

Colossians 1:15-23 // Christ is All You Need

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[0 : 00] this morning as you can see on the screen is from the first chapter of the letter to the Colossians and it's verses 15 to 23. The sun is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

For in him all things were created, things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities.

All things have been created through him and for him. 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 and the firstborn from among the dead so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on heaven or whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood shed on the cross.

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you wholly in his sight without blemish and free from accusation.

[1 : 35] If you continue in your faith established and firm and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Thank you, Derek, for reading that for us.

If you could keep your Bibles open that would be a great help. It's page 1182 in the church Bibles and you can find an outline inside the notice sheet to follow if you find that helpful.

If you look at the outline you think that's really just saying what it says. that's the idea and may help. But let's pray. Let's ask for God's help as we look at this portion of the Bible together.

We praise you, living God, the Almighty, for who you are, that you are the glorious one, holy, never changing, from everlasting to everlasting.

[2 : 42] everlasting. And we pray for your spirit to work now in us, among us, that you would open our ears to hear your voice, open our minds to understand and open our hearts to respond rightly to your Son, the Lord Jesus.

For we ask for his name's sake. Amen. When I was growing up, where I was growing up, there was no Friday Night Live, which our youth groups enjoy here on a Friday night.

And a Friday evening treat back home for me was watching the comedy Frazier. Some of you will know it well. Dr. Frazier Crane was a radio psychologist and he and his brother Niles lived in Seattle and had refined tastes.

At one episode, they received some misdirected mail, which they opened and discovered from it that there was a new exclusive spa in Seattle and they had not been invited.

It's called La Porte d'Argent. I'm sorry if you're French. I'm trying. Which means the silver door.

They eventually managed to get themselves in through the episode and when they get inside, it's everything they could have dreamed of.

[4 : 02] Rejuvenating face masks, luxurious comfort, hot tubs, steam rooms. They're perfectly content. Until they discover that inside the spa, there's a more exclusive area through a gold door.

Suddenly, they hate the silver door. All they can think about is how miserable they are and how much better it would be to get through on the inside of the gold door. And they trick their way in and they gain access and sure enough, once they get through the gold door.

For them, it's heaven on earth. Exotic foliage covers the walls. There are bubbling springs of water. The soothing sounds of marine life surround them and they lie back with cucumber slices on their eyes and their content.

Until Frazier looks up at the corner of the room and he sees another door, a platinum door. And suddenly, they're miserable again.

They've got to get through the platinum door. So they barge it open and they're covered in bright light and they think, this looks wonderful. It must be a solarium.

[5 : 13] And they push through and the door swings shut behind them and they realize that it was a fire door and the bright light is daylight and they are in the back lane next to a big garbage bin.

So often in life, we want more. We want more. And we think the answer when we want more is to move on to the next thing, especially if that thing is hidden from us, if it's more exclusive and we wonder, am I missing out?

And that can happen to us in the Christian life. Last week we started a new series in this letter, Colossians. It was written by the Apostle Paul. He's in prison for his faith and his ministry, writing to a young church, people he'd never met who've become Christians.

And we heard last week he gives them deep reassurance that the news they have heard about Jesus, the gospel, you see he defines it, he uses that word in verse 23 today, the gospel, the news about Jesus.

It's come to them and he wants them to know that the gospel they heard is the genuine article. And he said to them last week, and we heard it applied to us as well, the gospel has done so much for you.

[6 : 30] It's rescued you. It's transformed you. But now the Colossians find themselves in a dangerous position. They want the right things.

They want more of God. They want maturity. They want fullness in the Christian life. But it leaves them susceptible to being misled, led astray.

And they're hearing people say, the gospel was such a good thing for you because it got you grade one in the Christian life, Paul's gospel. But to make progress, here's what you need.

Something else. And Paul is urging them, don't buy it. Don't get scammed by pretenders who want to pull you away from the gospel about Christ by offering that you could have more of God elsewhere.

So we heard last week in verses 9 to 14, this magnificent prayer that Paul says that he's praying for the church in Colossae. And we thought about it as KFC if you were here, and hopefully if you've seen this week anywhere, the letters KFC on a sign.

[7 : 42] It reminds you to pray for yourself and for our church. The K was for knowledge. In verse 9, as Paul says that he's not stopped praying that they would be filled with a knowledge of God's plan in Christ.

Knowledge of God in Christ. The F for fortitude. From verse, we got that in verse 11, fortitude that they would be strengthened by God to keep going. The C for cheerfulness in verse 12, that they would overflow with thanksgiving and joy as they grow in Christ.

