

III. Colossians
The Preeminence and Prominence of Jesus Christ
“Seeing Jesus”
Colossians 1:15–23
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We are continuing our series on the book of Colossians and in this study we’re going to look at who Jesus Christ is. Charles Spurgeon said, “The motto of all true servants of God must be; we preach Christ and Him crucified. A sermon without Christ in it is like a loaf of bread without any flour in it. No Christ in your sermon, sir? Then go home and never preach again until you have something worth preaching.” I share that quote with you a little bit tongue in cheek, because this study is all about Jesus. I will have no danger in violating Spurgeon’s warning here because this text is one of the most glorious and complete pictures of Jesus Christ that we have in the Bible.

When Bruce emailed me and told me this was the text that I would have to preach on at first, I was really, really excited for it’s one of my favorite passages in all of the Bible. About an hour later, it sunk in to me that I have to preach this passage because it is so deep, dense, and there is so much here. A person could spend a lifetime in these verses and barely scratch the surface of who Jesus is and what He's done. It’s incredible and so it's a little intimidating, but also very exciting to be able to preach this passage because it is so complete, full, and glorious and it's meant to be.

This study will be a little bit like drinking out of a fire hydrant, but don't be mad at me, be mad at Paul because he is the one who wrote it, but he does so on purpose. One of the reasons why Paul wrote the book of Colossians was to address a heresy that was going on in this church. It is known as the Colossian heresy, and I don't know all the things about it or what exactly was going on, but I know a few things because there's a few hints. They had this mentality of this Jesus and belief that Jesus wasn't enough or sufficient and they need to add to the Christian faith, other elements of paganism, of Judaism, ceremonialism or angel worship. Paul is going to address those later on in this book but before he addresses what is false, untrue and counterfeit, he gives us an authentic picture of who Jesus is in the Gospel because it's to the degree that we understand and know the real thing as to the degree that we will know the false forms of it. He does this so this church and we will know what is false, what doesn't bring hope and what doesn't bring life.

My main point in this study, if you get nothing else from it, is that we must see Jesus as our all-sufficient Savior. When I say sufficiency, I mean He is complete, we need nothing else. We add nothing to Jesus and the Gospel for He is complete and the Gospel is sufficient to bring about His end and His purpose of redemption in our lives. He is the One who gives us life, hope, resurrection, security, purpose and we need nothing else besides Him. Jesus is all we need. Let's now get to our text for this study.

Colossians 1:15-23 says [15] *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. [16] 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. [17] And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. [18] 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. [19] For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to*

dwell, [20] and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross.

[21] And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, [22] 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, [23] 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.

I'm going to give you three major headings with sub points under each heading. The three main headings are this; Jesus is the Lord of Creation, Jesus is the Lord of Redemption and Jesus is all we need. Let's unpack the first one. – Jesus is the Lord of Creation. Paul begins in Colossians 1:15, *[15] He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.* This verse already creates some questions and two questions we might ask is what does it mean to be the image of God and what does it mean to be the firstborn? Let's look at the first question – what does it mean to be the image of God? Jesus is the invisible God made visible. The Bible teaches that God dwells in a unapproachable light, and no one has seen Him or can see Him (1 Timothy 6:16).

So the question is, how can we have a relationship with our Creator, if He's invisible and we cannot approach Him? The answer is He must reveal Himself to us. In order for us to know Him, He must share Himself with us. The Bible tells us there are three main ways He does so. The first is creation. We can know that He exists and know what He's like, in part by what we see around us. Psalm 19:1, says, *[1] The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims His handiwork.* Romans 1 talks about how the invisible attributes of God are made known through the creation, through everything we see – when we look around we see the beauty of the stars, the beauty of the mountains, the beauty of the oceans. We look at our own bodies and study it scientifically and we are all struck with the reality that there is a Designer because design is all over the place in our bodies. Now, we can't know God in full or know everything about Him, but we can know there is a Being beyond us that designed all that we see and that we long for Him. So Creation tells us some things about God as He reveals Himself.

The second way God reveals Himself, is God communicates who He is through the Prophets and Apostles – through His Word. One of the ways we see that is with Moses and the burning bush. God reveals Himself to Moses through a bush that will not burn up and says, “I am who I am” (Exodus 3:14). Throughout His Word through the Prophets and Apostles, we learn more about who He is, His character and His purpose.

