

Let's Look At Jesus

Colossians 1:15-18

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I want to get a running start on Colossians 1:15 by going back to verse 12. Paul says, "...giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom..."—that is, "Jesus"—"...we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins."

Now notice our text, starting in verse 15: "He is..." In verse 13, we have "the Son of His love"; in verse 14, we have "in whom we have redemption"; and in verse 15, we have, "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence."

As I studied this week for this sermon, all I could think of was the chorus of a well-known hymn,

"Turn your eyes upon Jesus,

Look full in His wonderful face,

And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,

In the light of His glory and grace."

That's what this sermon is all about: we should turn our eyes upon Jesus. I want to "look full in His wonderful face." And I pray that in light of who He is, things of this earth will grow dim before His glory and grace.

This text is one of several, very important texts on the Person of Jesus Christ. There are other references on Christ you can study. One is in John 1:1-18; the prologue to John's Gospel is one of the most Christological passages in all the Bible. The next passage is in Philippians 2:5-11. It is the gnosis passage. Then Hebrews 1:1-3 is a great parallel passage to our text today. The fourth passage is our text today, found in Colossians 1:15-18.

Why is this passage that we have today found in this place in the book of Colossians? Because false teachers gave Jesus a prominent place but not a preeminent place. The false teachers were teaching a combination of Jewish legalism, eastern mysticism and Greek philosophy with a little Christianity thrown in.

It's like today when people like to mix and match religious thoughts; take a little eastern

mysticism and eastern philosophy and combine them together. And they might give Jesus a prominent place, but they do not give Jesus a preeminent place.

Verse 18 says, "...that in all things He may have the preeminence." The word "preeminence" means that He has "the highest place." No one, nothing is higher than Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ should have the preeminent or highest place in our lives, in our church, in our marriages, in our families and in our homes.

So ask yourself, "Does Christ have preeminence in my life?" Is He first and foremost in your life? Is He the highest one? Or are there other things that have come between you and your relationship to Jesus Christ?

Why should Jesus have preeminence, verse 18? Beginning in verse 15, Paul gives us three reasons why Jesus is to have preeminence. Number one, He is the visible image of the invisible God. Or we could say that Jesus is the revealer of God Himself. In verse 15, Paul says, "He is the image of the invisible God."

Notice that Jesus wasn't created or made "the image of the invisible God" like man is. Jesus is "the image of the invisible God."

Now how do we know that this passage is referring to Jesus Christ? Verse 14 says, "...in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins." And in verse 13, it mentions "the kingdom of the Son of His love." So at the end of verse 13, it mentions Jesus Christ; in verse 14, it says, "in whom"; in verse 15, it says, "He is"; in verse 16, it says, "by Him" and "through Him and for Him"; in verse 17, it says, "He is" and "in Him"; in verse 18, it says, "He is," "who is" and "He may have"; and in verse 19, it says, "in Him." So over and over in this section, we have references to Jesus Christ. This entire passage points to one person: to the Person of Jesus Christ.

The Bible tells us that God is invisible. 1 Timothy 1:17 says, "Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, to God who alone is wise..." In John 1:18, we read, "No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him." This word "declared" is where we get our word "exegesis" or "explanation" or "to take out the meaning of the text." Jesus actually explains the Father, who is unseen, because God is spirit and we can't see God. But Jesus has manifested God for us, because He is God in the flesh. So Jesus came to reveal God to man. Jesus is the image of God.

Now there is a difference between human beings who are made in the image of God. We reflect God. So if you want to know some things about God, you can look at human beings. They have personality, they are personable, they have a mind, emotions and a will. God is a moral being, and He has volition and a will. There are a lot of attributes that God has that we have, as well, such as His communicable attributes.

But we were made by God in His image, while Jesus is the image of God. He has been and always will be. And every time when He is not in the image of God, He is eternal. Jesus is the

eternal God who became man and manifested Himself in flesh.

So what does it mean that Jesus is the image of God? The word implies representation and manifestation. It implies that Jesus represents God, and He is also a manifestation of God.

The word "image" was used in Matthew 22:20 for Caesar's image minted on a coin. Jesus was asked if it was okay to pay taxes, and He said, "Show Me the tax money." Then holding up the coin with the image of Caesar on it, He asked, "Whose image and inscription is this?" They said to Him, 'Caesar's.'" So Jesus said, "Render therefore to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." So that image of Caesar on that coin is the same Greek word used for Jesus as the image of God.