And for us today, we are surrounded by claims in our world today that in the Christian life, there is a platinum door. A new spiritual practice.

A conference you can attend. A place you can go. A course you can do. An ecstatic experience that you could ask for. Something that will give you the more of God that you've been lacking.

The fullness in the Christian life that you've always had a sense was missing. Some of us in a crowd this size will already have fallen for that. God's word here is a corrective one, but we could hear it graciously from him inviting us back with reassurance to Christ.

[8 : 58] So how is Paul going to protect us from being misled and drawn away from Christ? He gives us the verses we've come to this morning. One of the most magnificent revelations of who Jesus is that we will find in the whole of scripture.

Paul's aim for us is that we will see the greatness of Jesus so that we will know that we never need a detour. That we would be deeply impressed by him so that we are firmly attached to him.

So our first point is on the sheet. It's about who the son is. Christ is supreme over creation because he made everything. Look with me at verse 15, just the beginning of verse 15.

Paul begins, the son is the image of the invisible God. So if we want to see God, we look at Jesus. Sometimes if you go into a palace or a cathedral and it's got a magnificent ceiling, you'll find these days that there'll be these kind of stools around on wheels with a mirror on top.

I don't know if you've been somewhere like that. So that rather than having to crane your neck, you can just look at the mirror and you'll see this perfect reflection of what's above you to take it in.

[10:22] Well, when we want to see God, to know God in heaven, we can look at Jesus, his perfect image. When Philip said to Jesus, Lord, show us the Father and that will be enough for us. Jesus said, anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. Verse 15 goes on. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.

And here, the word firstborn doesn't mean that he was literally born, that he had a beginning. Jehovah's Witnesses deny the divinity of Jesus. And so they latch on to this verse.

And you might find that if you're engaging with the Jehovah's Witness, they will take you to this verse to say to you, aha, the Son was born. He had a beginning. He's the firstborn. But you only have to read the whole rest of the paragraph to see that Jesus was clearly divine.

If you were the firstborn in the ancient world, you were the heir. You stood to inherit. The word firstborn is being used in that way here to mean he has first place in God's plans.

[11:30] First place in God's plans. And Paul here is almost certainly alluding to a psalm, Psalm 89, which is about God's great king, his Messiah. It describes the Davidic king, David.

And it says in Psalm 89, my faithful love will be with him and I will appoint him to be my firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth.

So you hear there the way it's being used, the term firstborn, not to describe someone being born, but a title being conferred upon someone who already lives to be first in God's plans.

And Paul is saying here it's Jesus Christ to whom God has given that title. Then he gives us the reasons why in verses 16 and 17. First because he made everything.

Verse 16, for in him all things were created. And then notice the pairs that Paul uses to include for us everything, things in heaven. If you think about stars and galaxies and planets and the heavens above and things on earth, the oceans, the mountains, the highlands, rainforests, life.

[12:42] Then another pair, things visible, our universe, and things invisible, the spiritual universe that God reveals for us in the Bible is there, angels and demonic forces.

And he expands on that, thrones and powers and rulers and authorities, all greatness, all power in this world and in the spiritual world is all under Christ because it was all made through him.

If you can name it, Jesus made it. When his disciples were in the boat and he came to them walking on the water, when he got in the boat they worshipped him because they realised that he was displaying his mastery over the seas because he made the seas supreme.

Then we find that Jesus, he sustains all things. Verse 17, if you have a look, he is before all things and in him all things hold together.

He's before all things. It's hard to imagine, isn't it, what it was like before there was anything. If we just kind of rewind in our minds the history of our world and we go back to before humanity and before the dinosaurs and before planet Earth and before our solar system and the galaxies all getting pulled back together, back in time, back to the origins of the universe and then at some stage there was nothing.

[14:08] The sun was there, Christ was there, he's before all things. There was never a when, a time when he was not there. And in him all things hold together.

The reason the atoms that we're made up of and are all around us hold together are because he makes them hold together. The world keeps turning around because he makes it turn around.

The seasons change because he makes them change. He's the reason that your heart keeps beating and the reason you're about to take your next breath. Hopefully you're going to do that because he will make you do it.

He's sustaining you and me and all things. If he decided to stop, I don't know what would happen. I guess everything would just implode or it would just disappear because he's sustaining it all.

And then astonishingly, it's all heading into his hands. At the end of verse 16, all things have been created through him and for him.

[15:16] Everything that exists owes itself to Jesus. He's before it, he sustains it, and he collects it at the end. He can look out and scan his eyes across the galaxies and save it all.

