

Introduction to Knowing Christianity - Jesus in Creation

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[0 : 00] and sing, and then we'll come to the message as such. If you'd like to turn at the very beginning of your Bible, not the index page, but Genesis chapter 1, which is the first book there, I'm going to read to you just the first few verses, or a couple of verses really, then we're going to turn to Colossians. So now hear God's Word, which says, in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters. Now we'll read on a bit, actually, because it'll make more sense when we get to Colossians. And God said, let there be light, and there was light. And God saw that the light was good, and God separated the light from the darkness. God called the light day, and the darkness he called night. And there was evening, and there was morning, the first day. Well, of course, each day continues that until the seventh, which was a day of rest.

But if you'd like to turn to Colossians, which is Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, Acts and Romans follow on, 1 and 2 Corinthians, and then your vowels, A, E, I, O. There's no U in Thessalonians, but we'll make that up as we go along. So Colossians is the O because it contains two O's. In verse 15, Colossians chapter 1, verse 15, and through to 23, we read this.

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 of the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, and 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. Well, may God bless the reading of his word to us, his word in particular to us.

[3 : 27] And we'll come back to that after we have sung this next hymn. So what you're about to hear this morning is not actually a message as such.

David Gibb once offered me a job, and I used to, David Gibb's an Anglican minister down south, and used to go to the same word ministry group as him.

And, you know, the standard rule was that if you spent less than 15 hours on studying for one message, you were sacked. And that was the standard. And all those in the word ministry group adhered to that standard, or you couldn't be in the group. It was a general rule.

What I'm about to bring before you this morning is something that I've been working on for the last several months. But just to give you a bit of a backdrop to it, that years ago, we did a book called Encounters, even before I got here, which was explaining the Christian faith.

And then a few years after that, I wrote a study guide called Gospel Encounters, which a few of the people in the church did with a few other people.

[4 : 45] And we tried to roll it out, and it actually rolled out pretty well, even though there were several mistakes in the books themselves. And rather than redoing them, I guess perhaps over the years of studying more and looking at the world in which we live in a slightly different way than I did before, that I began to realize that starting with Jesus, when proclaiming the gospel, is not actually the best place to start.

Because I've had several conversations with people who wouldn't even know who Adam and Eve is, was, that God created the world.

And I began to realize that the starting point for a conversation about Jesus mustn't begin with Jesus, other than what it says in Colossians, that he is the creator of all things in him and through him, and everything was created for him.

So this morning is sort of an introduction to a course that I'm going to be running. It's not going to be a book course. It might eventually get to that after Easter, that you can bring people to in the church.

It'll be five evenings or five afternoons or five mornings, whatever we can get a group together of people to hear the gospel.

[6 : 07] The five, this is still in note form. Okay, so please bear with me this morning. It's not an excuse. But the five sort of evangelists, if you'd like to put it that way, is Jesus in creation, Jesus in the fall, Jesus and forgiveness, namely the cross, Jesus in the Christian, and Jesus in the church.

This is my fear, and it's been a fear for a long time, that the message of salvation has become lost from the message of Christianity.

That there has become a divide, I truly believe, in between people proclaiming a message of salvation and the rest of Christianity. In other words, there's a salvation that is going around that doesn't even include the church or the Christian life.

And that's a deep concern to me. So I thought, well, let's address the issues by doing five studies, starting at creation, then moving to sin, moving to forgiveness, then on to the Christian life, and then on to the church.

Because God, in Colossians 1, as we see, made Christ not only the creator of all things, but head of the church. In other words, Christianity has to be understood in the context of the church, and not just in the context of your personal salvation.

[7 : 36] And so this really is my notes that I do before I type anything up. And we're going to go through them, and I'm going to go through them as best I can this morning to show you what I'm thinking, and what I think you should be thinking, or encouraged to think about, and then maybe invite someone along to knowing Christianity.

Five weeks on the subject of salvation. We get to salvation, but this is where we start. And the place that I think we should start in is our need of God apart from salvation.

Okay? Our need of God apart from salvation. Our need of God's sustaining grace apart from salvation. Let's not even get to salvation as yet.

