

Colossians 1:15-23

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[0 : 00] 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.

And you, who were once alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled us 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.

[1 : 18] Let's pray. Lord, as we look today at your Son, will you open our eyes?

Will you help us see him? Lord, we turn our hearts to worship and our lives to living praise. We pray that in his name, the name of your beloved Son.

Amen. They say you should never meet your heroes. The only way that can go is disappointment. That movie star, the sports legend, the admiral for you coasties, the war hero, we've galvanized their reputation in our own minds. And so there's really nowhere for them to go but down when we meet them face to face.

And if you Google that phrase, never meet your heroes, right, you'll find lots of people saying lots of things. I found this article, 12 reasons why you should never meet your hero.

[2 : 28] And among them, you know, you won't make an impression on them, right? If they're impressive, you're probably not impressive to them. You'll embarrass yourself as you fanboy out. Maybe they'll be mean to you.

Or you'll misinterpret their indifference as mean-spiritedness. Or maybe they'll ask you for money, right? It's not uncommon for celebrities to ask for money for an autograph. In any event, they won't be your hero anymore.

In Colossians chapter 1, 15 and following, we meet the hero, the great hero. And is he like that? Is this like meeting a sports star or movie star or some really impressive political figure or someone who is prominent in our world today?

Do we come away from him thinking, oh, that wasn't as impressive as I had hoped it would be? Or is it different than that? That article, 12 Things, 12 Reasons You Should Never Meet Your Hero, They said this is the worst thing about meeting your hero.

[3 : 41] He will seem surprisingly average. Unless you pictured your hero as a kind of short, aging guy with sunken eyes, you'll invariably be disappointed by how simply human he is.

He doesn't exude an aura of greatness. In fact, he seems like a guy who watches a lot of sports on TV, leaving you to wonder, is this the pinnacle of mankind?

Is this what I have to aspire to? See, the movie star only looks that good with professional lighting and expert makeup and the right camera angles.

But not in real life. The sports legend is only at her peak, or his peak, for a few short years. And even within that, those of you who are athletes know that it's really only a few short days in a season that they're actually at their actual peak.

Right? Even in those years of their prime. And so the danger of meeting our heroes is that when we take a second look, when we look a little bit closer, they don't live up to the hype.

[4 : 54] And we are disappointed. What about this hero? He is the image, verse 15, 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 of the church. Who is this he? Grammatically, he refers back to verse 13, the beloved son of the father.

This passage is all about Jesus, who he is and what he's done and how he has changed everything for everyone who calls him Lord. Now, it begins today, Paul begins today saying he is the image of the invisible God.

What does that mean? It doesn't mean that he's a painting of the real God, not a lesser copy that we can reference and think about that Jesus' words in John chapter 14.

[6 : 10] Jesus said to them, I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except through me. If you had known me, you would have known my father also. From now on, you do know him and have seen him.

Philip said to him, Lord, show us the father and it is enough for us. Jesus said to him, have I been with you so long and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the father. How can you say, show us the father? Do not believe that I am in the father and the father is in me. No, he is not a lesser copy, a reflection of glory.

Jesus is the invisible God made visible. That means if we want to see God's glory, we don't look first to nature.

We don't look first inside ourselves to the inner divine, whatever that means in today's society. If we want to see the divine, if we want real transcendence to taste that, we need to look to Jesus, to his words, to his ministry, and to his glory.

[7 : 24] What does that glory look like? What does the image of the invisible God look like? Well, verse 16 tells us that he is the creator. 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.

As the one who spoke, let there be light. And it was so. See, there is nothing that you've seen, there's nothing that you've heard of, there's nothing that our minds have ever conceived of that isn't the result of his creative activity, that he wasn't the first cause of.

There is no end to his reign, to his dominion, because he is king over all. And we're not just talking about the physical stuff of the universe.

Sure, he made everything from nothing, but look what it says here. Thrones, dominions, rulers, and authorities. He created the world and everything in it, including the thrones, the powers, the dominions.

Nothing from kings and kingdoms, from human cultures throughout the ages, to hurricanes over raging seas, to the spiritual powers at work in this world.

[8 : 51] None of them are beyond the purview of his sovereignty. Don't meet your heroes, they say. They'll disappoint you. Not this one.

Not so far. Verse 16 continues. All things were created through him and for him.

The largest privately owned yacht in the world is called Azzam.

It was commissioned in 2013. It is nearly 600 feet long. That's two football fields. You already have a question forming in your head, don't you?

