

15-23

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Date: 16 April 2023

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[0 : 00] All right, good morning, Shoreline.

It's good to be with you all. If you're looking in a Bible, turn with me to Colossians chapter 1. We're looking at verses 15 through 23. I think those verses might be up on the screen as well.

It's good to be with you all and to worship with you and to bring God's word to you from this wonderful passage from this letter of the Apostle Paul.

So let me begin by reading it, and then we'll jump right in together. Colossians chapter 1, beginning at verse 15, and this is speaking about Jesus Christ.

He, that is Jesus, 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.

[1 : 15] 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.

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.

Things fall apart, the center cannot hold. Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world. The blood-dimmed tide is loosed, and everywhere the ceremony of innocence is drowned.

The best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity. So the Irish poet W.B. Yeats wrote those words, about 100 years ago, 1919. He was writing in the aftermath of World War I, which had left 20 million people dead, and 21 million more wounded.

[2 : 52] He was writing as political tensions were high in his own country, leading to the Irish War for Independence, and he was writing in a time of personal distress. His pregnant wife had almost died from a bad case of the Spanish flu.

And over the last century, his poem has resonated with many people facing personal crises or experiencing political upheaval or financial or other kinds of social instability.

His words have been quoted in numerous plays, poems, novels, and articles. And I think every one of us experiences this at some level.

We see things around us, or we feel things within us falling apart. That's sort of the natural course things take in this fallen world. You build a new building, and immediately something's starting to decay.

You buy a new car, or a new appliance, or a new article of clothing, and not long afterwards, there's a tear, or a malfunction, or something isn't quite going right.

[4 : 02] Sometimes you might invest in a work project, or a mentoring relationship, maybe for a long time, and then it just gets pushed to the side, or the person you're mentoring just sort of goes off on their own way.

And no matter how young and strong we might be right now, every one of our bodies are in the process of aging, decaying, and eventually dying.

In this fallen world, things don't naturally hold together. They naturally, gradually fall apart. Sometimes more cataclysmically, they fall apart.

But in this morning's passage, the Apostle Paul shows us that there is one who holds all things together. Sometimes when we look and see things falling apart, we sort of wonder, what can we hold on to?

What can we cling on to to hold things together? And the Apostle Paul answers that question in this passage. He says that Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God, is the one who holds all things together.

[5 : 04] And Paul, I want to look at this passage in three sections. If you're verses 15 through 17, Paul talks about how Jesus holds the whole universe together. He sort of starts at the broadest possible level.

He doesn't start by talking about how Jesus helps you and me with our whatever individual problems or woes we're going through today. He starts at a much bigger level by saying, look at how Jesus holds the whole universe together.

And second, in verses 18 through 20, he narrows down a bit and says, Jesus holds the worldwide church, the church with a capital C, together.

And then finally, in verses 21 to 23, he'll talk about how Jesus holds us together. Those of us gathered here and each one of us who trust in him.

So first, Jesus holds the universe together. You know, many, for at least thousands of years, human beings have looked around at the world and wondered, how did all this get here?

[6 : 08] All right? And what holds it all together? What keeps the sun shining? What keeps the earth spinning? What makes the rain to fall and the wind to blow? What sustains our human bodies, fragile as they are?

Why do we have minds that ask these questions? All right? Answering those questions is not necessary for our physical survival or pleasure. But human beings, and, you know, whether it's philosophers in academic settings or just people sitting around a campfire late at night, have talked about these questions.

What holds everything together? And one way that we've tried to sort of dig a little deeper into that question is through science. Right? So scientists have sought to explore the world and have sort of looked outward into outer space and looked inward at the microscopic level, at atoms and molecules and subatomic particles.

And one thing that scientists have found, whether you sort of look outward at the vastness of the universe or look inward at the microscopic level, is that the universe we live in is precisely balanced or finely tuned to support life as we know it.

So in 2000, year 2000, the British astrophysicist Martin Rees published a book called Just Six Numbers, The Deep Forces That Shape the Universe. And I don't know this guy very well.

[7 : 28] I don't think he's a Christian believer, but he's simply a scientist making this observation. He says the argument of his book is there are at least six constants or six forces that are precisely calibrated, finely tuned to sustain complex life in our physical universe.

