Lord of all, all the time

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[0:00] has a depressed heart and a depressed mind. He is a down man, somewhat confused. You know, he's not had the best of friends giving him the best of advice, and his complaint has gone up towards God. He hasn't sinned, we know that, and now God answers him, and he says to Job, can you draw out, this is verses 1 to 6 of chapter 41, can you draw out the leviathan with a fish hook, or press down his tongue with a cord, can you put a rope on its nose and pierce his jaw with a hook, will he make many pleas to you, will he speak to you, soft words, will he make a covenant with you and take him for your servant forever, will you play with him as with a bird, or will you put him on a leash for your girls, will traders bargain over him, will they divide him up among the merchants, can you fill his skin with harpoons, or his head with fishing spears, lay your hands on him, remember the battle, you will not do it again. And this is God's very gentle way of turning us to the rest of creation, and God saying, look at my power over all of it, look what I can do, and what you can't.

You know, can you take over, the leviathan, by the way, is a dragon-like creature, very similar to those Komodo dragons that live in Japan now. It could have been a lot bigger, but the point is, is look at what God can do, look at what God can do.
Well, let us pray. Father God, we would ask that our attention be drawn to what you pay attention to, that Father God, we see a tiny part of the world, you see everything in it, that Father God, we try and have a limited amount of control over what we can, but Father, you are sovereign over all. And we come to you this morning recognizing that you are the only one who can create change, you're the only one who can create a COVID-19 vaccine. If the world is going to be filled with it, then you're going to have to fill it. And Father, we come to you this morning that you would continue to work in your world as you have done and said in your word. We would ask, Father God, this morning that as we sit here in your world, in what is a strange time, that we would recognize that you're still sovereign over all. And the moment we think, why isn't this done, or why doesn't that happen? We are reminded of these words in Job, of all the things that we cannot do, and how dependent we are on you for doing them. So we look to you, Father God, for the future of this nation, for indeed the future of all nations and all people. And we would ask, Father God, that you fill the world with your goodness, that people would know and proclaim your name. So Father, we ask this morning, for the world, your world, that you created by your word, that it would receive your blessing at this time. In Jesus' name, amen.
Amen. We're going to come back to this. So Colossians chapter 1, verse 15, and through the two sections up to verse 23, now hear God's word. 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. [4:28] 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 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 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 his word to us this morning. And as you have made your way to

Colossians, maybe you have read ahead, or perhaps this particular part is the part that you know the most because it's one of those parts of scriptures that are quoted quite frequently, but often it's quoted without the words that go either side them. And the reason why this is necessary, to

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understand the words that Paul has said, says leading up to this, and this section afterwards, the preeminence of Christ where he talks about our pre-conversion status and how it was changed through Christ's death, is because the bit in the middle about everything being created through Christ and for Christ, and in him all things hold together, make a difference, a big difference to those surrounding words. And so we need all of these words to be able to fully appreciate, and just how exciting these few words are on the preeminence of Christ. Paul is bringing us into a sense of completeness, especially when many believers don't feel complete. We feel that we're lacking, and in many ways we are lacking. We're not in our final glorious state. But in Christ, you cannot be any more perfect in the eyes of God than what you are right now. That's just a truth. It doesn't feel like that down here, because we live in this sort of overlap of the old world and the new world, the old life and the new life. We've all seen those Venn diagrams where you have two circles, and you bring them slowly together.

Well, imagine one circle is the old world, the old you, the old self, the flesh, and the other circle is the new world, the new heavens and the new earth, and everything that is in Christ, and the new you, the Christian. You bring them together, and as the circles overlap, there's this sort of shape in the middle. It's not quite like an egg, because it's slightly more pointed at either end, and that's where you live. You live in this sort of tension period between the old and the new, and that's why you can enjoy many good things, but at the same time feel the many struggles that still exist from that old realm.

That's the tension that Christians live within. And it'll take time, of course it'll take Christ to return, before that goes, and we're just in that glorious state. But what Colossians is teaching us, or rather what Paul is teaching us here in this part of Colossians, is that that is coming. Jesus is Lord over everything, and that's going to make a big difference if you understand it. It's already made a big difference in the world. It's already true. But the difference that it makes in you actually comes down to what difference it makes for you as you live in the world. In other words, how does this change my attitude to the world that I live in? Now that I know that all authority belongs to Jesus, now that I know that he is the preeminent one, now that I know that through his death and resurrection all things are going to be reconciled in, how am I to engage in the world? Because it clearly must make a difference what I do in the world now that I know this, than what I do in the world before I know this. And so one of the questions that we ask ourselves is, why is Paul telling us this now? And if you were to read books on Colossians that other people have written, and there's some great people that have written great books on Colossians, you would have to read a lot. But if you like reading, that's not a problem.