Right? You are probably, even those of you who work in a shipyard are probably not thinking about a shipyard. What are you asking yourselves about? Not who made it, but who owns it? Who is this thing for?

[9 : 48] Right? That's what you're asking yourselves. Do you want to know more about the shipyard or do you want to know more about the billionaire? Right? That's the question. Right? That's what we want to know.

Who's using that thing? Who's sailing the seven seas? Now, many of you work at a shipyard. I'm aware of that, but my guess is that even you wanted to know who had that thing rather than who made that thing.

And even for you who work at a shipyard, right? When the world sees those submarines, do they think, oh, those are electric boat submarines? Or do they say those are the U.S. Navy's submarines?

Who looks mighty at the end of the day? It's the one that they were made for. If it's something that's made on commission, it's the patron who gets the glory, not the builder.

Jesus did make all things by the power of his word, but he didn't make them for someone else. They are for him. That's what verse 16 says to us.

[10:49] All things were created through him, like the shipyard, and for him, like the building there. So he is not second fiddle.

Everything that is, everything that exists in this world, in this universe, is for him. that includes a 600-foot motor yacht named his man, and the billionaire who owns it, and you, and me.

So, he made everything. Everything is for him, and it's not as if it's all in the past.

See, there's a present reality to it. Look at verse 17. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

What makes the world go round? What is it that makes, that holds everything together? ask yourself, in your life, what do you rely on?

[12:00] What is the thing that is the glue? When things get rough, what do you instinctively look for to hold it all together?

It'll be all right so long as what? So long as I make it to Friday? so long as I, you know, so long as nothing happens to the kids.

So long as nothing happens to my retirement accounts. So long as what? What is the glue of this world? What's the glue in your life?

Verse 17 tells us that the very molecules of our bodies cohere because he wills it. Every breath, every tick of the clock, the physical world, our society, time itself, everything depends on him.

And so in your mind, do you as politics hold your world together? We'll be fine so long as we get that policy passed or that person elected. In your mind, does the way your kids behave hold your world together?

[13:20] I can make it through the day so long as they don't embarrass me? Do the fluctuations in the S&P; 500 hold your world together? As long as I can keep my house, right?

Does keeping your boss off your back hold your world together? Or does the beloved son who made you, who made you for himself, who shed his blood for sinful man?

Does his unchanging love hold the world together? If not, if that's not what holds your world together, when the storm rises, you will be threatened with complete loss.

Every time a hurricane, literal or metaphorical, heads your way. And if his love does hold your world together, you'll go through trials all the same.

But you will have a solid rock in the midst of the storm. You'll not be undone. Don't meet your heroes, they say. They'll disappoint you, they say.

[14:32] This hero is looking better and better the closer and closer we look. So we see the son's glory, the invisible God made visible in his mighty work of creation.

We see his glory in that all things are for him. We see his glory in that he upholds the universe. And the capstone, the pinnacle of his glory, what is it?

How would you answer that question? What is the chief glory of our Lord? What does he point to and say, that is the indication of my greatness, my glory?

Would you say it is the empty tomb? That's a good candidate. Would you say it is his royal throne from which a river of life flows?

Good candidate. The angels singing endless praise. The angels who we are tempted when we meet them to praise, they are singing his praises.

[15:38] That's pretty high and lofty. Verse 18. He is the head of the body, the church.

That sounds like an anticlimax, doesn't it? I mean, have you met these people? Right? Look around the room. Look around the world.

Right? Some people, you know, are argumentative. Some people are odd. Some have been in the church for years and are still spiritually infants.

Right? There are terrors growing among the wheat, and when we look around globally, there seems oftentimes to be more division and unity. And so when we read verse 18, as if, you know, Paul is coming to a crescendo, like, hey, we're building step by step, Christ's glory is growing and growing

in front of our eyes.

This does not seem like the next step. Why do we look at the church and see glory?

[16:49] Why? The church is the crown of his glory, not because the church is beautiful, but because the people of God are covered in blood more valuable than any jewel or precious stone.

the church is where Jesus showcases the power of his redemptive love. Verse 21, right?

The vile made clean. The enemy made sons and daughters. That is the power of his redemptive love.

love. It's also the showcase of his creativity. In one single event, the cross, Jesus showed forth his absolute holiness as he poured out his wrath against sin and put forward his unconquerable love by showing mercy in the same event.

that is creative problem solving. The church is also where Jesus shows he is worthy of praise.