And that will be the introduction to knowing God and knowing the Christian faith. And so there are two things in particular that must be considered. Firstly, that we do have a need of God apart from salvation.

We have a big need of God apart from salvation. But then secondly, we have a great need of God in salvation. But one leads to the other.

[8 : 55] And the point here is to recognize that we need God's existence. God's existence is necessary. God's existence is vital for our existence.

We are only a human being because God has made us such. So even before we get to salvation, like you have in Genesis, even before there is sin or anyone needing to be saved, you have God and you have people in a wonderful environment.

And their need of God is evident. It's clear. They have a need of God apart from salvation because the sin and fall hasn't happened yet. And sometimes even Christians can forget that.

That we reduce God down simply to our need of salvation. But that's not a good reduction because we end up leaving God out of a lot.

So even before we get to salvation, we live in a world where we need God. We need God's involvement apart from salvation.

[10 : 09] And the reason for beginning with creation is twofold. Namely, firstly, we need to understand who the creator of the world is, why things exist, and why they are sustained by God.

But more importantly, the moment you begin to appreciate and understand that God is the creator of everything, then you have to conclude that God is therefore the God of everything. Okay?

If God made everything, then God is the God of everything. And that there is just a simple conclusion that anybody could get to if they read the first few verses of Genesis.

And that if God has created everything, then God is the God of everything that he has created. And so this morning, I want you to consider, if you can, briefly, your need of God apart from salvation. Okay? You clearly need God for salvation, but just as an exercise, I want you to think of your need of God apart from salvation.

[11 : 13] And the best way to do this is to go back to the original creation before the fall happened, and you begin to realize you have two people in a wonderful environment that don't need God to save them.

But they do need God. They don't need Jesus to die on the cross to save them from their sin, but they do need God. They don't need a message of salvation.

They don't need to hear the gospel, but they do need God. And when the fall does happen, and people do sin, it is true that they need God in a whole new way.

It is true that they need God for salvation, but that doesn't rule out of all the things that they needed God before that. And so the challenge here is not to reduce the message simply down to salvation. Not to reduce God simply down to the person who can save us from our sin as if that is all that he is good for. When what the Bible is proclaiming is God is necessary for all of life, the whole of life, all the time.

[12 : 22] And that's the thing that we need to consider this morning. Our need of God apart from salvation. Just consider that just for a moment.

Another way of looking at this is we need God and his benefits. We need God and his benefits. Now, the truth is is that all of this was ruined by sin. The first man and woman took us with them into sin, took us into the fall, and then all of a sudden we need God in a brand new way.

We need God to save us from our sin. But the issue here is that even once God has saved us from our sin in Christ Jesus, we still need God in lots of other ways that I think needs to be recognized so that you can give him thanks, so that you can give him glory.

And so just for a moment, just as an exercise, think about your need of God apart from salvation.

And here's why. Because we do have at least one chapter or a chapter and a half, possibly two chapters, in the whole of the Bible at the beginning where there is no sin and God is present with his people.

[13 : 40] And at the end of the Bible, in the new heavens and the new earth, there will be no sin, no pain, no sorrow, and we will still need God then. But most of the Bible is taken up, of course, with God restoring what was lost.

God taking us back to the perfection that was lost at creation and through the fall. And the reason why this is important is because I think that most people, when they try to identify the problem, the one problem they never seem to identify is what the real problem is.

And what this leads to is people make rash judgments in the world as to what is the source of all the trouble. And when life gets complicated, you ever had an argument where life gets so complicated, where the argument becomes so complicated, you actually have forgotten the cause for the argument in the first place.

You forgot what started this argument. It was this, no, you said something even before that. And so as people look at the world, they will go, religion's the problem.

God causes war. This is the problem. That's the problem. The trouble is, is they are problems, but they're not the source of those problems. There's a problem that precedes all of those other issues.

[15 : 02] And that problem is sin. And so we live in a world where life is complicated and where people can identify the real problem. They can't track back and get to sin.

They have to be told that that's the issue, that that's the thing that's gone wrong. So for us, we want to think just for a moment of our need of God apart from salvation.