The third way God reveals Himself is through Jesus Christ, who is the invisible God made visible which we will go into more depth in this study. When we talk about Jesus as the image of God, we're talking about the Incarnation that God taking on human form to reveal Himself so that we can know Him, know His plan and will for us and His redemption of all things. Jesus is fully God and fully man. So what do we understand about this word ‘image’? When we think about being made in the image of God, we think about the garden – Adam and Eve, who are made in the image of God, and we think about us. We reflect and image God in certain ways, not fully, not completely, and is corrupted by sin, but there are aspects we can know about God in a sense, because we're made in His image. One of the ways that image is used is to represent or symbolize the object pictured, but it's not the object, it is not of the same substance – we can reflect God, but we are not God, but Jesus being the image of God is something very different. He doesn't reflect God and this lead to the second way image can be used.

Secondly, Jesus manifests God. The image brings with it actual presence. Jesus is the image of God, whereas we are made in the image, He is the image. He is made of the same substance. This is what Paul intends here in Colossians 1:15 – Jesus manifesting God to us. Hebrews 1:3 says [3] ***He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature, and He upholds the universe by the word of His power. After making purification for sins, He sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.*** Colossians 1:19 says [19] ***For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.*** He's fully God. The phrase 'the fullness of God' is meant to call our attention to the temple. The temple is where God dwelt with His people, the people of Israel and He dwelt primarily in the holy of holies in that temple, the place where no one had access to, the place where the mercy seat resided, the place where His glory filled, and that you couldn't just go in and talk to God and experience His glory.

Only one person, one time a year was allowed into that room, and that was the high priest. Even then there was a lot of sacrifices, a lot of procedures that needed to be made that he had to do. The high priest had a rope tied around him and bells on his robes as he went in that they can know he was still alive, so didn't have to go in and get him. The rope allowed them to fish him out if he died. It was dangerous to be in the presence of God, in the presence of His glory. Yet he had one job to do, which was to sprinkle blood on the mercy seat to atone for the sins of Israel for that year but it was still unapproachable.

Jesus being in the image of God, the fullness of God dwelling in Him is the temple walking around on Earth. John 1:14 says, [14] ***And the Word became flesh and dwelt (tabernacled) among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.*** This unapproachable God, this God that you couldn't have access to, that you couldn't talk to, that you had to make major sacrifices and only one person could get access to once a year, is now accessible to you in the Incarnation – God being made visible through Jesus.

The second question which comes from Colossians 1:15, is what does it mean that Jesus is the first born? It means that He is the eternal Son. Here is what it doesn't mean. We're tempted to read this and think that if Jesus was the first born of all creation, maybe He was the first being that was ever created, but it does not mean that, because Jesus did not have a beginning. We learn here in Colossians that He is before all things so how can He be before all things and yet be created? And He created all things. This is actually an old heresy that was duked out by Arius and Athanasius in 300 A.D. Arius was proclaiming that there was a time when the Son was not, that He was a created being, higher than humans but lower than God and this belief is actually believed by other religions of our day. The Bible doesn't teach that for the Bible teaches that He's eternal. So, Arius created such a stir and a controversy that the First Council of Nicaea was to settle this debate. The council proclaimed he was wrong, that Jesus wasn't born, Jesus wasn't created, wasn't born in a sense that He was the first created being, but He was eternal.

John 1:1-3 says [1] ***In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.*** [2] ***He was in the beginning with God.*** [3] ***All things were made through Him, and without Him was not any thing made that was made.*** Revelation 1:8 says [8] ***"I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty."*** That is eternal. He's the beginning and the end. He exists eternally and so it does not mean that He was the first created being. It means that Jesus has the status and the position of the firstborn and Son.

In Biblical times, the firstborn male child was given priority and preeminence in the family. It also meant that he got the best of the inheritance. It is very different than how we do

inheritance today. Right? Today, if you pass away and you want to leave something to your kids, you tend to do it equally – divided amongst all your kids, at least hopefully you do that. That wasn't so in their day, in this time. The firstborn son was to carry on the family name and therefore they had first place, first priority, preeminence, and received the best of the inheritance. That's who Jesus is. He's not the first created being. He's the firstborn Son of God, eternal, who had all the rights, privileges, and inheritance of the firstborn Son of God. Everything that belongs to God the Father belongs to God the Son. He owns everything and He's preeminent. That is why Paul will say in Colossians 1:18 that He's preeminent in everything.

