

Jesus and Creation

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[0 : 00] If you'd like to open up your Bibles to Colossians 1 on page 188 and as you do that it's nice to welcome back Gene Begg and Ted McPhee who's with us today for the first time after seven months of illness. Welcome to you.

Well now we finished a series last week on living thankfully and I can see that you're all now living fully grateful and thankful lives and so it's time to move on. We get a series today that's going to last till the end of the year and it's on Jesus and I've called it Jesus' Matchless Saviour.

It was one of about 35 titles I just I couldn't find a right way of saying how wonderful Jesus is and it's so important for us to fill our hearts and minds and lives with the Lord Jesus Christ not just because he's the source of our life and our hope and faith and joy but because all the riches of God are found in him.

So all the joy in our relation with God comes from him and the depth of our understanding of God comes from him and the length and willingness and love for one another and joy in service also comes from him.

But here is the problem. We are being told today that any kind of religious belief is a dangerous thing to have particularly the kind of religious belief that might change the way we act and religion is of course the reason that everything is wrong with the world.

[1 : 37] This week I read in the sun a full page on the work of Dr. Michael Persinger. He's the neo-psychiatric clinician at the Laurentian University and Dr. Mike believes that belief in God is a virus of the brain.

So he is working to find ways to give us religious experiences without the unnecessary and unhelpful belief in God that goes along with him. And I quote, religion he says is a property of the brain, only of the brain and has little to do with what is out there.

So what Dr. Mike does is he gives his students religious feelings and he does that by having them put on a computer controlled solenoid deployed striped yellow motorcycle helmet rigged with electromagnetic charges calculated to mimic brain patterns.

And he says, quote, If we can provide the therapeutic value of God belief without all the baggage, we will have done something valuable. Helmets will be available next week.

So the idea is that if we can provide this religious experience without having to believe all these nasty doctrines, then that will be good.

[2 : 59] We'll all feel good and we won't do terrible things to one another anymore. At first sight, this problem is only made deeper when we turn to the New Testament.

Because it just doesn't seem very interested in the therapeutic value of religious feelings. Instead, any page you open in the New Testament has a massive focus on the person of Jesus Christ.

I mean, just take the five verses that were read from Colossians to us, twelve times it refers to Jesus. In him, in him, in him, in him.

It doesn't refer to us once. And there's a very good reason for this, I think. Because we have this tendency to keep putting ourselves at the centre. And the more we put ourselves at the centre, the less we see the beauty and loveliness of Jesus.

So these five verses that I've chosen for today are all about Jesus. And, of course, they don't come to us or they weren't written in a vacuum. They were written to new believers living in a pluralistic culture.

[4 : 06] Being tempted to make their faith more palatable. And the way this temptation came was new teachers had come along and said, what we want to do is we want to take away this sharp emphasis on Jesus Christ that the Apostle Paul has.

We want a faith that's more culturally acceptable. And the best way to do that is to add new things to it. And it's fascinating to see how the Apostle Paul deals with this.

He doesn't go at them head on as he does in the Galatians letter. What he does is this. He simply shows them how magnificent Jesus is.

Because Paul's view is that when we come to see Jesus as he really is, we'll realise that we've got nothing to be ashamed of. We should never be ashamed of him. And that we can add absolutely nothing to what he has done for us.

That is why this passage is so centrally focused on Jesus Christ. It is true biblical worship.

Colossians 1, 15 to 20. It's not just data about Jesus.

[5 : 14] It's revelation on fire. It's the furthest thing from academic truth. And as it comes to us from the heart of the Apostle, it has the power to shape our hearts and to shape our prayers.

What the Apostle does is he speaks about Jesus in these overflowing and overwhelming terms, in terms of his relation with God, with creation, and with us, his people.

And I want to look at those three things briefly with you this morning. Firstly, in relation with God, Paul says Jesus is the Son who reveals. If you look back at verse 13, you can see that the Apostle is speaking of God's beloved Son.

And now he wants to show us that all the different parts of our salvation are contained in him. So he begins verse 15 by saying this, He is the image of the invisible God.

If you're a reader of the New Testament, you know that the Apostle Paul uses this image language in two different ways. Firstly, when it applies to us, he speaks about us being changed to be more like Jesus Christ.

[6 : 21] We are gradually growing into the image of Christ. But when he uses image to speak of Jesus, he means this, that Jesus is alone the perfect representation of God, that Jesus alone is the one who makes the invisible God visible.

You remember John's Gospel? No one has ever seen God. The only Son who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known. And if there's any doubt, just look down at verse 19.

For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. All the goodness, all the power, all the wisdom and righteousness and blessing that is God's, dwells now permanently in Jesus Christ.