It's mine. It belongs to me because I made it. So folks, guard yourself from ever thinking, if you want more of God, you go somewhere else.

You could not ever get more of God than this. All of God is in Christ. And maybe there's a thought here for those of you still looking in, exploring the faith, that when we look at the Gospels and we see the man Jesus, and he is a man, Jesus, is there a temptation to see him as just a man?

A man who was helped by God to do some amazing things. Paul wants to explode our minds with who the Son is, so that you wouldn't invite this man into your life because he might help you out. No, we submit to him. He is all of God. Some years ago, the preacher John Stott put it like this, we may speak, if we will, of Alexander the Great, and Charles the Great, and Napoleon the Great, but not Jesus the Great.

[16:41] He is not the Great. He is Jesus the only. There is nobody like him. He has no peers. He has no rivals. And he has no successes.

So our place is on our faces. Prostrate before him in humble adoration and praise. Then the Apostle Paul turns from who Jesus is to what Jesus has done.

Supreme over creation, and then our second point, Christ is supreme over the new creation because he reconciled everything. So we see a new section in the way it's structured because we get a repeat in verse 18 of that same word firstborn that we had in verse 15, if you see that there. And verse 18, let's pick things up there.

And he, Christ, is the head of the body, the church. Now we might find that an underwhelming next step after we've just heard about the sun.

But for Paul, this is not a climb down because the church, the community of believers in Jesus, is the future. It's the beginning of the new thing that God is doing, the new age that he is bringing.

[17:59] So he goes on, verse 18, he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead so that in everything he might have the supremacy. So when the gospel comes to town, when you hear the message about Jesus, you learn that the universe has a king, an owner.

But this universe has gone spectacularly wrong. It's fallen out of kilter. Humanity has turned from the king with calamitous results all around us.

But this king we hear of is putting everything back together again, remaking it better than before. And he has demonstrated that with his resurrection when he went through death and out the other side.

He'd raised people from death to die another day. But when he came through the grave, he lives never to die again.

The firstborn of a new creation, proving that he has first place in God's plans for the future. And then he tells us why, Paul tells us why.

[19:06] It's because he is the one who's made the future possible. In verse 19, for God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him.

Now that word fullness there is almost certainly a loaded word. It would have been the word being used by the false teachers. Do you want fullness? You find it here. Paul says, the fullness of God, all of it, God was pleased to have it dwell in the sun.

Because in God's goodness, in his mercy, his plan was for what the sun would do. That he, verse 19, would, sorry, verse 20, would reconcile all things to himself through the sun.

Verse 20, through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood shed on the cross. So there's Jesus' work, bringing everything back as it should be.

What does he mean to reconcile to himself all things? It can't mean that everyone becomes right with God and a friend of God through what Jesus did.

[20:18] Because anyone who hasn't put their faith in Jesus is still, in verse 13, in the domain of darkness. I think the best explanation is that through the cross, Jesus is bringing everything back together again under God.

And there is hostility to God, but what we'll see in a couple of weeks' time in Colossians chapter 2 is Paul explained that when Jesus died on the cross, a great cosmic victory was won so that God re-establishes his authority over all of his creation, including the evil one, Satan, so that he can subject everything again to his right authority and rule.

He brings it back under Christ. And for those who are trusting Christ, that means friendship with God, forgiveness of sins, redemption, eternal life.

But for those who continue to reject Jesus, because of the cross, ultimately, one day, every knee will bow to him.

Everyone will acknowledge that he is Lord. So Jesus is bringing everything under himself for the future. And let's notice the way he makes that possible is so astonishing, that he goes from the heights of heaven, in the beginning of verse 19, God pleased to have all this fullness dwell in him, to

complete loss of everything, at the end of verse 20, that he might make peace between God and humanity.

[21 : 51] He's so powerful, he could create all things with words, the whole universe. But he couldn't speak a word to reconcile us to God.

For that, he had to bleed out in agony, endure the horror of the cross. That was the price he had to pay to bring reconciliation, given our sin.

And he willingly paid it. Willingly. So as we share the simple gospel message, and people hear it, and they receive Jesus, and they join the church, it just seems so insignificant.

When the gospel comes to town, it gets overlooked. We get preoccupied with what the world says really matters. The US election this week.

The budget last week. And it seems such a small thing, that somewhere, Jesus will be spoken about, and heard about. But we see here that it's news that remakes the world.

[23 : 00] That the universe belongs to a magnificent king, a supreme creator, and he has conquered death. And he's now remaking heaven and earth, putting his creation back together again, so that to come to him, to join his people, is to get swept up in God's big plan, and part of the future.

