

**Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus**  
**Colossians 1:15-20"**  
**Dr. Derek Thomas**

It's an honor privilege to be back with you. You are in our prayers. You are in my prayers and I pray that God in this season would uphold you and strengthen you and give you guidance and leadership and that in this interim period, you would know the hand of the Holy Spirit upon you.

Now when Bruce texted me a week ago or so for a text, I was on a plane heading somewhere, and I suggested to him that I should preach on the Book of Job as being something of an obsession for me for the last 30, 35 years. But he talked me off the cliff, and you should be grateful to Bruce for that. My text this morning is Colossians 1. I'm going to take it a little further than the bulletin has it Colossians 1:15 -20. And let's give our attention to the infallible, inerrant word of God.

<sup>15</sup> He (Christ) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. <sup>16</sup> For by<sup>[a]</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup> 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. <sup>19</sup> For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, <sup>20</sup> and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

May he adds his blessing to the reading of it.

In that interim, from the resurrection of Jesus until the first canonical book of the New Testament. And we're talking about the late mid to late fifties, a generation or so in the early church they had no New Testament scriptures. What were they to believe? Essentially, what were they to believe about the Lord Jesus and who He was? Last week you celebrated Easter, celebrated the resurrection of Jesus, and it seems it seems the right thing to ask on this particular Sunday. Who is the Jesus who was resurrected from the dead? What is his identity? Scholars think Paul picks up here in verses 15 through 20, a catechetical hymn that perhaps pre-dates the writing of Colossians. And there are similar hymns in the rest of the New Testament, Philippians 2:5-11 would be an example of that, to being in the form of God thwarted, not robbery to be equal with God, but emptied himself and took the form of a servant and so on. You remember that passage, And that too, might be one of those catechetical hymns about Jesus, about the person and the work of the Lord Jesus. It was important for the early church before they had the New Testament to know exactly what it is that they should believe concerning the Lord Jesus. Colossians is one of those prison letters like Ephesians, and Paul is in

prison. We read in Colossians 4, remember my change. This is the imprisonment that we read of at the end of the Acts of the Apostles, chapters 27 and 28. This is the imprisonment that is sometimes known as the house arrest. Paul is awaiting a trial, a trial that never took place. The Jews had formally accused him before Rome, before Caesar of blasphemy and other things. And but they never came. But for a season, Paul was imprisoned, one imagines, because of the freedom of movement and so on, that he was chained, perhaps with one wrist to a metal pole somewhere around shoulder level, allowing him to move up and down. That that is the conjecture of the conditions he was in. He's never been to the church in Colossae. A member of the church has made their way to him, to the prison cell. He's taken a ship and gone down the Aegean and south of Italy and docked somewhere on the west coast near Rome and made his way to Rome to find him. And he brings him news of the church in Colossae. Paul had never been to Colossae. He had been to Ephesus, which isn't a million miles away. Colossae is in the Lycus valley, along with churches like Laodicea and Hierapolis. And one imagines that folks from Colossae had gone to Ephesus. Paul had been in Ephesus for over two years and one imagines that folk from Colossae had gone to Ephesus, perhaps on business, perhaps because they had heard rumors of what the Apostle Paul was, was preaching and teaching and they wanted to check it out and, and they were converted and went back to the church to Colossae established a church -- this church would be at most ten years old, possibly a little less than eight or nine. It's a church plant. It's a fledgling church. And there are many things about it that are good. But into this church has come what we might call super apostles. And you read about it in chapter two men who are claiming that it's not enough to have Jesus. You need the special insight. It's that only these super apostles can give.

And so Paul is writing to the Church of Philosophy with a single message. And if you don't remember anything that I said because of my Southern accent, I want you to remember this-- that the message this morning is that if you have Jesus, you have everything, you have all that you need to forgive you your sins, and to bring you home to glory. If you have Jesus, you have everything.