We also get our words "picture," "portrait" and "icon" from the Greek word that is translated "image" in verse 15. So Jesus resembles God, He represents God and He is a revelation of God. It means that Jesus is a perfect picture of God, because He is God. If you want to know what God is like, take a good, long look at Jesus Christ.

It's funny that sometimes people will get "religious" without Jesus. If you have religion without Jesus, you don't have God. If you reject the Son, you don't have the Father. The only way to the Father is through the Son, Jesus Christ. Christianity is not about a religious system; it's about a Person. Christianity is Christ. If you take Jesus out of Christianity, there is no Christianity. A Christian is a person who knows Christ, has Christ dwelling in them, they are dwelling in Christ and they worship Him, love Him and serve Him. The Holy Spirit is manifesting Christ in their lives as He changes them into the image of Jesus Christ, which is the goal of our sanctification.

Jesus is God and He came to reveal God to us. In John 14:2-6, Jesus said, "I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know." Then Thomas said to Jesus, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?" Then Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." Then the minute Jesus mentioned the Father, Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us." Then Jesus made the statement, "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father."

Now this statement does not mean that Jesus is God the Father. But it does mean that He is perfectly representative of God the Father. No one represents God the Father more than Jesus, because He is in essence divine.

So this supports the doctrine of the Trinity, which Christians believe; that there is one God manifested in three Persons: God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. And God the Son took on humanity and represented in flesh the Person of God the Father. In Hebrews 1:3, a passage about Jesus Christ, it says, "...who being the brightness of His glory and the

express image...”—there’s our word—“...of His person.” So Jesus is “the express image” of God the Father.

Jesus is God manifested in the flesh. And this was seen in the Gospel accounts through His Incarnation, His miracles and His bodily Resurrection. Through them, He is declared to be the Son of God. Jesus became man by being conceived through the power of the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary. The Bible teaches the virgin birth of Jesus Christ.

Not only if you take out Christ, but if you take out the virgin birth of Jesus Christ, you do not have Christianity. You may say, “Well, I’m a Christian, but I don’t believe Jesus was God. I don’t believe He was the God-man. I don’t believe in the virgin birth.”

Well, you might think you’re a Christian, but your belief system is not based on Christianity. It’s not orthodox. If you take out the virgin birth, you just have a human Christ who cannot save. His death on the Cross then would not be an atonement for the sins of the world. He wouldn’t be the sinless Lamb of God. So we must have a divine Christ in order to have a redeemer.

So Jesus is the one who was born of a virgin in His Incarnation and took on flesh. The Bible teaches that Jesus Christ is fully man but a sinless man, and fully God yet in one person.

And you will not be able to fully wrap your mind around Jesus Christ. That’s why we worship Him. That’s why we’re in awe of Him. That’s why we give our lives to serve Him and follow Him. You’ll never be able to put your mind completely around the idea that God the Son would leave heaven, Philippians 2:6-7, and “who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation.” Jesus laid aside His majesty and took on humanity and lived as man for 33 years on the earth. So Jesus is the God-man.

Not only through Jesus’ Incarnation do we see God manifested in the flesh. It was also through His miracles. Who but Jesus could give sight to the blind instantly? Who but Jesus could multiply bread and fish and feed a multitude? Who but Jesus could stand at the grave of Lazarus, who had been dead for four days, and raise him from the dead? Lazarus’ sister, Martha, told Jesus, “Lord, by this time there is a stench.” But Jesus said, “Lazarus, come forth!” And Lazarus came out of the grave. That’s what you call power!

If Jesus had just said, “Come forth!” the entire cemetery would have been emptied. But one day that will happen, and it’s going to be marvelous. “The dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.” That’s power!

Who but Jesus, the God-man, could be on a little boat on the Sea of Galilee when the waves were splashing over the boat, the winds were blowing and the storm was raging and He stood up and said to the winds, “Peace, be still!” and He muzzled the wind and there was a calm? The disciples looked at Him and said, “Who can this be, that even the wind and the sea obey Him!” They were blown away by Him. They couldn’t comprehend it.

Jesus cleansed the leper, He raised a dead girl, Jairus' daughter. Jesus was able to perform all these miracles and more because He was God manifested in the flesh.

Then Jesus voluntarily went to the Cross and laid His life down. He said about His life, "No one takes it from Me, but I lay it down of Myself. I have power to lay it down, and I have power to take it again."