[18:11] We give a lot of weight to people who have made a major change in their life. The drug addict who's now trying to get others clean. We give a lot more weight to that person's testimony than we do to the person who's never seen drugs and says from a long way off, oh, drugs are bad.

The gangbanger who now is trying to keep kids off the street. We respect that guy in his opinion way more than the politician in Washington who's never been to the streets. The abortion doctor who now campaigns against it.

Things like that. We instinctively know that the person who has had a radical life shift, that person is worth listening to because something major has happened to really change their minds.

And that's what the church is. You're going to see again in verse 21, we were once hostile to him. It might not feel like it now, but we'll get there soon. Those who were once hostile to him now must, if they are praising him now, there really must be something to this.

in the church, the Lord reveals and displays and puts on a showcase of his redemptive love, the creativity of his love, and shows that he is worthy of praise in a very unique fashion.

[19:39] That's why the church is the crown of his glory. Don't meet your heroes, they say. they'll disappoint you, they say.

The more we look at Jesus, the more impressive, the more excellent, the more glorious he looks, which leads us maybe to the next reason that we shouldn't meet our heroes, according to that list of 12.

That author wrote, he will try to get rid of you. Assuming that all goes well in your brief encounter with your hero, you won't want to leave. And chances are you won't.

until he makes it abundantly clear he wants you gone. There's nothing like the feeling of your biggest hero trying to be rid of you forever.

In other words, if your hero is really awesome, like Jesus is, why would he want anything to do with you? So, second half of verse 18 says, he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.

[20:55] 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.

most celebrities don't want you in their lives. I mean, honestly, how many times does someone have to run up to you while you're just trying to eat lunch, screaming, I'm your biggest fan, for you to hate them, right?

Before you don't want anything to do with fans ever again. I can actually understand that. I mean, I don't get that, but I can kind of, if I put myself in their shoes, I can see why that would be the case.

And if Jesus is as glorious as he is presented to us in this passage, why would he want anything to do with you or me? This hero is very, very different.

We've sort of seen him from afar, right, in verses 15 to 18. We're looking at him on a cosmological scale. He is before all things. In him all things hold together, right?

[22:12] These lofty, lofty words. And it's as if we're looking at him from afar, but in verses, the second half of 18 and following, we start getting close to him.

It's as if we can run up here, face to face, and say, I'm your biggest fan. And does he reject us?

Does he turn us away? He doesn't. It is not glory at a distance only.

He doesn't keep us at arm's length. What's so incredible about this hero? We didn't run up to him asking for an autograph.

He came to us. to stop there. He didn't come just passing out autographs simply to move on after his press tour was over.

He came for a relationship. He came to reconcile us to himself. But he didn't stop there. He opened the checkbook, so to speak, an autograph costs a celebrity nothing to produce, except maybe hand cramps.

[23 : 30] They do a lot of them. Our reconciliation cost him the blood of his cross. Now, why might that be? Why did it cost him that?

Verse 21 has the answer. You who were once alienated and hostile in mind doing evil deeds? That's who he was reconciling.

Now, if you ask any average person on the street who doesn't know Christ, are you alienated or maybe separated from God? They'll probably say, sure, like, I don't know God.

Maybe he's okay, but I'm okay here too, so we're fine. Right? That's probably the average person in this world will admit, yeah, I'm separated from God, if God's a thing.

Right? That's what they'll say. But Paul goes on, that's actually just the starting part. We're separated from him because we are hostile in mind, the text says.

[24 : 36] How many people would admit to that? Is that how you look back, if you are a Christian today, is that how you look back at the time before you became a Christian?

People are less inclined to admit that. It sounds a little antagonistic, and they're like, I want to ignore and be ignored, thank you very much, not be hostile with this God that you are talking about.

And then what about doing evil deeds? People are least likely to admit that. Or even when they do, they do it lightly. I remember reading a fitness book, one that I obviously didn't put into practice.

You need a clear motivation, right, to keep up with a fitness program, and a diet plan, and all those things. The author was really clear.

The name of the book was called Built for Show. And even in the midst of that, you kind of know where he's going, right? And I remember, I don't have the exact quote, but I remember very nearly this.

[25 : 45] He said, I am in this for maximum fornication points. I remember that phrase very, very specifically because it really sticks with you, right? And so he is not shying away from evil deeds.

He is celebrating them and even labeling them as much as he can. Oh, that's what I'm in this for. That's what I'm about here. Let's go back briefly though to that hostile mind.

It is so important for us to understand that apart from Christ and his love transforming our hearts, we are set against him. Now, that might not seem how the world is around us day by day.