Now let's look at this passage together. We could spend several weeks examining all of the details, but then I'm going to fly at 36,000 feet and pick out six things that this catechetical hymn is telling us about Jesus. And the first of which is that He is the image of the invisible God. He is the image of the invisible God. God is invisible. God cannot be seen. He doesn't have a body. A child may come up to you and say, but who is God? And because you're good PCA Presbyterian, you will say God is a spirit - Infinite, eternal and unchangeable in his being wisdom, power, holiness, justice, goodness and truth. And then the child will say to you, What does Spirit mean? And I defy any of you to be able to answer that question. Even as a professional theologian, that's a very difficult question to answer. But perhaps the answer should be this If a child would come up to you and say, what is God like? He is like Jesus. He is like Jesus. If I can put it this way, there is no un-Christ likeness in God. God is like Jesus, God in Jesus is personality, in the concerns that Jesus had for little children to allow them to come to him, that He might bless them. That's what God is like. God is like Jesus when He heals the sick,

the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. When He raises the dead like Lazarus, that's what God is like. God has a love and a concern for lost souls like Jesus did, preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God. That's what God is like. No, man has seen God. He that is in the bosom of the Father. He has revealed him, John says in his Prolog to the Gospel. He is the image of the invisible God.

Now, the Colossians knew very well about images. They would use Roman currency. They were in the Roman Empire and on the face of a coin of a denarius there would be the image of Caesar. They may never have seen Caesar, they may never have gone to Rome or seen him, but they saw him in an image cast on a coin. It represented the likeness of Caesar. And what Paul is saying that Jesus is the likeness of God. He is the image of the invisible God.

Then secondly, He is the firstborn of all creation. In the third and fourth centuries. There were those who read this passage and drew the conclusion that there was a time when Jesus in his Godhead, his deity was born. In other words, Jesus may be God like, but there was a time when He was not that He was a created being by the greater God, the Father. And so Bishops gathered at Nicaea in 325 A.D. and brought forth what we call the Nicene Creed and said of Jesus that He is God of God, very God of very God, begotten, not made being of one substance with the Father by whom all things were made.

What does firstborn mean? Well, it's an Old Testament word, and it's a word that signifies inheritance. The firstborn was the one who inherited. The firstborn was the one who had status and supremacy. And if you look at the passage, it goes on to explain what that means. He's the firstborn of all creation. For by him, all things were created.

Have you been watching that satellite that's been sent out into deep space? And it's been sending back pictures of space that no human being has ever seen before. I was a math physics major a long time ago in a place far, far away. But I've been I've been reading some fairly technical articles about these pictures and what they represent. And that's true. Physicists minds have been blown apart because what they thought was true of the origins of the universe cannot possibly be true. If these pictures are correct and they are, it tells you that scientists can get it wrong. We've just walked through a few years of that. It tells you that he created all things, things that are seen and things that are unseen.

I have a friend. He's a doctor and he's an orthopedic surgeon, and he retired about a year ago and bought an RV, a fancy RV, an RV like the one I would like with all the amenities. I'm not into roughing it anymore. I don't want to go in a tent, but an RV, a 2024 RV that I could handle. And he's been gone for months and he's been to the Rockies and he's been to state parks and he's been sending back these pictures that can only induce envy. So I've told him, stop it. I don't want any more pictures of you standing in the Rockies with this incredible background that only God can create, that only Jesus could create. And he has before all things in the beginning was the word. You know, when John writes his gospel, he starts with the words in the beginning, where did he get that from? And the answer is Genesis. He's writing with Genesis in mind. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. And John, when he writes his Prolog,

begins in the beginning. In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God and the word was God. And he was before all things.