So I'm going to ask you a question. You don't have to answer. It's not meant to be answered as such this morning. But the question is this. What do you think your need of God is after you are saved?

What do you think your need of God is after you are saved and you live in the new heavens and the new earth? Where there's no pain, no sorrow, okay, you have everything at your disposal.

What do you think your need of God is in a place like that? And if you're unable to come up with the answer, then that shows partly the problem, that we don't recognize how much we need God apart from salvation.

[16:10] That suddenly we have been conditioned to think of our need of God solely in terms of salvation. What about Jesus? What do you think your need of Jesus is after you have been saved and you're in the new heavens and the new earth?

And you're led by the hand down by the crystal fountain. What do you think your need of Jesus is in that moment? Well, if you're struggling again to find the answer, then what's happened is that your thinking has been reduced to salvation only.

And you don't necessarily know what your need of God is apart from salvation. And I think it's crucial to understand that even in a world where there is no sin and no trouble, just like at the beginning, and just like it'll be at the end, our need of God is still great.

Our need of God and all his benefits is huge. And that is something that we shouldn't forget. There is a theological term for this and it's called providence, but I'm going to change it and call it this.

That all that means is this, that God continually cares for his creation. The reason we need God to continually care for his creation is because without his continual care, his creation cannot exist.

[17:36] We read in Colossians that Christ Jesus holds all things together in verse 17, if you read it just with me, which says this, and he is before all things and in him all things hold together.

Christ holds this together. He holds what I'm standing on together. He holds my life together. He holds you together and the chair that you sit on together.

Everything that exists is sustained and held together by the Lord Jesus Christ. apart from salvation, apart from salvation, Christ holds everything together.

God continually cares for his creation and his creation experiences his continuous care whether they realize it or not. You know, the average guy out on the street who has no idea about Jesus is continually being held together by the Lord Jesus Christ that he knows nothing about.

That as he goes down to Asda or to Tesco's and he buys the loaf of bread off the shelf, if there is any, or milk out the freezer, again, if there is any, the issue that you have is that, you know, his understanding might just stop at, well, it might go as far as the farmer, it might go as far as the guy that sowed the seed in the field, but it doesn't often get all the way back to God where it should get back to.

[19:11] And yet, God is the God of milk. God is the God of blessing. God is the God of bread. Okay? These things exist because God exists. We need God apart from salvation.

Everything is held together by God. Everything is held together by God. So even before we get to salvation, which is clearly the pinnacle of God's accomplishment, we still need God for an awful lot.

One of the interesting things if you read the Genesis account is that it's clearly the case that we need God for food. It's clearly the case that we need God for water.

It's clearly the case that we also need God for rest. But we also need God for work. You know, God created us to work. And we need God to work.

God holds all things together. So again, we return to our basic point that even before we have a need of God for salvation, which we clearly do have, we need God for an awful lot.

[20:24] We need God for everything. Here's another reason. Purpose. If we're truly going to understand our need of God apart from salvation, we need to understand what we are for.

In other words, what is your life for? What are you made for? Why did God make you? Why did God create you the way that He did?

Why are you the person that you are? Well, that's a wrong way of putting it because the person that you are may not necessarily be the person that God created you. and there's a difference in psyche there, not a difference in your physical makeup.

But generally, what is your purpose? Well, some people believe, and I truly understand this, that human beings have no purpose, that human beings are simply a product of chance.

You know, a few germs swimming around in a pond suddenly growing into what we have today. that there is nothing but pure chance, that that's all that we are.

[21:35] But the trouble with that, I think, is this, that all that they're saying is this, that life is meaningless. In other words, if everything is a product of chance, then everything's not a product of meaning.

And therefore, they're not willing to admit that their life is meaningless. You may get a few people who would, but what you end up with, with people who will not want to admit that their life is meaningless, is they have to invent their meaning.

Now, the trouble with inventing meaning, the trouble with inventing purpose, is it leads to abuse very, very quickly. If people do not understand what they are for, then they will not use their life for the purpose that it was given.