The third thing in this section under Jesus is the Lord of Creation, is that Jesus is the Supreme King over Creation. Colossians 1:16-17 says *[16] 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. [17] And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.* Everything is made by Jesus. Everything continues to exist and function because of Jesus. The reason why the planets do not spin off in space is because Jesus is upholding them by the word of His power. The reason why you breathe and your lungs work is because Jesus makes it so. The reason why you can think, process and your synapses fire the way they should is because Jesus makes it so. The reason why these walls can continue to hold up this enormous ceiling and doesn't come crumbling down, is because Jesus upholds everything and everything in the universe serves Jesus' purpose. It's all for Him. There is absolutely nothing in the entire universe that is independent of Jesus Christ.

R. C. Sproul once said “There are no maverick molecules. Everything submits under His sovereign rule. This includes both the material and the spiritual realm.” What often terrifies us often brings anxiety and fear to us is our earthly kings or earthly powers. Who's in control? Who's in the government? Who's making decisions? Here in Colossians, it is saying that Jesus is King over all – even over the government of earthly kings, of earthly powers, but more so than that, He's over spiritual powers and spiritual forces, even Satan and his demons. We don't believe in dualism. We don't believe it's God and Satan duking it out and we hope that God wins. No, Jesus is King over Satan, his demons and they submit under His rule. That's why in the Gospels, when you read about Jesus and His encounters of healing casting out demons, the demons are terrified when they approach Jesus. They know who He is, and they have to ask permission to do what they want to do. Everything submits under His rule, under His reign and this should give us confidence and hope because we do not serve a weak God or incapable God. We serve the King of all in which all things serve His purpose. He is supremely in control. So, what is His purpose?

The next section is Jesus is the Lord of redemption. Colossians 1:18-20 says *[18] 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. [19] For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, [20] and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross.* Number one His purpose is to establish a Kingdom people. He says He's the head of the church. What is the church? The church comes from this Greek word called *ecclesia*, which means the called out assembly or the called out ones. I Peter 2:9 says *[9] But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.*

You belong to Him. He's gathering a people that are His to proclaim Him, to worship Him, to witness to Him, to point to Him, to make much of Him. Those in Christ have been called out of a kingdom of darkness and death into His kingdom of light and life. He's establishing His

assembly, His people, a Kingdom people. Therefore, the church is God's redemption made visible. We are the beachhead in which God is bringing His Kingdom reign and rule. This is an incredible responsibility for us. We are displaying the fruit of salvation to a lost and dying world. We are witnesses to His salvation and we encounter people who do not know Jesus. They ought to see that we have been marked by grace. They should see a people of humility, knowing that it's not us who saves ourselves, that we don't somehow have it together, that we're saved by His grace and mercy. They should see a people of love because Christ has loved us when we were unworthy of His love. They should see a people who give life to those around them because Jesus gave life to us. He builds us up. He nourishes us, He encourages us. Therefore, we ought to encourage others.

We should be a people who point to Jesus as their source of Hope – that life is found nowhere else. Hope is found nowhere else. Security is found nowhere else and we ought to be a people that point to this redemption and this glorious Savior. The question for us is, does the way we live, the way we talk, the way we work, reflect that we're a part of this new Kingdom or do we blend in and not give witness to Jesus as reconciling grace? Do we witness and point to make much of Jesus, or do we blend in or do we displace something very different as Kingdom people?

The second purpose is to bring peace to everything. He says that He is reconciling all things to Himself (Colossians 1:20). We often think of salvation in personal terms, and certainly each one of us must deal with Jesus individually. We must all individually turn away from sin and trust Jesus as our only hope for salvation. Each one of us has to say who Jesus is. Do we believe that He is Lord and Savior, or do we think He's a liar or a lunatic as C.S. Lewis put it? Each one of us has to decide for ourselves, has to put our trust and hope in Christ individually, but to think of salvation only in that way is to fail to see the full scope of Jesus redemption. Sin broke the universe, and Jesus is restoring all things, not just you and I, but the entirety of the cosmos. It's a glorious redemption. Sin causes death in all our relationships, and He is bringing peace into all those spheres.

We cause death in our relationship with our Creator. We don't love Him as we are. We don't serve Him as we ought to. We don't follow Him as our king. We hate Him. We rebel against Him and His rule and reign, and we can't know Him as we ought. We're cast out from His presence to cause death with our relationship with each other. We get jealous, we get angry, we hate, we steal, we murder. It causes death with our relationship with creation. Work is hard. Nature turns against us and causes destruction. There are weeds in your lawn that you just can't get out no matter how hard you spray that weed killer and get frustrated. Creation doesn't work the way it should. It's subject to futility, as Romans 8 says. It's interesting to think about. In the new heavens in the new Earth, think about how glorious the mountains, the stars, the oceans and the sunsets will be, because right now as glorious, beautiful and wondrous as it is, it is being held back and restrained because of the curse of the fall. It's not as beautiful as it could be.