Let me ask the question -- what was there before the Big Bang? And not giving credibility to the Big Bang. But let's go with that for a minute. What was there before the Big bang? Well, you've got three possible answers. You can say that before the Big Bang, there was something and it was gravity or it was electromagnetism or something. And that gravity or that electromagnetism produced everything. That's hard to believe. That's harder to believe than the resurrection. Or you can say you can even go another mile and you can say there was nothing. There was absolutely nothing and nothing produced everything that our world renowned scientists out there who's who have absolutely incredible intelligence, who actually believe that --that nothing produced everything. Or you can say before the Big Bang there was God, there was Jesus, and he spoke the word and it came to be -- that's the Jesus that you're worshipping this morning. You're passing through a trial. You're uncertain about the future. You've lost a loved one. You've lost a child, you've lost your job. Things haven't turned out the way that you had planned. And here you are. You're sitting in this church this morning in these pews and your worshipping Jesus, this Jesus who has always existed and brought the whole creation into being. And notice what he says. And he upholds all things in him. All things hold together. He upholds all things he didn't just create and then sit down and let it all pan out. He is intimately involved in every detail of Providence.

If you asked me what is my favorite doctrine, I would say the doctrine of Providence. It helps me sleep at night. Actually, I didn't sleep last night at all. I set three alarm clocks because Bruce Stallings needed me here by 730. There's a time change in my body. I looked at my iPhone at one, two, three, four and five and decided that was it. I now needed to get up.

God in Jesus Christ is upholding all things.

What's the alternative to that robust sovereignty of Christ that He upholds only some things. We have this truth expanded for us in Paul in Romans 8:28, when he says that God works all things together for the good of those who love him. If you live inside of that bubble where God orders all things together for good, what do you have? Peace, rest, tranquility, assurance, even in the midst of a storm, you have peace and stability and tranquility. But outside of that bubble, what have you got? Uncertainty. War. No guarantee, no assurance. What a beautiful thing it is to know that he upholds all things.

The third truth is that he is the head of the body. The church. Interesting, isn't it? This is a poem, catechetical hymn, all about Jesus. And it's interesting that it mentions church because what did Jesus come to do but to build his church at Caesarea Philippi when Peter had confessed that he was that he was the Christ, the son of the living God, you remember that Jesus said to him, You are Peter. And on this rock I will build my church and the gates of hell will not prevail against it. I will build my church. The church, my dear friends, is plan A. There is no other plan. There are sadly many, many Christians in North America who believe because they've been taught to

believe that the church is plan B, that plan A is Israel. And because Israel rejected the Messiah, God introduced the second plan. The parenthesis called the church. But his true plan is Israel. Nothing could be further from the truth. It has always been about the church. When you read in the Scriptures that Jesus says, I will build my church in the gates of hell will not prevail against it. The disciples didn't sort of tap him on the shoulder and say, What is church? This was the first time in Matthew 16, first time in the Gospel of Matthew that the word church appears. It has always been about the kingdom, but all of a sudden this is about church. But they understood the connection between church and synagogue and temple and tabernacle, that it was always about gathering God's people together in order that they might worship him and serve him.

This is a difficult time for you, and we love you. We love this church. We want this church to retain the influence that it just had in the PCA and in other denominations. The world looks to you, and this is a difficult time for you to walk through. My prayer for you is that you retain the peace of the church.

You know, it is just that he says is he is the head of the body. And elsewhere, Paul talks about the body as having different parts, arms and legs and feet and so on. But all of them must work together to retain the unity of the peace of God by the help of the Holy Spirit, because that body is serving one head and that is Christ.

That's my prayer for you, that you will guard the unity of this body and pray hard that God would bring someone here to be your pastor and take you into areas that you've perhaps never trodden before. And then fortunately, he says that he is the firstborn from the dead. Well, that's what you were thinking about last week at Easter. Easter is one of my very special favorite services. Everyone is happy. The place is filled with lilies. You take your allergy tablets and double them if you're in the pulpit. We sing those wonderful resurrection hymns. It's beautiful. The Jesus rose again from the dead. He is the firstborn and the promise, therefore, of many more to come. You if you're trusting in Jesus and if you're not trusting in Jesus, you need to trust in Him because He is the only one there is. He is the only savior there is. There is no other savior. There is no other name under heaven given amongst men whereby we must be saved. You must put your faith in Him and trust in Him.