But not only that, they will not use other people's lives for the purpose that they were made. Okay, the moment you forget the purpose for why God created us the way that he did, or you don't know the purpose behind why God created people the way that he did, or if you truly believe that life is meaningless, that you're just a product of chance, and you have to make up your own meaning and your own purposes, it leads to abuse.

Think of the prostitute on the street. Is she fulfilling her purpose? Not for a moment. Think of people sold as sex slaves on the increase in Europe in particular.

[22 : 59] Do you think that's meaningful, or do you think that is the abuse of somebody else's life? What about child labor to the extreme?

It seems fairly obvious to me that if you've got a group of people in the world who believe that life doesn't contain any one real purpose, and that life ultimately is a product of chance and therefore meaningless, then it's perfectly right to arrive at abuse, because that can't be wrong, right?

It can only be wrong if there is a right way of life. It can only be a sin if there is such a thing as a righteous life and a righteous way to live life.

life. So without God, and without God creating the world, then your life means nothing. But that just isn't the case, is it?

You are who you are because God has made you to be a particular type of person, a person that loves God and loves each other, a person that will fulfill their purpose and help other people around them to fill the purpose that God has given them.

[24 : 23] In other words, the reason we treat everybody in the same way is because God is the creator of all and we're all responsible to the same God and therefore none of us can be ever any better than anybody else in our bare physical form because God created us.

What we believe, however, really matters. Because our life will be directed by what we believe and that is a challenge.

So the world needs God's sustaining grace. The world needs God and his benefits apart from salvation. Even before you get to the need of God saving us, you still have a great need to understand your great need of God.

Because without it, no one will ever fulfill the purpose for which they are created. To put this another way, God has his very own good reasons for making you that are all of his own.

Even before you get to your purposes, God has his very own purpose for your life. You matter to God in a whole way that you perhaps don't even yet understand.

[25 : 44] So your need for God, even before you get to salvation, is great. But when we get to salvation and we see the life of Jesus and the death of Jesus and the resurrection of Jesus, all of this which follows the accomplishment, every blessing that follows, what you're actually seeing is God not abandoning his purposes.

purposes. When you see God give his son into the world to seek and to save you and to die on the cross for your sin, what you are actually seeing is God not abandoning his purposes for the reason that he created you.

He doesn't wipe you away. It's just that now the ante's upped. Now the cost of redemption is far greater than the initial sustaining.

Now it's going to cost his son's life to take you back to being the completed person that you were before sin entered into the world.

When you look at Jesus, you simply see the extent by which God goes to to make sure his creation is what it is meant to be.

[27 : 01] And the striking thing about this is clearly the case that God is in need of nothing. In other words, God doesn't need you to be holy. He doesn't need you to be perfect.

He doesn't need you at all. He doesn't need me. He doesn't need any one of us. And so the only reason that God invests himself in us in the way that he does is because he doesn't abandon his own purposes.

And one of those purposes is that you are meant to be as he made you. He doesn't abandon his love for you. And so the reason we receive all of his benefits and all of his blessings is simply because God does not abandon his own purposes.

We are blessed because God is faithful. Okay? We are blessed because God is faithful. And so maybe once the person has understood all of this, their need of God apart from salvation, salvation, they can then get to understand and appreciate the lengths that God went to in sending his son. Okay? Once we understand our need of God apart from salvation and the purposes that he has in creating us as his people, then maybe then we can get to appreciate the cost of sending his son. [28 : 31] God does not abandon his faithfulness. God does not abandon the purpose for which he created you. To put this another way, God's common grace in giving you food and water and a place of rest and a place of work leads to his special grace, the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Have you ever thought about that? Have you ever thought that the only reason God sustains every life on earth is so that they can actually get to hear the gospel? gospel, what other reason could there be?

Okay, what other reason could there be? Is not hearing the gospel the most important message that a person trapped in sin and bondage could ever hear?

Isn't God fulfilling his purposes by giving us Jesus? So our need of God, his sustaining grace and all his benefits and his continual care, teaches us this, that we have other needs than just salvation.

We do need salvation, but as people, we also have a whole load of other needs that only God can fulfill. I'll leave it there.

[29 : 51] Thank you. Let's stand together as we maintain.

Thank you.