If any of these forces were a little bit larger or stronger or a little bit weaker, stars and galaxies couldn't exist, let alone planets like ours. Everything would either explode or collapse.

So one example he gives is that the electrical force between two protons is 10 to the 36th power, that means 10 with 36 zeros after it, greater than the gravitational force between two protons.

Now, I'm not a scientist, and I don't even understand that sentence that I just said to you, okay? But the point is, if the force of gravity were just a bit stronger, gravity would make everything too heavy and we'd all collapse under its weight.

And if the force of gravity were just a bit weaker, everything would be too light and we'd sort of spin off apart from each other. But in our universe, that ratio happens to be precisely 10 to the 36th power, right?

[8 : 36] This amazingly huge number that none of us can even fathom how large that is. And yet it has to be pretty precisely that much. So the point is, the universe we live in is finely tuned, it's precisely balanced to support life as we know it.

And of course the question, that's sort of just a scientific observation. Now scientists by themselves can't answer the question why, right? But that's the question we naturally ask next, right?

Is why is this the case? Why is the world so finely tuned? Now some people say, well, that's just how it is. There's no reason or explanation. We're just here. We'll never be able to explain why and we don't need to.

But that's not a very satisfying answer. I mean, think about it this way. If you were facing a firing squad and every single bullet flew past you until the firing squad ran out of bullets and you stood there unharmed, would you say, well, I guess that's just how it is.

I'll never know why. I don't need to know why. I guess I'm just lucky. Or would you wonder, maybe somebody was looking out for me and protecting me.

[9 : 48] And I wonder who that was. Right? So other people have proposed the sort of multiverse hypothesis. Ever heard of this? I know, we're going a little off into all kinds of conversation, but I'll get back to Colossians.

This gets back to it. Okay? Right? Other people have proposed the multiverse hypothesis. Right? I mean, we need to think about not just what the scripture says, but also how does it relate to the questions people are asking in our culture? That's where I'm parking for a couple minutes in this set of conversations.

Right? Other people have said there's trillions of other universes out there besides our own. They're all completely inaccessible to us. And we just happen to have landed in the universe that works best for us. But that is all just speculation.

Right? It's far more speculative than believing in Santa Claus, the Easter bunny, and the tooth fairy. Right? Most people don't believe in all three of those things. Right? Who are especially scientifically minded.

Right? The simplest and by far the most elegant explanation for why this universe is so finely tuned and why it holds all together is that this universe is not a random accident.

[10 : 51] It's the work of an intelligent being who made it all and governs it all. And the Bible, and this passage in particular, introduces us to the one who holds all things together.

From the vastness of outer space to the tiniest subatomic particle that we can't even figure out how it works. The Bible shows us and tells us about one who holds it all together.

And the Bible tells us it's not some impersonal force or law that holds it all together. It's not an abstract idea or principle that holds all things together.

It's a personal being. An infinite, personal, wise, and loving God who holds all things together. And we can know this God through his son, Jesus Christ. That's who Paul's speaking about in these verses.

Jesus Christ, the eternal son of God through whom all things were made, in whom all things hold together. Right? Paul sort of starts by taking this big picture view and says, look, Jesus Christ is the one who holds the entire universe together.

[12 : 01] Look at what Paul says about Jesus in verse 15. It says he's the image of the invisible God. Hebrews chapter 1, verse 3 calls Jesus the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature.

In other words, Jesus perfectly and completely reflects the character of God. If you want to know who God is, look right at Jesus and you will see him clearly. He goes on to talk about Jesus as the firstborn of all creation.

Now, that doesn't mean Jesus was the first created being. That's not what that phrase means. So, it says Jesus is the one through whom all things were created.

So, in the Bible, there's sort of two categories. of things that exist. One is God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, uncreated, who has always existed and nobody made him.

And the other category is everything else that has been created. And Jesus, the eternal son, as the eternal son of God, he fits in the first category.

[13 : 08] He is the eternal son of God. And that phrase, the firstborn over all creation, means he's the rightful ruler over all creation. In the ancient world, the firstborn son had a unique status and responsibility and authority over all who would come after him.

And in a similar way, the Son of God, Jesus Christ, through whom all things were made, rightfully rules over everything else that exists without any exceptions. Just notice how comprehensively Jesus' authority is described in these verses.