People are just trying to get through the day, right? Here's how that thought process goes.

Let's say we tell someone, hey, you're not just separated from God but you're hostile in mind to him. Or maybe put yourself in an unchristian's shoes, right?

[26 : 57] Well, me? I'm not so bad. What's the matter with God that he thinks I'm so bad? And that right there, that's it. Isn't it? It's seemingly innocuous, but that is in itself hostility towards God.

Right there. And it only grows. That's it at its most innocuous. And of course, that mind is going to be separated and alienated from God.

Of course, that mindset is going to produce action that's evil in God's sight. And that's the whole of verse 21 there. Now, you remember the glory that we saw in verses 15 to 20?

You wouldn't slap a movie star in the face, would you? What are the ramifications of sinning against the one who is before all things? verse 22 says, 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.

That was the cost. In a few moments, we're going to celebrate the Lord's Supper. We'll actually think about this idea, his body of flesh, just a little bit more.

[28 : 25] And then verse 23 we read, 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.

Last week we were in the first half of this chapter. Verses 4 through 11. hung on verse 5.

The hope of Christ is the thing that builds our love and our faith. And love is active and it looks like all those other things in the passage.

So the whole Christian life depends on hope in Christ and today we have seen Christ as he is. And so Paul is enormously concerned in verse 23 here that we forge ahead without shifting from that hope.

And in a sense that's actually how he's summing up his ministry. I proclaim the gospel so sinners can repent and believe for reconciliation and I proclaim the gospel to the redeemed so that they

don't shift their eyes off the hope.

[29 : 51] Before all things. Preeminent in all things. Over all things. Those are lofty words are they not? Paul wants our minds there.

Needs them there. Because being heavenly minded as we said last week is not the way to be no earthly good. It's the only way to be salt and light in this world.

How do those lofty things take root in daily life though? What does it look like? If our minds are on this Christ. But first it keeps us from falling back into a hostile relationship with God in our thoughts and our deeds.

We have this picture of Christ before our eyes. Do you want to walk away from that? Do you want to turn your back on that? It also shows us the depravity of our sin.

One Puritan pastor put it this way in this passage. He said it shows us the malignity of sin that it could be expiated only by such blood.

[31 : 04] Now what the heck does that mean? It means this. It means behold the unspeakable glory of the beloved son.

If there was any other way to pay for sin don't you think the father would have done that? but the fact that the son did offer himself up in our place shows that our sin is infinitely evil.

That's the malignity part of that quote. Oh how we praise him for his sacrifice. and oh how our own sin should break our hearts.

And to the degree that our own sins don't upset us, that's the degree to which our hearts are still seared. That's what it shows us.

It also models for us a love that reaches out, right? That's what this whole passage is about. Erin is traveling this week.

[32 : 18] She asked me yesterday, what's your sermon about? I gave her the good old Sunday school answer, Jesus. But that's what this passage is all about. A love that reaches out.

And what does that look like? It looks like a love that sacrifices for someone else. It says, I see that person as they are hurting.

And I'm going to reach out and I'm going to touch them. Even if they are hostile to me. That's what it says. That's what it shows for us. It's what it models for us. Because that's what he has done for us. And only that it gives us confidence in our spiritual battles. Rulers and authorities and powers and kingdoms and dominions.

some of that is very practical. The governments of the world around us but I think it's painting a bigger and broader picture. There's a spiritual dimension to this war and it sounds like those could be threatening to us.

[33 : 29] And they can't harm us. But this passage reassures us that they were made by and for our Lord. It also means that we were made by and for our Lord and so that as he lives in us and empowers us, the spiritual battle in our own hearts against sin, against the heart of sin, is not a battle that we are ill equipped for unless we shut him out of it.

It gives us a great confidence also in our salvation. Right? It's easy, I think, sometimes for Christians to say, am I really saved?

Like, did I believe hard enough? Those sort of questions, right? This passage is about his redemptive love saving sinners from their own sins.

The sinners contribute to that one bit. Could they have contributed to that one bit? No, we can't earn it, we can't even maintain it.

The one who made it all, the one for whom all things exist, the one who holds it all together, shed his blood for you. His blood is going nowhere.

[34 : 47] If you have been redeemed, you have been redeemed. Paul is going to say, as we move next week, Matt will be preaching the end of chapter one and the beginning of chapter two.