But one of the things that they all stumble over is, why is Paul saying these verses, 15 through to 20 in particular, at this point? Why doesn't he say it in chapter 4, or chapter 3, or chapter 2? Why this? Why now? And that's a good question. They are good questions. And the reason they're good questions is because they have good answers as well. And the answers are there in the words leading up to this section, and then the words that follow out from this section to verse 23. Paul begins his letter, as you know, with the words of grace, peace, and faith, and hope. And these words have meaning, and you're meant to understand their meaning. That grace and peace are words of reconciliation, that faith and hope are words of God's gift to you. They're not just a greeting, but they are the gifts that God gives you to enable you to now live as a Christian in this world. Remember, we do not want to be a people like Leonardo da Vinci's sketchbook that can come up with tremendous ideas of helicopters and lawnmowers and blenders and the like, and have to wait 400 years before any of it can be made.

[10:55] That's not the way God works. God tells us what's possible and then enables that possibility in us by giving us grace and peace and faith and hope. And one of the reasons for that is because God's people are to be a productive people. We're to bear fruit. We're to do good works. But the focus is never on the good works. The focus is on the production of what those good works produce. And we'll get to that in a moment. The key section here, of course, is that everything is created through Christ and for Christ. Everything is for him. Everything is for him. The whole world is for him. And in him, all of these things are held together. So the world is held together. It spins multiple thousand miles per hour. And you never feel dizzy. Well, at least just by standing still in the world, you never feel dizzy unless you suffer with vertigo at a height. But let's just not overcomplicate it with 101 exceptions. Okay? Because if everything's an exception, then nothing is a rule. Okay? There is rules.

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And so you can stand on a world spinning it a quadrillion thousand miles per hour and not feel dizzy because Jesus Christ is holding it all together. That's amazing. You ought to be amazed at that. That you feel warm in the summer, maybe not here, but you can feel warm in the summer and cold in the winter because Jesus is holding it all together. Plants grow because Jesus is holding it all together.
Trees bear fruit because Jesus is holding it all together. Artists have something to paint because Jesus holds the mountains and the sea and the stars where they are.
That's amazing. And that's what these verses, at least that's what these verses lead to. If you start thinking about what this means, you can't help but think about the artistry put into God's creation. [13:04] Not just the mechanics, you know. Boys perhaps like taking things apart and breaking them. They also like drawing things. And girls perhaps understand beauty in a different way than boys do. But the point is, is that in this world, there's not just mechanics, there is artistry, there is beauty, and things work.