So if you want to know God, you must know Jesus Christ. If you want to know salvation that God offers, you must find it in Jesus Christ. Apart from Christ, we have nothing.

And that is why the life and ministry of Jesus is the perfect manifestation of God. When he enters the world as a human baby, the angels of heaven couldn't contain themselves.

[7 : 36] And so the greatest choral concert of all history is given to a most unexpected and unappreciating audience. And throughout his ministry, every word, every deed that Jesus performs, makes the God of the Bible visible to us.

He casts out demons and sits down and blesses children. He forgives sins with all the authority of God and he washes dirty feet.

He eats with sinners and he welcomes their worship. He searches for the lost and then is transfigured in blazing glory, the glory of God.

He claims that all the Old Testament bears witness to him. And then he gives his life to death on the cross. And time after time after time in his ministry, Jesus makes clear that God the Father and he are one.

Listen to these words from Matthew. Jesus says, All things have been delivered to me by the Father. No one knows the Son except the Father.

[8 : 40] And no one knows the Father except the Son. And anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him. And do you know what the next words are? Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden.

Read through John's Gospel, you will know. Jesus expected people to understand that if they had seen him, they had seen God the Father. You remember Philip says to him, Lord, show us the Father and we'll be satisfied.

And Jesus said to him, have I been with you so long and yet you do not know me, Philip? He who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, show us the Father?

And what the Apostle Paul is saying here in Colossians is that there is nothing in the Godhead that is not in Jesus Christ. God has no more of himself to give us than he has given us in Jesus Christ.

To be sure, we will never begin to exhaust the depths of the riches of Jesus. But if we want all the fullness of God, it is to Christ where we must go. For he is the place where God's glory dwells in all its perfection.

[9 : 51] So in relation to God, Jesus is the Son who reveals. Secondly, in relation to creation, Jesus is the Sovereign who rules. Verses 16 and 17 are probably the clearest statement in all the scripture of Jesus' relation with creation.

But before he gets there, the Apostle says this, He is the firstborn of all creation, which has caused considerable difficulties in the history of the church.

In the 4th century, it led to a famous heresy called the Arian heresy, which denied that Jesus was eternal, that said that Jesus had a beginning of existence, and therefore there is no such thing as the Trinity.

And Arianism has been around ever since the 4th century. The most well-known group today are the Jehovah's Witnesses. But there are two problems with the Arian view. The first is that whenever the word firstborn is used in the Greek Old Testament, it doesn't mean first in birth order, but it means the one who is given the highest place.

In Psalm 89, God says that he's going to make the Messiah, his firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth. It has to do with supremacy, not birth order. The second problem with the Arian view is that the context completely removes the possibility that Jesus was created.

[11 : 12] Look at verse 16, please. For in him all things were created, in heaven, on earth, visible, invisible, thrones, dominions, principalities, authorities.

All things were created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. You couldn't get it much clearer, could you?

There are two kinds of things that exist. Everything that has been created, and the other kind of thing is God who created them. And what Paul is saying is that Jesus is not in this category, he's in this category.

All things were created in him, through him. No exceptions. Nothing exists that was made apart from Jesus Christ. And not only is he the agent of creation, but in him all things hold together. He is the bond which holds things together. The unifying principle of life is not a philosophy, or a mathematical equation, or a unified field theory, or Stephen Hawkins.

[12 : 18] It's Jesus Christ. Without his continual sustaining of our world, if Jesus were to stop thinking about us for a moment, we would disintegrate and cease to exist.

Not only is he the source of creation, not only is he the centre and sustainer of creation, but he is also the goal. All things were created for him. Everything in this world, every single person in this world, is created for him.

And we move towards our true purpose, and we move towards our true end, when we move towards Jesus Christ. That's why it's so tragic, that so many people spend so much time in their lives, without a clear knowledge of him.

There is no true spiritual end, apart from Jesus Christ. And what is remarkable, is that the man that the Apostle Paul is speaking about, was crucified on a Roman cross, less than three decades earlier.

This is how the early Christians confessed Jesus Christ, right from the start. And in some ways, we shouldn't be surprised, should we? This is one of the things, when people begin to read the Gospels for the first time, they see that in his earthly ministry, Jesus demonstrated this sovereign lordship over creation.

[13 : 35] He heals the sick, the blind, the deaf, the lame. He commands the wind and the waves, as we've read this morning, to obey, and they do. He takes five loaves and two fish, breaks it up, feeds 5,000 people, with 12 baskets left over.

And several times in the Gospels, we see him raising the dead, with just a word. In relation to God, Jesus is the son who reveals. In relation to creation, Jesus is the sovereign who rules.