It's all about that very last thought in this passage, him we proclaim. It's going to come, again, more fully into view next week, but when we look at this, this is the message, this is the content of the gospel, and it's Jesus Christ himself.

love. When we say God is love, this is what we mean, not some generic good feelings. I think when Americans hear God is love, they think that he gives us the warm and fuzzies, or he answers all our prayers with nice things.

When Americans hear God is love, they don't think that the one by whom and for whom all things were created, rescued wicked sinners who were set against him, headed for righteous, eternal

judgment, that he saved them by taking their sin on his shoulders so he could die for them and make them family.

That's what we mean when we say God is love. But I don't think most people, when they hear God is love, hear that because we haven't told them.

[36 : 20] And Paul says that that is our ministry. And it can be as simple as saying when a spiritual topic comes up or somebody says something negative about Christians or Christianity.

Somebody's saying, well, what have you been told that Christianity is all about? it probably won't be this, but this is the center, this is the heart, this is the very essence of God's love for the world.

And so ask that question, what have you been told? Is Christianity all about? And then point them to this passage and say this is what God is all about. to do it.

We have the best message ever. There cannot be a better one. Let's share that. And so if you are actually sitting in verse 21, hostile in mind to the Lord doing evil in your own life, friend, you have sinned against the one who upholds the universe.

yet he has done everything, everything to reconcile you. Will you turn and be reconciled to him? Right this moment.

[37 : 46] Will you believe on the one who is before all things? Will you say you, the author of life, died in my place to save me from my sin? And will you say present me holy and blameless and above reproach to the Father?

This passage is all about Jesus' glory. His glory in creation and his glory in the cross. I've never heard those two things put together in the same sentence.

His creative goodness and his merciful goodness. I've never heard them put together quite as well as the theologian Octavius Winslow did. He said, so completely was Jesus bent upon saving sinners by the sacrifice of himself.

There's the mercy. He created the tree upon which he was to die and nurtured from infancy the men who were to nail him to the accursed wood.

Friends, let's pray. Lord, forgive us when we do not see glory when we look to Jesus.

[39 : 06] Help us to see his goodness, his greatness, that he would be before all things in our lives, that he would hold together all things in our lives.

Lord, will you turn us into people more and more each day who proclaim this message to our families, to ourselves in the church, to our own hearts, and to this world who needs this message more than anything.

Father, we pray this in the name of the hero who does not disappoint. Amen. Amen. You probably can't have been in church very long without hearing the words from 1 Corinthians 11 where Paul talks about the Lord's Supper.

sometimes they are just ritual for us. The Lord Jesus, on the night when he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, this is my body over you.

Sometimes we need to read it with fresh eyes, and I think our passage today helps us do that.

There are a lot of people who, when they think about the Lord's Supper, think very highly and put the emphasis on this is my body, which is for you.

[40 : 47] And say, look at these things right in front of us. This is it. And there are some wings of the church that believe that the bread and the wine become physically the body and blood of Christ.

We don't believe that here, in fact, for very good reasons. The places, including 1 Corinthians 11, where the host is sometimes called, the elements, are referred to in light of the body.

Paul is talking exactly like he's talking about in Colossians 1.18. The body is the church, very, very clearly. But with the emphasis, if we shift it, not from, this is my body, but this is my body.

well, that changes things quite a bit. Let me rephrase it then. This is my body, which is for you. Well, that becomes this is the body of the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, which is for you.

Or, this is the body of the one through whom and for whom all things were created, which is for you. this cup is the new covenant in my blood.

[42 : 08] We shouldn't read it really, this cup is the new covenant in my blood. Rather, this cup is the new covenant in my blood. Which Colossians 1 transforms for us and says, this cup is the new covenant in the blood of he who is the beginning.

This cup is the new covenant in the blood of the one who in everything is preeminent. Friends, the Lord's Supper isn't special just because someone died for you.

Amazing as that is, the Lord's Supper is special because of who died for you. And, in fact, our English translations of Colossians 1 begin with the word he, but, in fact, in Greek, the word is who? The beloved son, verse 13, who, 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.

[43 : 27] 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 in through him, to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

that is what we celebrate. His body broken for us. His blood spilled out for us to redeem us from the penalty of sin.

So friends, if you belong to him, if you are a member of his church, redeemed sinners, this is a celebration and a remembrance for us that he died for us.

Celebrate with gladness. If you have not yet been reconciled to him, don't receive the elements, receive Christ, receive his grace. We're going to stand now, we're going to take the elements and return to our seats and we'll celebrate by taking them together.

As you return to your seats, think about the one, who he is. This is my body broken for you.

[44 : 39] Let's take the elements.