You know, water flows downhill. And you've never stopped to consider why other than say, well, because that's the way it works. That's gravity. No, that's not why it happens. Water flows downhill because God made it to. Gravity is just the means by which that that happens. And we know that from pictures in the Old Testament when God sent bread from heaven, he's just reminding his people, don't get used to the fact that you think it comes out of the ground. It comes from me. All this time, it's easy to forget me when you think that bread comes out of the ground. So I'll send it a different way to remind you it comes from me, not from the ground. And that's the beauty of what it means for Jesus to be Lord over all creation. That's what this means. There is beauty. There is mechanics for those who like breaking things and taking things apart. And, oh, let's break this rock and see if we can make a mobile phone out of it. Because that's essentially what's happened, right? Rocks get broken, metal comes out, and suddenly thinks, hey, we can make a computer with this. Now, that takes hundreds of years, but that's what it leads to. Everything is created through him and for him. And Paul wants us to appreciate that beauty. That's what we're appreciating, just exactly what God has created.
But he begins with Jesus. Our focus here is, of course, on the preeminence of Christ, that he is the image of the invisible God, an image, might I add, that we've not seen either. I love it when Hebrew says that Jesus is the image of the invisible God, you know, and well, that's great for people who saw him, not so great for us who haven't seen him. So he is the image of the invisible God that we have not seen. But we don't have to see in the physical sense to get this idea of who God is. We understand through the words spoken, through the actions taken and made by him. Everything is created through him and for him. He is the firstborn from the dead, which is another way of saying it, through his death and resurrection, he is the rightful ruler of everything. That's what it means, that he has the right to rule. There's no one who can question his reign over anybody. Now, when we understand that
Jesus is Lord over all, and then we begin to understand that in Jesus, the fullness of God is pleased to dwell, we now get to understand what Paul is saying, especially in the context of false teachers. Because the false teachers of the day are saying, no, there is a fullness yet to be experienced after you're a Christian. No, no, no, Paul says. The fullness of God was pleased to dwell only in one place, in the person of Christ Jesus. And those who belong to Christ Jesus will enjoy that fullness in him by virtue of belonging to him. What does that mean? Well, one of the things it means is don't look anywhere else. Don't go to other things in order to be filled. Now, of course, you know, when we speak about marriage and children, we speak about the importance of filling empty tanks, and how tanks can go into debt. You know, if you, every, every argument is a deduction. Now, if you have, if your wife's tank is on 100%, and the husband's tank's on 100%, and you do something that's not nice, and that makes a 30% deduction, well, you're still in credit. But if you make a 30%, if you make a 30 credit deduction of sin, when their tank is only at 10, then they're now 20% in the negative. They're now down. The same with children. You have to, in order to, because we're sinful people who can sin against people, we constantly have to make sure we enjoy the fullness of Christ. And that needs to be promoted not only in us, but in each other, because through sin, we make deductions out of each other.
And now those deductions can be coped with when you're full. But when you get down into the negatives, well, that's difficult, because then you go from being able to take it to the point now where it's doing harm. What does the fullness of Christ mean? It means that you don't go anywhere

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else other than Christ to be full. So in the same way, of course, husbands can fill wives, wives can fill husbands, children are to be filled by their parents. But all of us are to be, all of us are to experience the fullness of Christ. That's the fullness that we need, because we live in a world full of deductions. And Paul is tackling the false teachers just by stating what is true. Don't go anywhere else other than to Christ Jesus. The importance of the fullness of Christ in the whole of creation belonging to him is not just to deal with false teachers and remind them that they're not to dilly-dally in the world, but stick with Christ.
[18:49] But he's also making connections between the victory and the glory, the victory of the cross, his death and resurrection, and the preeminence of Christ, that everything belongs to him. He wants us to see the connection between what difference this makes to you as you live in the world, what difference it's going to make to faith, very foundation of your faith, what difference it will make to the good works you do. Remember, we're to be productive, not just serve in good works. How this new knowledge of the fullness of Christ and his lordship overall all the time changes everything.

Paul is making connections. And the connections is simply to draw us to one conclusion, that Jesus Christ is the governor, governor of all reality. He is the governing reality. We know what is real by looking at Jesus and the world through God's eyes, his lens. No one can turn their back on God and remain and hold on to a firm commitment to the truth. It's just not possible. It's just not possible to be firmly committed to the truth and not belong to God. And I don't think you need a Bible verse to convince you of that, but I'll give you one anyway. Jesus said, I am the way, the truth, and the life. That's pretty convincing, isn't it? That if we want a firm commitment on the truth, then Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. No, there is no one who can hold on to a firm commitment to truth without holding on or at least following truth. It doesn't make any sense. Well, these are some of the implications that Paul is pulling out. And of course, this is what we're meant to understand, the many implications.
And so one of them here is, of course, creation. What does it mean? What does it mean? Well, as I said, in creation, God is speaking. There's mechanics. There's artistry. There's beauty. Things work because God in Christ Jesus holds them all together. They're created through him and for him. The stars stay where they are. Mountains point upwards. Snow falls down. Water flows downhill. The tide goes in and out. Flowers bloom and then die off. The grass withers and fades. All of these things are part of God's creation, which he holds together. He pays attention to things that you never think about.
[21:24] And so when God is answering Job, as we saw, I'll give you a few more things here that God said to Job. Job has got to complain. And the way to deal with this man who's down is just to take him back to creation. Just look. God is saying when he takes Job to creation, in the same way we might be tempted to take someone to God's word to help them out. And that would be a good thing. But it's also a good thing to take them to creation. He's saying to Job, look, look at what everyone else is saying.