How many times do you see the word all? Eight times that word appears in verses 15 through 20. The firstborn of all creation, by him all things were created. End of verse 16, all things were created through him and for him.

He's before all things in him, all things hold together. And it's three more times in verses 18 through 20. So a guy named Abraham Kuyper once said, there is not a square inch in the whole domain of

our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry mine. In other words, you have never seen anything in your life that God had no part in creating or sustaining. Right? The very things that are in your field of vision right now, Jesus Christ is upholding.

[14 : 23] And Paul wants us to see that Jesus is Lord not just over our own personal lives, but over the whole universe. Wherever you go this week, whatever you encounter, Jesus Christ is sustaining and upholding it all.

You see, where Paul was writing back in ancient Colossae, people commonly believed that the universe was sort of full of all kinds of different spiritual powers.

And therefore, spiritual fullness could only be achieved by taking all those different powers into account and trying to connect with a whole bunch of different ones. And so people would sort of mix and match different spiritual and religious and philosophical practices because they feel like you sort of have to get the whole smorgasbord.

It's like if you go to a buffet, right? And you think, I've got to get a little bit of this and a little bit of that and a little bit of that and a little bit of that. And Paul says, no, no, no. No, no, no.

There's not a buffet of gods who are governing the universe, right? Everything that exists, whether in the physical realm or the spiritual realm, is made and sustained and ruled over by Jesus Christ himself.

[15 : 29] And so you don't need to worship anyone else but him. There's nothing missing in Jesus. He is the ultimate source of salvation, security, and satisfaction.

So that's the first thing that Paul wants us to see. He wants us to sort of take a big picture and realize Jesus holds the whole universe together, right? You know, sometimes when we're stressed or anxious or frustrated, you know, something that's often helpful to people is you go take a walk in the woods.

Why do people do that? Right? Because it reminds you that there is so much that is so much bigger than you. And on a much grander level, that's what Paul's doing in these first three verses.

Paul's saying, okay, let's put to the side all your anxieties, all your frustrations, all the problems that the church in Colossae was facing. He'll get to them later. And there were challenges and particular problems they were facing.

Paul says, start by looking outward and upward and see that Jesus holds the whole universe together. That's the first point Paul makes here. But second, verses 18 through 20, Paul wants us to see that Jesus holds the worldwide church together.

[16 : 43] Verses 18 to 20, 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. So Paul's shifting his focus from the whole universe to the whole church.

And when he's talking about the church, he's not talking about the buildings where Christians meet. He's not talking about just one group of Christians in one particular time or place.

He's talking about church with a capital C, the worldwide body of Christ. And Paul wants us to see that Jesus has a special relationship to his church, to his body on earth.

Now notice, Paul doesn't say in the same way that Jesus made the universe and rules over it. Jesus also founded the church and rightfully rules over it too.

Now that's a true statement, but Paul says something even more. Paul begins verse 18 by saying Jesus is the head of the body. Now think about the relationship between your head and the rest of your body.

[17 : 46] Right? In one sense, the head governs or rules the rest of the body. There is a sense of authority, right? Jesus has authority over the church. That's true. But the head is also inseparably connected to the rest of the body.

Right? Nourishing, guiding, sustaining it. Right? Paul's point is that Jesus, the eternal son of God, is intimately, personally, and inseparably connected to his church.

Right? If you sever the head from the body, then there is no hope. Right? But Paul says Christ is the head. He is inseparably connected to us, nourishing us, guiding us, sustaining us, upholding us. He has promised himself to us, and he will never leave us or forsake us. So how does Jesus hold the church together? Well, verse 18 says Jesus is the source of the church's life.

He's the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, the one who conquered death on our behalf. Verse 19 says Jesus is the source of our fullness. In him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.

Verse 20 says Jesus is the source of the church's message.

[18 : 54] The church's message is that sinful people like us can have peace with God through Jesus Christ because of what he accomplished for us on the cross and through his resurrection from the dead. Right?

And this is what binds the church together. Jesus is our life. He's our fullness. He's our message. He's the one who holds the worldwide church together. If you think about Christians throughout history and around the world today, there are a lot of things that make us different from one another.

Christians don't all speak the same language. Christians don't all like the same kinds of food or art or music. Christians don't all have the same views about politics or economics.

Christians belong to many different ethnic and national groups. Christians are citizens of many different countries. Christians can be very different from one another in many different ways. even in a local church.