And when Jesus died on the Cross, He said, "It is finished!" He paid for the sins of the world. Then He said, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit." And He dismissed His spirit. Then His body was taken down by loving hands and prepared for burial and laid in the grave of Joseph of Arimathea. Three days later, after being buried on a Friday before sunset, on Easter Sunday morning,

"Up from the grave He arose;

With a mighty triumph o'er His foes;

He arose a victor from the dark domain,

And He lives forever with His saints to reign.

He arose! He arose! Hallelujah! Christ arose!"

And Jesus Christ became "the firstborn from the dead," verse 18, in His bodily Resurrection. He is the first one to ever come back from the dead in an immortal, eternal, glorified body, which is a prototype of our body, as we will follow in His train. Jesus paid for sin, Jesus conquered death, Jesus ascended back into heaven and is seated "at the right hand" of God the Father. So Jesus Christ is to have preeminence.

No other religious leader, no other ascended master or guru has ever done anything like that. This is why Jesus is to have preeminence. And He is to have preeminence not only because He reveals God, but He is God.

You want to know God? He's only found in the Person of Jesus Christ. In John 5:23, Jesus said, "All should honor the Son just as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him." And in 2 Corinthians 4:6, Paul said, "It is the God who commanded light to shine out of darkness, who has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God..."—where?—"...in the face of Jesus Christ."

So Jesus Christ reveals God, because He is God manifested in the flesh. He should have preeminence or the highest place.

Paul, in writing these words in Colossians and Corinthians exalting Christ, was a Jewish rabbi who was writing about a man who was a peasant from Galilee, a carpenter. So Paul was convinced that Jesus was more than just a Nazarene or a peasant carpenter; He was God

manifested in the flesh.

The second reason Christ is to have preeminence is because He is the sovereign over all creation, or you might say that He is the sovereign and source of all creation. So we see Jesus in His relationship to God; He is the revealer of the Father. And now we see Jesus in His relationship to creation; He is the Creator.

Verses 15-17 of our text says that Jesus is “the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.”

This is a mind-blowing section of this passage. So as far as God is concerned, Jesus reveals Him, because He is God. And as far as creation is concerned—the cosmos, the whole universe—He is the source of, the sustainer of and the goal of all of creation.

Now why does Paul focus on Jesus as Lord of creation? Again, because the false teachers had a different view of Jesus. They believed Jesus was created. They didn’t believe Jesus was the Creator; they believed Jesus was created.

This false teaching at that time was known as “Gnosticism.” The Greek word “ginosko” means “to come to know.” These people were the deep intellectuals. They rejected God’s revelation in the Bible and leaned on their own intellect. They assumed that matter was evil and only non-matter, or spirit, was good.

This led them to a couple of conclusions. Number one, Jesus was not God in the flesh. They denied the humanity of Christ, because God cannot have interaction or connection with matter. Number two, they denied that Jesus created the universe, because the matter that is created in the universe would be evil. So God sent out emanations from Himself until finally down the line, a lesser emanation than God, which was evil, created the universe. But they said Jesus was not the Creator.

This teaching is not so far afield from some of the doctrines we run into today. The Jehovah’s Witnesses, who knock on your door, hold this same concept that Jesus was created by God the Father. They believe Jesus was made Michael the Archangel, and then He created the universe, but He was first created Himself. He isn’t the eternal, almighty God; He is lesser than God. He is the creature and not the Creator.

This doctrine is still with us today and became known as the “Arian Heresy.” They deny either the deity or the humanity of Christ, both of which the Bible affirms.

So Paul makes it clear, in verse 15, that Jesus is “the firstborn over all creation.”

Now what does the word “firstborn” mean? It’s very important for you to understand this term. It’s the Greek word “prototokos.” This word originally and in a general concept means the first

one born or the oldest of your children. In the Jewish culture, the firstborn son was the son who would get the majority of the inheritance. He was the respected, honored and venerated son.

Then the word “firstborn” came to be used as a position of prominence and not for the order or chronology of birth. So it was originally used for the son born first. But because the first son born had the place of honor and respect, the word “firstborn” became a term used “for the most important one.”

It's failing to see the difference in the two meanings of “firstborn” that cause people problems. The Jehovah's Witnesses believe that this word “firstborn” means that Jesus was created by God the Father, and then Jesus the Son created all things. But that's not what our text is saying. So the original Greek of “firstborn” in our text is “prototokos,” which means “the most important one” and conveys not first in time but first in priority and sovereignty. It means that Jesus is sovereign over all creation.