One day we're going to be resurrected unless Jesus comes before then and my prayer is Jesus. Come quickly. I scan the headlines of the news every day and I think to myself, my goodness, Jesus, come quickly. But if he doesn't come within our lifetime, one of the perks of being the senior minister at First Presbyterian Church in Columbia, South Carolina, the church is set in the middle of a churchyard. I called it a graveyard when I first got there, and I was told by seven women that it's not a graveyard. It's a churchyard. Well, be that as it may, there are graves in it. And one of the perks, one of the perks of being the senior minister is that you get a plot. And so when I die and when my wife dies, we are going to be buried right next to a previous senior minister who doesn't know it yet.

I used to have a moment on Easter Sunday morning when I'd have all the children down in front and up the aisle. There would be a hundred and 20 of them. We're talking about children probably under five. And I would play the game of playing dead. So we would all lie down on the floor and play dead. And then one of the elders who plays the trumpet would be up in the balcony. And he would play on the trumpet and we would all rise from the dead and stretch and stretch and stretch. It's good to teach children of the hope of the resurrection that in the resurrection of Jesus there is the promise of our resurrection and your resurrection. And then, truthfully, we are told that in Him, all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. What a statement -- you could spend weeks expounding that that all the fullness of God. He isn't just like God, He is God. All the fullness of God, everything that God is. However you define God in terms of His attributes, that's what Jesus is. This one who became incarnate and walked the sands of Palestine and wept at the tomb of his friend and was crucified at Calvary and was buried in a borrowed tomb. He didn't need to buy a tomb. He was only going to use it for the weekend, so he borrowed it. This one is none other than God himself. In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God and the word was God.

Let me apply that to this morning. Do we have anyone in here worrying this morning? Worrying to the point of distraction? Your personality is being changed because you're always worrying - relationships that you have in your marriage and with your family are strained because you're always worrying. And you say to me, Well, I have something to worry about, and I don't doubt it. But I say to you, How big is your God? How big is your God? Can you say this morning that in Him all the fullness of the Godhead dwelt bodily - that's the God that we have who walks beside us, who sits beside us, who puts his arm around us, who exists and reassures us that we are his? And he says He says to you, I will never leave you, nor forsake you, never, even in the midst of trial, I'm still there. I never promised you that life would be a bed of roses. But I can give you that peace which passes all understanding that garrisons our souls.

#6 through him to reconcile to himself, of all things, making peace by the blood of his cross, to reconcile all things. What should the cross achieve? Now, some people come and they read this text and they say there the Bible says that everybody is going to be saved. In the end, everybody's going to be reconciled. No, my friend, you can't pit this one verse against other verses. I am the way, the truth and the life and no man comes into the father. But by me, there is no other name under heaven given amongst men whereby we must be saved. No, this is the reconciliation of creation.

Creation is out of joint. Paul talks about it in Romans eight that creation groans and travails in birth, waiting for the regeneration of all things -- earthquakes and tornadoes. Storms. What are they? They are signs that this world is out of joint. But God has made a promise. It's a beautiful promise I'm going to create for you a new heavens and a new earth.

You say to me, what does that look like? Well, it looks like this world, except without sin. Imagine if there had been no sin. Would there be mountains? Of course. If there had been no

sin, would there be rivers? Of course. And seas and oceans. Places of extraordinary beauty and animals and birds and fish and dogs and cats?

He's going to bring peace. One of the benefits of the death of Christ was to bring peace to this disordered universe and renew it, to make it a place for you and I in our redeemed, resurrected bodies, to live forever.

Here's a thought, to dwell on this afternoon after you've had lunch and you're sitting down and not just going to heaven, I'm not just going to those intermediate state where my body is here, my soul is dead. No, I'm going to have my body and soul reunited at the resurrection and God is going to renew this universe for us to dwell in and live in forever. I don't know about you, but that makes me excited. That makes me really excited. This is a text this morning about Jesus and what he has accomplished for you. Will you praise him? Will you turn your eyes upon Jesus and look full in his wonderful face and the things of us will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace.

Father, we thank you. Thank you for the gift of your son. We thank you for the assurance of salvation. We thank you for the anticipation of glory to come. Receive our thanks we pray in Jesus' Name. Amen.