Then there's death with our relationship with ourselves. We struggle with anxiety, with depression, we have insecurities, we have disorders that we need medicine for. We struggle to think well of ourselves, and have internal debates and arguments, and we're not at peace. Jesus' mission is to bring about a new creation with new creative people that brings peace in all of those areas, that brings peace with the relationship with the Creator – instead of hating God, you'll love God and want to serve Him, instead of being jealous, angry, hating, stealing from, and hurting others, we will serve and lay down our lives for the good of others. He's bringing peace in creation and is going to restore it all to its glory and intended design. He's bringing peace in

ourselves and our soul. Imagine never being insecure and always in confident hope. What does that feel like, that complete and perfect peace? He's reconciling all things to Himself as a grander and greater salvation than we tend to think.

The question is, is how does He bring this peace? He brings this peace through His death and resurrection. He is not only the firstborn of creation, but He's also the firstborn of death. His resurrection and death on the cross is what accomplishes this peace. By His blood on the cross, He had to die. The Bible teaches that all of us have sinned and we all know this to be true. No one can claim they have always done everything perfect. If you need a little bit of help, ask your spouse or ask your roommate. All of us have done things we regret. I'm regretting something I did last week. I regret something I've done ten years ago. Perhaps you regret doing something in your childhood. We've all sinned. None of us have lived perfectly. All of us are needy.

Here's the thing; our sin carries with it a price tag, and the cost is death. The great question in the Bible is this; how can a holy and just God have a relationship with a sinful and rebellious people? How can He maintain being just in His Holiness if He doesn't deal with sin and how can we know Him being sinful? How can we have a relationship with Him? Sin must be dealt with. Sin must be paid, sin must be forgiven. Not only that, we need to be remade with a new heart that loves and longs for Him and doesn't hate Him. Something incredible must happen.

Here's the crazy thing. What this passage has been building to is this; Jesus, through the fullness of God dwells, who created all things and upholds all things by the Word of His power, who is the Supreme King over all creation, became a Man to die for you, to pay the penalty of your sin that you earned, and to make you into a new creation who loves and serves God, and thereby reconciling you to Him. How amazing is that, that the Supreme King humbles Himself in that way and we don't deserve it. We've done nothing to earn it. We've done nothing to add to it. We bring nothing to the table but our sin. But the King of the universe that made all things, that upholds all things, laid down the privileges of His divinity to become a human, to die for us and to be our substitute in hell. He experienced your hell so He could give you His heaven.

We see the impact of the peace that is brought by Jesus in Colossians 1:21-22 which says, *[21] And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, [22] 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.* Here Paul moves to the Colossians themselves to remind them of the salvation that they have in Jesus. The impact of the peace as brought by Jesus is one a new heart. Your desire has moved from hostility to love. We get a new record. The evil deeds that we once done, the things that we have credited to our count are gone, wiped away, washed, paid for. Now our record is the record of Jesus. We don't stand before God on the Judgment Day with our record. We stand before Him with Jesus' record.

On the cross this great exchange took place. Martin Luther talked about this. On the cross Jesus takes all the things that you've ever done, all the sin that you've ever committed, all the terrible thoughts that have entered in your mind and He puts it on His shoulders to pay for it, as He experiences God's wrath for you. Then He takes all the perfect things He's ever done, all the perfect thoughts, all the perfect actions, all the perfect desires, everything and gives it to you so you stand before God on Judgment Day clothed by the garments of Christ and God sees that you're holy, blameless, and above reproach. That's credited to your account, not because of what you did, but what Jesus has done and what Jesus has freely given to you. Then you get a new family. You were alienated, you were orphans, alone and now you are children of God and heirs to all that is His. With Jesus being the firstborn all that belongs to God the Father belongs to God the Son and God the Son freely shares all that belongs to Him and gives it to you. In Him is all

the blessings that we could ever have and ever imagined come to us because we're in Him. We get a new heart, a new record, a new family. This is all completely done by the work of Jesus. We add nothing to it.

This leads me to my third major heading that is Jesus is all we need. Colossians 1:23 says *[23] 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.* What is he saying here? Is he saying we can lose our salvation, that we're saved by grace but kept by our performance? No, that's inconsistent with other places of Scripture that says; we are saved by grace, kept by grace, what He began in us He will bring to completion, no one can snatch us from His hand, we are safe in him. It's not about us. So we can't lose our salvation but we can lose as a church the Gospel Light and the Witness.