Let me give you a couple of examples of how “firstborn” is used. It wasn't used of Esau, who was born first, but Jacob was called the firstborn son. You had Esau born first and Jacob born second, yet Jacob is actually the favored one, the chosen one, so he was called the “firstborn,” even though chronologically he was born second.

In Exodus 4:22, it says, “Thus says the LORD: ‘Israel is My son, My firstborn.’” Israel is called the “firstborn” among many nations. There were other nations in existence before Israel, but Israel was the highly favored nation or God's chosen nation, so they had the “firstborn” status.

Notice also that in our text in verse 16, “firstborn” doesn't mean the first created because Paul says, “For by Him all things were created.” So that precludes Christ from being created. The Jehovah's Witnesses translate this verse as “all other things.” They add the word “other,” but it's not in the Greek, so it's not in the Bible. But they add that in their Bible to support their false teaching. Christ is the Creator and sustainer of “all things” and the goal of all the cosmos.

So Jesus is not only God in the flesh; He is the creator of the entire universe. How amazing is that. Jesus is Lord over all creation.

Now to break down this text, Paul gives us four reasons why Jesus is Lord of all creation. First, in verse 16, Jesus is the Creator of all creation. “For by Him all things were created.” Literally it reads, “For in Him were all things created.” So in Christ is the source and the power. Paul knows that Christ is the Creator of all things. Paul made it clear in that text.

First Jesus created the universe and then He created you, so He can take care of you. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, one of the things that this passage does is it gives you assurance that your faith is not misplaced. If I'm trusting Jesus with my life, with the lives of my buried loved ones, I want to make sure He is capable of taking care of us. If He can fling the stars into space, if He can create the galaxies with the power of His word, if He can say “Lazarus, come forth!” and he came out of the grave, if He can say, “Light be” and light was, then He is capable of taking care of you.

I'm not an astronomer, but from the little I glean from reading about the galaxies, the stars and the vastness of space, it absolutely, completely blows me away! This week I watched the NASA channel on TV. From the international space station I saw the photos and video of looking back onto earth from outer space. It's mind boggling! And looking at billions of stars and billions of galaxies from outer space! And that's just a little spec of space. And guess who made them? Jesus.

Another song I like is,

"He's got the whole world in His hands.

He's got you and me brother in His hands.

He's got you and me sister in His hands."

We're all gripped with fear. "What if I get cancer? What if I lose my job? What if I can't pay the bills? What if we lose our home? What if my wife dies? What if my husband dies? What if my parents die? What am I going to do?!" He's got you in His hands. If He can fling the stars into space, He can sustain you, He can take care of you, He can watch over you, He can provide for your mortgage. The Bible says that even the lilies of the field "neither toil nor spin... Even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these." God takes care of them, and He'll take care of you, "O you of little faith," Luke 12:27-28.

God feeds the birds. When you get discouraged go to In-N-Out and watch the birds eat the French fries. Be encouraged. I believe God created fast food for birds. I have to pay for the fries; they get them free when they drop on the ground. God takes care of them, and He'll take care of me.

The glorious truth is that Jesus created the entire cosmos. That's actually mind blowing. Creation has meaning only when it points to Jesus Christ. All things were created by Him.

Secondly in verse 16, Jesus is the purpose and goal of all creation. "All things were created through Him and for Him." Not just created "through Him" but "for Him." So creation has meaning only when it points to Christ.

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem on a donkey, He created that donkey. He could get that donkey to cooperate, because Jesus was its creator. Can you imagine putting yourself in the donkey's mind? "My Creator is riding on my back!" So the donkey cooperated with Jesus. If I jumped on the donkey, it would throw me right off.

And when they were worshiping and praising Jesus as He approached Jerusalem, some of the Pharisees said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke Your disciples." But Jesus said, "I tell you that if these should keep silent, the stones would immediately cry out."

The Bible says that "All the trees of the field shall clap their hands" in worship. The other day on

my back porch I was listening to birds sing. They're praising Jesus. They're worshiping God. "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech." All creation points to Jesus and gives glory to Him. How marvelous that is.

Thirdly, Jesus is before all creation, verse 17. "And He is before all things." This is super simple but super profound. This speaks of the eternity and preexistence of Christ. Jesus is eternal and He preexisted His birth in Bethlehem. He existed before time and matter—"before all things."