Sometimes it's challenging when we are trying to relate to somebody who's maybe very different than us but holds the same faith and hope in Jesus Christ.

[20 : 01] But what binds us all together is nothing less than Jesus Christ himself. It all comes back to what he did for us on the cross and the reality of his resurrection from the dead.

Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians if Christ hasn't been raised our preaching is useless and so is your faith. It all stands or falls on the person and work of Jesus. So if you're considering Christianity if you're not yet a Christian believer but maybe you're sort of feeling things out listening, processing, thinking this is the heart of the matter.

Is Jesus who he claimed to be? Did he really die on the cross for our sins and then rise from the dead? If those things are true Christianity makes sense and is worth following.

If those things are not true Christianity is not worth following. Don't get distracted by anything less than those most important questions. That's the heart of the matter. Maybe you have come back to the church after having been away from the church for a time and maybe you're sort of working through some questions or some hurts.

When I was in college I started attending a church that was different from the one I had grown up in and over time I was trying to sort out what of the beliefs and practices from the church I had grown up with was I on board with and what about the beliefs and practices of this other church and searching the scriptures and I wasn't quite sure what to think about certain topics.

[21 : 40] I wasn't quite sure what to think about spiritual gifts about predestination and free will sometimes I felt like I was sort of constantly wrestling with some kind of doubts or questions about something or other but when I came back to these core truths of what these verses 18 to 20 say Jesus Christ made peace through his blood on the cross that was the rock of the foundation that was the foundation of my faith and I realized I had no good reason not to believe any of those things I had no good reason to I had other questions I couldn't quite resolve but that was the anchor and so if you're wrestling with doubts or if you're sort of healing from hurts hold on to these truths as your anchor and dig deep into them that Christ died on the cross for our sins and he rose to life on the third day and there's all kinds of implications that come from both of those but just dig into those dig your teeth into those and that will sustain you and that will lead you along the process of sorting things out and understanding things better and finding healing from past wounds and hurts finally for those of us who've been part of the church for a long time let's make sure that our life our fullness and our message stay centered around Jesus you know it's always a temptation for churches to allow various other things to displace the centrality of Jesus and let me just encourage you you know

I've known some of you for about 10 years now and my family and I have usually come here and visited about once a year as we've been able to and we've just been encouraged by I think you're doing this I think you're seeking to be a Christ centered church so let me just encourage you to continue in that here's an analogy I think that the church is like the room in the Louvre which is a French art museum where the Mona Lisa is located so right a strikingly beautiful painting right you don't want to let that room get filled with boxes of stuff in storage right or amateur art drawings taped to the walls right the point of that room is to display that one beautiful painting and I think that's a good analogy for us to think about as a church right our goal as a church is to display the striking beauty and glory and that is of Jesus Christ the unsurpassed glory of Jesus so that when people come in they see clearly who our treasure is

Paul said in 1st Corinthians 3 no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid which is Jesus Christ so let me encourage you brothers and sisters here let your life and fullness and message remain centered on Jesus Christ so Jesus holds the universe together Jesus holds the worldwide church together and finally verse 21 to 23 Jesus holds our lives together right so Paul's been speaking about the beauty and glory of Jesus Christ on a grand scale but now he comes and says and you and when Paul says and you it's a plural you he's speaking to the whole church in Colossae but that also includes each one of them individually who are believers in Christ Paul wants us to know that the same Jesus who holds the whole universe together the same Jesus who holds the worldwide church together he is sufficient to hold each of you together he is sufficient to hold

Shoreline Community Bible Church together even if your life feels like it's falling apart so Paul ends this passage by pointing us to Jesus faithfulness in the past present and future look down at verse 21 Paul says remember who you were in the past you were once alienated and hostile in mind doing evil deeds in other words Paul reminds us we weren't naturally on good terms with God God didn't accept us because we were so good and righteous and holy no he showed mercy to us in spite of our attitude and behavior it's by his grace that we've been saved so Paul says remember who you were in the past but then he says know who you are in the present verse 22 he has now reconciled you in his body of flesh by his death now you're reconciled to God through Jesus you're at peace with God so Paul says remember who you were know who you are and look forward to who you will become in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him that's pointing to what God is making us into he is making us into people who are holy that word means set apart and blameless those words were used in the