And thirdly and quickly, in relation to us, Jesus is the saviour who reconciles. Look at verse 18, please. We read, 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. The church is made up of those who share the risen life of Jesus.

That's what it means to be a Christian. And the risen life comes as we bow before Jesus as the head of the church. That is why, in the church, it is Christ and his word alone who governs.

[14 : 50] It's not the Pope, it's not the bishop, it's not the priest, not the clergy, not the church committee, not the congregation. It's Christ and his word. And that is why any genuine unity in this body of Christ cannot be denominational or ecclesiastical or structural or synodical.

But our unity can only come as we together draw close in living contact with the person of Jesus Christ. He is the source and continuance of our life.

And that's why it is vital that he be preeminent in all that we do. The sad possibility is that you can run a church and lose touch with Christ the head.

That's the reason this letter of Colossians was written. And when a church takes its heart and mind off Jesus Christ and his words, something else will always fill the vacuum and Christ will no longer be preeminent.

And I wonder what it is at St. John's that will make us lose contact with Christ the head. You want to know what keeps me awake at night? I don't think it will be some gross heresy or some gross immorality.

[15 : 59] I don't think it will be anything terribly obvious at first. I think it will come almost imperceptibly in our attitudes to God's word where it's easier in our Bible study groups to spend time talking about other things and to ignore God's word.

Or in our prayers where we feel we don't really need to depend on God and gather with others to pray. or in our relations with one another where we love but we limit our love to what will not inconvenience us too much.

And here is what the Apostle wants us to remember. We cannot really be joined closely to the person of God otherwise than through Jesus Christ. That's the point of verse 20.

Through him to reconcile to himself all things whether on earth or in heaven making peace by his blood of the cross. Paul says the wrath of God we so richly deserved has been turned away by the blood of the cross and all who've turned to the person of Jesus Christ in faith are now reconciled and at peace with him.

Doesn't mean that everyone will be saved. Paul is no universalist. In fact if you read to chapter 3 the Apostle warns of the reality of the coming wrath of God. Now what Paul is saying here is that all who receive the reconciliation offered by God will be saved through the blood of Jesus.

[17 : 26] That Christ alone is the author of our salvation and reconciliation. No one else was crucified for us. No one else can reconcile us to God. Jesus is the Saviour who reconciles.

This is a terribly important word for us to hear today isn't it? This week I read of an Episcopal congregation in Washington. Two clergy have taken two years using market research and focus groups.

They've been given \$95,000 from various bishops in the Episcopal Church and a year ago they began an experimental service and the core of the service is this they deliberately de-emphasize Jesus Christ.

And I quote one of the clergy saying the sad fact is the name of Jesus has become for many people exclusionary. So during the service you'll hear the writings of Saint Benedict Zen master I'm not sure how to pronounce this Thick Nut Hun as well as music from Willie Nelson.

And after a year of this experimental service they've grown to the grand number of 24 people. having church without Jesus kind of defeats the purpose.

[18 : 47] I think that's what Paul would want to say to us. And it's just not possible to reduce Jesus to be one of a line of mystics and prophets as Islam and Hinduism teach.

It's just not possible to fit Jesus into polite conversation. The issue is not fitting Jesus in with us but whether we fit in with him. And I think we begin to do that as we take these three truths from this passage and feed on them.

In relation to God Jesus is the Son who reveals. Our relation with him grows as we see and continue to see the matchless preeminence of Jesus Christ.

It is God's desire that you and I and all his people be Christ focused. It's not enough for us to be God centered. We must be Christ centered people.

It's not enough for us to say I believe in God. The question is whether Jesus Christ is preeminent. That is God's desire for us. That our hearts would be inflamed with love for his Son.

[19 : 54] That we would be able to see the face of God in Jesus Christ. Second, in relation to creation, Jesus the sovereign who rules. It means that Jesus binds all things together, both visible and invisible.

They both come from him. They both belong to him. He is their rightful Lord. All time past, all time future is in his hands. He is the center of life.

He is the center of time and space and eternity. They all belong to the one who lived and died for us. He is the meaning and goal of all life.

Everything living finds its identity in him. I wonder if you think this way. I wonder if you think about yourself as being made for Jesus Christ.

Do you think about your family and friends and children made for him? In your decisions and resources, that they are made for him? Thirdly and finally, in relation to us, Jesus is the Savior who reconciles.

[21 : 04] I think the question for us is this, do you think that this Jesus Christ is adequate for your life and for my life, for this congregation and his church and to bring us to glory?

Can we trust him with our lives and our goals and our children? Is he sufficient to meet our needs? For me, the key to this passage is that little phrase at the end of verse 18, that in everything he might be preeminent, and he must be, and he will be, and he shall be.

Amen.