Genesis 1:1 says, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." Jesus Christ was "before all things." And John 1:1 says, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." The Word was face-to-face with God, and "the Word was God." In John 8:58, Jesus said, "Before Abraham was, I AM." Jesus used that "ego eimi" term. Moses asked God at the burning bush when the people ask Moses who sent him, how should he reply? God said to Moses to tell them "I AM has sent me to you." And Jesus picked up that title of I AM.

Revelation 1:8 says, "'I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End,' says the Lord, 'who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.'" That is Jesus speaking. Yet there are some people who say that Jesus is not God. And if He is God, He's not the "Almighty" God. I don't know how you would have God without Him being almighty, but they somehow believe that.

Fourthly, Jesus is the sustainer of all creation, verse 17. "In Him all things consist." The word "consist" literally means "are held together." Jesus is holding the universe together. When I was watching that NASA station and saw the pictures of the earth, the stars and the galaxies—to think that it was all in perfect balance and all in perfect distance from each other! God actually holds it all together by His Word.

What keeps it from just blowing apart? Someone said, "The big bang." The big bang hasn't happened yet. That will happen when Jesus Christ comes back. That's going to be the "big bang." And there will be "a new heaven and a new earth." But Jesus is Lord over the creation, because He created all things. Jesus makes the universe a cosmos instead of chaos.

So Christ should have preeminence because He is the visible image of the invisible God, He is the sovereign over all creation and the third reason is that He is the head of the church, verse 18. "And He is the head of the body, the church..." He uses that metaphor of the body for the church, the "iglesias." "...who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence." So Paul has listed all the reasons why Christ should have preeminence. He is the revealer, the Creator and the exalted head of the church. He is Lord of the cosmos and of the church. The head of nature is the head of grace.

Paul changes the focus from Christ's preeminence over natural creation to Christ's preeminence over the new, spiritual creation, the church. Christ's preeminence is seen in

revelation, in creation and in exaltation.

I don't think we can comprehend the vastness of the universe or the Person of Jesus Christ. But what we take for granted and what we really don't understand is the glory of His headship and His body, the church. We think so much in terms of the local church with all its faults, failings and weaknesses that we forget that the Bible elevates the church to a very prominent place. Christ is the head and the church universal is the body.

What God is doing in the world today is that He is taking out a people for His namesake, creating the church. It's the new humanity; not Jew nor Gentile, not male nor female, but one in Christ, all linked together with Him as our head. It's the bride of Christ, "a building from God, a house not made with hands," the church, "a dwelling place of God in the Spirit." So the church is elevated in Scripture.

So we need to have a high view of Scripture, we need to have a high view of Christ and we need to have a high view of the church to properly understand the Bible. We take the church for granted; we don't think it's important, we have a cavalier, take-it-or-leave-it attitude toward the church. The church is His body and Christ is the exalted head over the church.

How did Christ become the head of the church? Let me give you five ways: His Incarnation, His Crucifixion, His Resurrection, His Ascension and His exaltation. Christ is now the exalted God-man in heaven over the church.

There is no such thing as a man who is the head of the church. Jesus Christ is the exalted head of the church. He dictates to the church. He controls the church. He is the head of the new creation. He "created the heavens and the earth," but He also created the church, His body, the bride, of which He is the living head.

Some day we will be "caught up," or "harpodzoed" in the Greek, or raptured "to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord." We're going to be married to our heavenly bridegroom. And it's all because Jesus Christ is the exalted head of the church.

Since Jesus is the revealer, the Creator and the exalted head over the church, He should have preeminence in all things. He should have preeminence in your life, in your marriage, in your profession, in your pleasures, in your ministry and in your conversation.

How about when we're just conversing with one another? Say, "Let's just talk about Jesus. Let's stop talking about the political landscape. Let's worship Jesus. Let's fall in love more with Jesus." How about in our worship when we sing and praise Him on Sunday? How about in our preaching? I can't think of a greater topic to preach on than Jesus Christ. He is the central theme of all Scripture. Yet we get so busy, so preoccupied, so distracted that we forget. Our service is all for Him, to Him and through Him.

So Jesus is God, Jesus created you, but sin separated you from Him. So Jesus died on the Cross to pay for your sins so you can be reconciled back to God. Christianity is Christ.

Won't you give Him first place in every area of your life? Won't you say, "Take my life and let it be consecrated Lord to Thee"? Since He is God in the flesh, since He is the Creator of all things, since He is the head of the church, Christ should have preeminence in your heart.