Old Testament for the sacrifices in the temple right and God is making us into people whose lives can be our living sacrifices offered to God through Jesus Christ above reproach before him right that's what that's what Paul's making us into or that's what God that's what Jesus Christ is making us into Paul's reminding them of that and so Paul concludes the passage in verse 23 by urging us to hold tightly to Jesus just as he holds tightly to us continue in the faith stable and steadfast not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you've heard and the image there in verse 23 that stable steadfast not shifting the image is of a building that's securely founded firmly established and not shifting let me just close by speaking a few words to you all in particular as a church so as

[28 : 02] I said some of you I've known for about 10 years now so I think the first time I met you guys was in 2013 Andrew correct me if I'm wrong is that right so some Sunday in 2013 I was a pastor in New Haven and some new people walked into our church there were three or four or five of them 2011 11 oh even before that goodness okay all right well I remember the first I so I remember here's what my memory may not be perfect but here's what I remember I remember the first day talking to Andrew and Andrew said there's six or eight of us we've just started having a Bible study in our house I think we might plant a church and I said something like planting a church is and so so they did it was a men's Bible study at the time but they were committed to just cultivating deep

Christian friendships and digging deep into the word of God and building a community together that would show forth the glory of Christ and over the next few years so the men's Bible study continued then a women's Bible study started in another house nobody was married at the beginning by the way so some people started dating and some people got married and some people broke up but through that but through all that God brought people closer to himself and there was also a lot of intentionality some of you would run triathlons and you would invite your work colleagues to train with you and then I would meet your work colleagues because they would show up with you at church and they would be like well I started running a triathlon with so and so but now we're talking about Jesus and I'm really sort of considering Christianity for the first time seriously and so a couple people came to faith got baptized so these

Bible studies kept growing so eventually we realized you know a lot of time churches are planted by starting with a pastor or maybe a leadership team who wants to plant a church so this is the reverse we had 30 or 40 people and we're like okay we have to help you plant a church and we have to help you find a pastor so there was a church really before there was even like a pastor a staff elder whatever you want to call and so in 2016 finally after a long process Shoreline officially launched and you know it's been my family and I have really enjoyed coming we usually come every year and every year there's more faces that I don't recognize or that I didn't know from the beginning which is

great it's a good sign but I want to encourage you because you're all in a transition right now right and it's a transition that three four months ago nobody was anticipating and so you're going through a pastoral search or going to talk about how to take the next steps in that for the first time since before this church was officially constituted right and you're thinking about moving to a new building and maybe that's tabled for a while but regardless you might not always the holiday and might not always be your home on Sundays right there's there's many things that might change but what I want to say to you is that

Jesus Christ who holds the whole universe together from the smallest atoms and molecules to the farthest reaches of outer space and Jesus Christ who holds the worldwide church together he is more than sufficient to hold you together to strengthen you and this is not an interruption in God's purposes for shoreline okay the transition you're going through it's not like oh this is just an interruption and then once we can settle everything then we can get back to doing what God wants us to do no this is a very important period where Christ is drawing you closer to himself and helping you to depend on him and work together as a church and work together as leadership teams and I know you're thinking about and praying about bringing new people onto the leadership teams the elders and deacons but let me just encourage you hold tightly to Christ don't shift from the hope of the gospel that you've heard and that has brought you together ever since the beginning because continue in the faith stable and steadfast through

Christ so let me just leave you with that word of encouragement encouragement and I hope that will I hope that will be an encouragement to you let me pray let me close by praying for us all Lord Jesus we thank you we thank you for how you hold the universe together Lord everything we see everywhere we go there is nowhere that you are completely absent from and there is nothing that you are not upholding and sustaining by the word of your power and Lord thank you for how you have sustained your church throughout the world throughout 2000 years of history through many challenges and ups and downs ebbs and flows Lord I pray for Shoreline in particular I pray that you would that you would be the one who holds them together and that they would that you would be the glue that fastens them to one another and that you would be growing them as a body of believers and as individuals and as families we pray pray for your blessing on Shoreline and each of the people within it and that that that that we just pray that as as time goes on we would be able to we would continually stand in awe of you and how you what you've done in the past and what you're doing now and what you've promised to do in the future pray this in your holy name amen to do to do to do!

[34 : 45] to do