So that's where the apostle Paul turns next. So the personal implications of this. We've heard Jesus is supreme over creation, that he's supreme over the new creation. Thirdly, Jesus is sufficient to save you.

Because of the cross. Look with me at verse 21. Once you were alienated from God, and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior.

But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish, and free from accusation.

You see the contrast there in the verses of what we once were. We were alienated from God, and what we now are, now fully reconciled to God.

[24 : 15] Once, our sin affected every part of us. It was our behavior, not to live in accordance with God's will, and we just didn't want God sticking his door into our lives.

We didn't want God at the steering wheel in our lives. And so, we became his enemies in our minds. We resolved to reject him. But now, verse 22, because Jesus has physically given his body, he presents you holy in the sight of God.

One day, he will bring you with him into the throne room of heaven, and God will see his wounded hands and feet, and he will count you as having no blemish.

He will say, this one is free from accusation. It's a profound promise, because there might be people you can think of in the world today who, quite rightly, could accuse you of things that are wrong, that you've done.

And maybe this morning, you yourself are your worst accuser. There might be things that you've said, or done, that you remember, and when you remember them, you deeply regret them, and you feel this visceral regret.

[25 : 33] But you can take them today to the cross, and know the promise that Jesus, he died for those things, so that God will say of you, and says today of you, no one can accuse you now to me.

For me, you are free from accusation. Jesus tells you and me this morning, I could not be any more supreme than I am.

My work at the cross could not have achieved more than it has. And you could not be any more right with God than you are. And then so crucially, verse 23, if, verse 23, these things are true of you, if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel.

And you could move from your faith by giving up on Jesus, by saying, I don't trust him. But you can also move on from your faith, you can fail to continue, by adding something to Jesus, by thinking, well, Jesus got me in, but I need something else as well as him.

Something to keep me moving on. That something else can deceive you into losing everything as you let go of full dependence on Christ.

[27 : 06] All of God is in him. Let me ask you to answer for yourself the question, what do you think it would be that would be most likely to lead you away from Christ?

Do you see how Paul wants to guard us today? The Apostle Paul. It's sometimes said like this, imagine a salesman comes to your door and he says, I've got just what will fill what you've always

been lacking in your life.

I can give you here and now from my van the entire back catalogue on CD, no less, of ABBA. And you think to yourself, you know what, I have thought for years there might be something missing in my life.

Maybe he's right. Maybe it's this. You know, Waterloo, Mamma Mia, Super Trooper. And your flatmate is behind you and they overhear the conversation and just as you're about to blow your money and invest, they say, you've got Spotify premium.

Remember, come and see, let me show you again how it works. All of ABBA is on here. In fact, anything you want is on here. And you see it and you say to the guy, oh, I'm fine.

[28 : 27] You can keep your CDs. Well, in a similar way, don't let anyone try and patronize you into thinking, you know, with the Christian ministry you've experienced, St. Silas, small group Bible studies, you're basically stuck on the first rung of the Christian ladder, the gospel rung.

All well and good, but you're not going to really grasp it all until you try this thing over here that I've got. Then you'll move on up. What could anyone offer you in life that you could not find in Christ? Christ, spiritual power and authority, he is above everything, Paul says. The fullness of God, he's got it all. God's blessing shining on you, his favor channeled towards you.

How do you get that? He's telling you he died for it to secure that for you. He presents you faultless before God. So what do we do when people invite us to try new things in our spiritual lives?

When we hear about podcasts, conferences, pilgrimages, big tent worship experiences that claim to give you more of God, a deeper encounter with God, what do we do?

[29 : 49] Well I think one question to ask is what does this do for my view of Jesus, for my faith in Jesus? Is this something that will grow me in my knowledge of God's revealed plan in Christ so that I can put my roots down deeper in the Jesus of the New Testament, thrilled by him, marveling at his supremacy, strengthened by what I've heard to endure hardship with faith in him, thankful to him, joyful in him?

Or, is this something that takes me away from full dependence on Jesus Christ, the Jesus of the New Testament?

Folks, there is no platinum door. Make your whole life about Jesus. To grow, we don't move on, we go deeper in him.

you put your roots down in him. Let's pray together. Lord Jesus Christ, we worship you for you are supreme over all creation, the image of the invisible God.

We acknowledge that you are the head of the church, the firstborn from among the dead. We rejoice in that truth, your great victory over sin and death.

[31 : 27] By your spirit, may we continue to live in you, rooted and built up in you, strengthened in the gospel message that has come to us and overflowing with thankfulness.

For your name's sake, amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.