I understand what you're saying, Job, but look at what the rest of creation is saying. And why would God do that? Why would God take Job to the rest of creation to hear his voice?
Because all of creation is God's voice. It's all the word of God spoken out. Tap your chair. That's the word of God. Tap this. That's the word of God. This is the word of God. It's all made by the word. And what we've made out of the creation. That's the beauty that God has done. So when he sits Job down, he says, can you guide the bear with its children? Can you do that? Can you establish their role on earth? Can you send lightning and tell it where to go? Can you hunt, pray for the lion? Can you count the number of clouds? Can you hear the cry of the young ravens and feed them? Can you do that?
And we have all of these beautiful sounds in creation. I mean, I don't know if you've ever heard sort of a young raven or a young animal cry for food. It's annoying, isn't it? It's screeching and it's horrible. And God considers that them as praying. They're speaking to God. Feed us. So the things that we find annoying, God is feeding and giving and this is what God's doing with Job. They cry out and I feed them. God is incredible. I have to stop using that word. God is amazing.
[23:49] Unbelievable in the sense of, wow, this is more than my mind can handle rather than unbelievable. Didn't mean that. So God takes Job to creation. Jesus is the Lord of all creation. Everything is created through him and for him. God is taking pleasure in everything that he is creating.

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And one of the things that God is doing here, of course, is just reminding us our place within the rest of everything else that God pays attention to. It is true that we are made in the likeness of God, but it is equally true that everything is made by God.
So being spiritual, living in this world, is simply to recognize our place within the creation. It's to recognize that Jesus Christ is the only mediator, that everything is created through him and for him. To be a spiritual person is not to look to anything else or anyone else to mediate or advance or change or somehow for you to acquire the changes that you want to see. No, Jesus is Lord over everything.
It will either be filled by him, by him speaking, or it won't be. And so the fullness of Christ, the fullness of God that is pleased to dwell in Christ Jesus is what better place is there to put it, the fullness of God. And so these Christians who are tempted to sort of think, well, I'm a Christian now, but what else can I fill my life with out there? They're going out into a world where God speaks. [25:23] And if they're listening, the creation is saying, no, fullness is in Christ. Everything points us back to Christ Jesus. So to be a spiritual person simply means that you will not advance your cause or mediate change or seek to mediate change in your life through any other means other than looking to Jesus. The creator in him, all things were created and through him, in him, he holds all things together in him, through him, by him, all about Jesus.

So now he moves on, of course, to the gifts or surrounding this is, of course, the gifts. The preeminence of Christ is not a gift as such, it is a reality, but nonetheless, it does answer the question of what am I to do in the world? How am I to engage in a world that belongs to God? And he's already mentioned that we have been created for good works, you know, that by virtue of receiving grace and peace and faith and hope, we bear fruit, we grow in the knowledge of God and we be productive with good works. Now, since Paul has mentioned this, we can sort of go back into it and now think, well, what does that mean in a world where Christ is preeminent over everything? What does good works good works look like in that type of world? So God gives us gifts in order to be productive, not just to prove that we are a Christian. Something is to be produced. And in a world where Jesus is Lord over everything, we now understand that the issue is always going to be between principle and method. Let me give you a couple of examples of just how important this is to have a real engagement in the world in a way other than just speaking the gospel. There are many things in this world that are legal that Christians would not agree with. There are certain drugs that you can buy at a shops like spice that do terrible things to people and yet they're not, they've not been tackled yet as to say that they're bad. Then you have abortion, which is the legal killing of all these children. Then you have the reclassification of certain other recreational drugs. Now, in principle, every Christian would go, yeah, that's bad. That's really bad. And this is the joy of the church, that as Christians, God has given us a moral conduct and code by which we can distinguish good from evil, by which we can say those things are bad. The difficulty, however, comes with a method.
What method do we use to address it? And this, the method, some people want to tiptoe around, some people just want to go head on, and God makes us all different. Okay?
I know probably what you're thinking. Yes, sledgehammer to everything. Not everything. Okay? But if you're not getting through, then I don't mind changing the tactics. And some of us are more incrementalist, tiny steps.
But the fundamental issue here is, is do you believe that you're tiptoeing around in someone else's house on creaky floorboards in fear of waking the giants? Or do you believe that you are living and acting in a world that is God's creation, of which he is Lord over all? Now, whichever one that you line up with, that will then determine what type of things you will do in the world and what you will say and what you won't say. Those who want to climb the secular ladder will be careful of what they say because I don't want to stand on a creaky floorboard here because they'll know what I'm up to. [29:29] But if Jesus is Lord over everything, and we want to affirm that in everything we think, say, and do, then that is going to dramatically change the methods of our engagement.