Going back to the introduction, we talked about what is Paul addressing here? He's going after this Colossian heresy. He's saying if you allow this to infiltrate your church, you begin to teach it, you begin to practice the implications of it, then Jesus is going to remove your lamp stand because it doesn't point to Hope, to resurrection, or redemption. There is death there and there's only life in Jesus. We as Christians have a propensity to drift away from the Gospel. Pastor Buster Brown at East Cooper Baptist Church was the church we attended before moving here to Briarwood. He used to say this all the time and it was burned into my head. Pastor Brown says, "We are leaky buckets who cannot hold water." It's a sense that we forget.

We fail to realize who Jesus is and what He's done for us. We forget His grace, we forget His mercy, and we begin to look for other things that we think will satisfy, that will bring us joy or that bring us hope and we begin to base our relationship on our performance rather than on God's free mercy. This is why we need to be reminded of the truths of the Gospel, day in and day out. That's why it's so important for you to read the Word of God every single day. That's why it's so important for us to come on Sunday mornings and gather to hear the preaching of God's Word, because we need to be reminded of the truth in it, the promises of the Gospel and who Jesus is, because we forget and we drift.

That is Paul's point here. He's giving this beautiful picture of Jesus to remind them of who He is and what He's done because they're drifting. He tells them to remember, don't forget your first love. Remember, that was the danger of the Church of Ephesus, an incredible church who was doing some incredible things and incredible ministry but they were forgetting their first love. They were forgetting the Gospel and Jesus is calling them back. Alistair Begg says this; "The evil one's strategy in every generation is to divert believers from the only one Person and from the only one place where reconciliation is achieved and discovered." He's trying to move us off mission, off message and get us out of ministry. That's the strategy.

Salvation, hope and life are nowhere else but Jesus. Therefore, we are to be keepers and proclaimers of the Gospel. We at Briarwood Presbyterian Church have a wonderful legacy for standing firm on the Gospel but we must never take that for granted. We must never assume it. We must always stay alert and be a people who never forget our first love. We must continue to be a people about Jesus first – Jesus as first importance, first place, the preeminence of all things. If we drift from it, or move away from it, if we buy into false theories or false gospels or false ideologies, we will lose our Gospel witness in this world. We must proclaim who Jesus is, what He has done for us, and preach Christ and Him crucified day in, day out, to our own souls, to our own people, and to those that don't know Him. He is King of all and our only Hope.

Paul at the end says this; 'This Gospel is proclaimed under all of creation under heaven in which he is the minister.' He is saying the Gospel is for everybody. It doesn't matter if you're

Jew or a Gentile, which means basically everybody else but it's for you. The only thing you have to do is lay down your arms, lay down your rights, and trust Him fully. You come to Him in faith, you turn away from your sin, you repent, and you believe that Jesus is your only hope to get this redemption, to get this hope, to be a new Kingdom people with this new creation, with a new heart, a new record, and a new family. Just come to Him and at the Judgment Day when God says, 'Why should I let you into this new creation?' You say, "It's not because of anything I've done. It's all because of what Jesus has done for me for He has given me His record, His righteousness and His credit, and I fully trust and hope in Him."

If you reading this today and you don't know Jesus in that way, I pray this day is the day you come and experience this new creation, this new life, this new hope, because life is in nothing else, not in money, not in fame, not in popularity, not in your career, it's not in your relationships for all those things will dissatisfy you and will leave you empty, ultimately being without hope. But Jesus is inviting you to something greater and something more wonderful.

If you're a believer and you have accepted Christ, this King, this Ruler who's done it all for you, I want to give you two questions; one is in what ways do you see yourself drifting from the Gospel, in what ways are you basing your relationship on Him based on your performance and not on grace? The second question is, in what areas in your life does Jesus not have first place? What are you putting before Him? What is getting your time, money and your skills that belong to Jesus? Jesus is our hope and salvation and it's found nowhere else. Let's pray.

Prayer:

Father, we praise and thank You for this text. We thank You for Your Word. We thank You for who Jesus is. We thank You that He is God revealed to us. We thank You that He is supreme over all things and He brings about redemption and reconciliation and that we bring nothing to it. May we never drift. May we never fall away. May we be keepers of the Gospel, proclaimers of the Gospel and may we make much of Jesus every single day of our lives, knowing that in Him there's hope and peace. We ask this in Your Name, Amen.