented as holy without blemish and free from accusation in God's sight which is incredible when you think about it because we still mess up, don't we?

And yet the blood of Christ shed at the cross continues to cleanse us and free us from all accusation. So like the day that we cleaned our kitchen floors and then the dog ran inside and brought all the mud from outside across our clean kitchen floors and as we chased after it, every time He put down a dirty footprint, we had the towel wiping it up as He went, wiping it all around. It's another reason why I love our dog. But you see, every time we sin, the death of Jesus is like that towel that continues to mop it up, to cleanse it so that we are free, remain free from accusation which is amazing.

And this peace with God not only comes with ongoing cleansing such that we remain free from accusation, it also comes with a certain hope as we've been talking about that when our bodies die, our souls will live on in heaven and then on the last day He will raise our bodies to enjoy life in the new creation.

[25:24] And yet, there's a big if to all this. It's in verse 23. If you continue in your faith established and firm and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel.

Of course, to continue in your faith and do not move Faith implies you have faith to start with, doesn't it? And so do you. Do you believe and trust in Jesus the Son who has given you life in this world and offers you new life with God?

And for us who do, then we're obviously to continue in faith. That's what verse 23 says, isn't it? But faith that is lived out in life, faith that acknowledges the Son's supremacy over all things in life, including our lives, such that we live like rotating planets around Him where His priorities shape our priorities, which, by the way, are for our good anyway.

For it means instead of suffering despair when some of our spinning plates fall down, we can continue to enjoy the Son's loving warmth of peace and hope.

Like a member who last year was diagnosed with incurable cancer, you could say his plate of physique took a fall. But here's the thing, if he was so focused on that spinning plate, if he made his health his top priority in his life, his God, if you like, then when that plate fell, it would have landed him in a world of despair.

[27:07] But it didn't because he lived more like a rotating planet around the sun. And so when the diagnosis came in, he still felt the warmth of peace and hope that the sun gives us all rather than the coldness of despair.

And that's a good thing, isn't it? In fact, rotating around the sun even gives us purpose no matter what. And so if we focus so much on our prosperity and plans of being able to do this or do that or travel here or there and then our health suddenly prevents us from doing that, you know, if we focus so much on that, then it can land us again in a world of despair and feeling like we're useless.

But if our lives rotate around the sun, then we always have purpose. The purpose of living for him. And that doesn't change no matter what we can and can't do anymore. The sun always gives us the warmth of purpose rather than the coldness of uselessness.

And so it's worth living our lives like rotating planets around the sun rather than spending our lives spinning plates, you see. But the big point is God has made his son supreme, the most important one in this life and in new life.

[28:36] And by doing so, he has made all of life about the sun. That's why at Holy Trinity we keep talking so much about Jesus. Because we think life's about him.

And we want to make our lives primarily about him above all other things. Where we seek to glorify and honour him. In fact, the way we please God the Father is by following and honouring God the Son.

Because that's how God has set it up. God has made all of life about Jesus. And so are you on board with him. Let's pray. Our gracious Father, we thank you for the way you have made the Son supreme in this life and in new life.

And so we pray that you would help us to be on board with you and make him supreme in our lives too. That we might live revolving around him, making him the most important one in our lives. Help us in this, we pray, in his name. Amen. Amen. Amen.