Totally changed the methods of our engagement because what we're proclaiming and everything is, Jesus is Lord. You're not. So what does this mean as then we come down to good works? Well, Jesus is taught about the need to serve him and follow him. Paul has already spoken about that we have been created through grace and peace and receiving faith and hope to bear fruit, to do good works for God. So there's got to be a method to those good works. We know the principle could go and do good works. We know biblically they are to be productive. They're not just to be happening.

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They're to be productive. And the way to address that is Jesus, you'll remember, told parables about giving men talents and he comes back looking for the productive ratio. Where's the prophet? I didn't just ask you to work.
I asked you to be productive. And that's the essence of what good works are. So what do those good works look like? What do productive good works look like in a creation where Jesus is Lord over all? And then the disciples very cheatily in Luke 17, you'll remember, say, well, Lord, if you only give us more faith, we will be able to do what you ask. And Jesus gently rebukes him and says, you know, if you have faith as small as a mustard seed. In other words, he's saying this, don't you ever say that you need more faith to obey? Don't you ever say that you need more faith to obey? A subtle but firm rebuke. How does that rebuke stands? Well, it stands because Jesus is Lord over all. He fills his creation. We're to go out and do good works in the knowledge that all of this belongs to him. And we don't have to tiptoe around as if we're in someone else's backyard or someone else's house with creaky fruit. We don't need to do that. We just don't need to have that. I can remember growing up in Cornwall, there was a shared yard when I bought, it was near the business and everything, and there was a shared yard. You would come out of the property, your business property, and there was a yard. Now, okay, that belonged to everyone. But ultimately, it all belonged to the Lord. And we tend to think that, yeah, there are boundaries in this world that we have to understand that Jesus has told us to adhere to, but never ever lose the fact that it all belongs to Jesus. So here's the reminder and the exhortation.
Paul closes at least this section in verses 21 through to 23. You who were once alienated and hostile in mind doing evil deeds have been given grace, peace, faith, and hope. You've been given all of these things. He's reminding you of your pre-Christian condition and now your condition of what you are in Christ Jesus. No longer are you alienated, but you are reconciled.
No longer are you hostile in mind towards God or the things of God, but you are filled with the knowledge of his will. This is tying the two sections together. What he says leading up to verse 15 through to 20, and now what he's saying after verse 20. He's bringing these two things together. You are no longer doing evil deeds, but you have been given grace, peace, faith, hope, and love in order to produce good deeds and good work productive fruit. If indeed you continue in the faith and not shift from the hope that has been given. In other words, when you read the first 23 verses together, you begin to understand that this section on the preeminence of Christ sits firmly between grace, peace, faith, hope, good works, and the knowledge of his will. A pre-Christian understanding of yourself and a post-Christian, now that you belong to Christ. And the reason that we have this section bang in the middle on the preeminence of Christ is to remind you that you now live or you now know that you live in God's creation. You've always lived in God's creation, but now you know you live in God's creation.
[34:19] In him you live and move and have your being. That's where you are. So here's the exhortation as we close. We are called by God to never ever seek fullness anywhere else other than in Christ. We're never to look anywhere else. Being spiritual, being Christian, means that we are filled and filled only by Christ Jesus.

There is nothing else out there. And when you go out there, God speaks through his creation, sending you back to him because it's all his. And so there is fair warning here for every single Christians who wants to keep Jesus in the church, who wants to keep Jesus on the cross, who wants to keep Jesus in sort of the Bible study. No, Jesus is out there in the world. He's speaking, he's acting, he's doing, and he's calling you to come and join him in good works, bearing fruit, being filled with the knowledge of his will.
And as I said earlier, that if we want to, if the world is going to be filled with a COVID-19 vaccine, then it's going to have to be filled with that by God. God will bring that into fruition, into it being materialized in the same way he does everything else. And why? Because God creates something out of nothing. The creation is ex nihilo. You are new people in Christ Jesus. No longer an old thing, but a new creation. How did you get to be that way? God spoke to you. And that's why Paul finishes this section of which I became a minister. God speaks in the whole of creation, and now I'm a minister, and I'm called to speak. God works in this world by speaking and by people listening and hearing.
So may the Lord bless you. May the Lord keep you and apply this word to your heart. Well, as we close, we'll listen to our final song, and we'll close with the final words and exhortation.

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