

## The Preeminence of Christ Colossians 1:15-20

It is good to be with you this morning. Thanks for allowing us to be with you this morning. We have been praying for Pastor Steve and family as they all deal with this loss in their life.

This morning I would like to share with you one of my favorite passages in the New Testament. It is a passage that gives us a great view of who Jesus is and what He has done for us. When I preach, I like to go systematically through books of the Bible, verse by verse, phrase by phrase. Pastor Matt and I trade off each week, each of us taking the next paragraph. I was fortunate to be able to preach from this paragraph a few weeks ago. When Pastor Steve asked if I would come this week while he was away I thought I wanted to give this passage another try. I don't ever preach the same message over again so I sat down and restudied this paragraph and found things I did not find the last time. That is why I love the Word of God, it is new every day.

The book of Colossians was written by the apostle Paul while he was in the custody of Rome. He spent some of his time in custody in an actual prison and sometime in his own rented house under house arrest. Colossians is one of the letters written by Paul that we call the Prison Epistles.

Colossians was written to a church in Colosse which was a valley town about 100 miles east of Ephesus. The Greeks and now Romans were heavily involved in mining in the

mountainous region, so there was some significant affluence in Colosse.

Religiously Colosse was the center of a religious cult dedicated to the Greek goddess Cybele. The practice of dedication of Priests to Cybele involved two different rituals. One in which the candidates for priest had to emasculate themselves with a rock in memorial of Cybele's boyfriend who went crazy after Cybele fell in love with someone else and emasculated himself with a rock. The second ritual involved suspending the priest candidates over a gorge and the slaughtering of bulls over them and the blood from the bulls flowing over them, in effect baptizing them as priests of Cybele.

Heavily steeped in polytheism and religious practice these people came to the Lord through people coming from other churches, including Ephesus. We have no record that the Apostle Paul ever was in Colosse. Se we have a new church planted by people from other churches with the people coming out of pagan religious practices. That is the historical background to the Colossians.

As with most of the letters to churches in the New Testament Paul is writing to address issues and problems. One of the problems is the influence Greek Philosophy had on the church in Colosse. Part of the influence of Greek philosophy was what would eventually become known as Gnosticism. Gnosticism had its foundation in Jewish teaching and stressed the need to

keep the Old Testament law. It was more philosophical than practical. It focused on “special” or deeper knowledge. Angels and other spiritual beings were worshiped and served as mediators between God and man. It was very exclusivistic in that only a select view got to the upper level of the philosophical elite. There was also a focus on Christ but not in the way that we view Jesus. Gnosticism denied the deity of Jesus.

That is the heresy that Paul was dealing with in Colosse and makes it a little easier for us to understand our passage this morning which deals with the preeminence of Jesus. So, with that background let’s dig into the text. Turn over in your Bibles to Colossians chapter 1 verse 15. I will be reading from the ESV, English Standard Version.

*Colossians 1:15 (ESV)*

*15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.*

Remember Paul is dealing with the heresy that teaches that Jesus is not God, not the son of God. Paul says that Jesus is the image of the invisible God.

The job of the Bible student is to learn what the original writer meant when they wrote. There is a movement among American churches to teach that a passage can have different meanings for different people in different situations. While there can be different applications of the text the meaning always has to be determined by the writer. This is simple to prove that only the

author can determine the meaning of words. When you go to the restaurant after church today and the server leaves you the check say for \$29.45. Well, who gets to determine what that \$29.45 means? Just try and say that \$29.45 means to you \$2.45 and see what happens. The actual crime in the State of Florida is called “Beating a Board Bill” and depending on the value could be a felony. We could never have real communication if the definition of words used is not determined by the author and remains fairly consistent. The readers then have to conform to the what the author meant. Scripture is no different, we must determine what God meant when He wrote it.

What does Paul mean that “Jesus is the image of the invisible God”? He means in Jesus we have the ability to see who is otherwise invisible. God eternally is spirit and as spirit not visible to our human senses. But God has revealed Himself in the person of Jesus Christ in bodily form.

We should not view this as saying that Jesus is just a picture or facsimile of God. We should see this as Jesus is really God who is in a form we can actually see. Fully human, mortal human.

I am a guy that is visually oriented. I have a hard time comprehending of something I cannot see. So, when I think of God I see in my mind’s eye Jesus. I can see Him as a big strapping guy with big arms not some effeminate guy like the renaissance painters displayed him. Strong enough to pick up blocks and timbers as a carpenter. He is my image of God.

Paul also said that Jesus was the “Firstborn of Creation”. Some cults have used this verse to claim that Jesus was a created being. I understand how they get that picture from this verse. The problem is we view things through our western eyes. We see the word “firstborn” differently than the Greek ancient eastern near east mind did. Here in the west we view things “form over function” while in the ancient near east they viewed things “function over form”. That is: something is what it does. For us today we see firstborn and we think that he is the first one born. But the ancient near east mind did not see the first one born but the one in the primary position of importance next to the fathr. This does not mean He was created but in creation Jesus is in the primary position. Why is Jesus in the preeminent position in creation? Look at the next verse.

*Colossians 1:16 (ESV)*

*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.*

Because by Him, that is Jesus, all things were created. Jesus is the agent of creation. When we read in Genesis 1 and 2 about creation it was Jesus who was the agent who carried out the Father’s plan.

All things we created by Jesus, in heaven and on earth. I think that the words in heaven and on earth is a reference to the

spiritual world and the physical world. During the 7 days of creation Jesus created the spiritual world, angels and eternal paradise and eternal torment we refer to as hell. He also created the physical world which includes everything we can see feel and touch. Everything that is physical.

Visible and invisible is further confirmation that Paul is telling us that Jesus created the physical world and the spiritual world.

The next phrase I believe modifies the end of the previous phrase. The invisible world, is made up of thrones, dominions, rulers and authorities. Both fallen and un-fallen angels organized in different groups and different functions in the spiritual world. All created by Jesus.

It is the next phrase in the text that we often skip over.

“All things were created through Him and FOR HIM”. In the western world, today churches all over the place are teaching that salvation is all about the person. That the world is all about them. Paul says right here that everything in the world is for Jesus and **not for us**. You are saved to bring glory to God. The bird flies in the sky to bring glory to God. The hurricane blows and the volcano erupts to bring glory to God. Everything is for God not us. We need to get over ourselves and recognize it is all about God and not about us.

*Colossians 1:17 (ESV)*

*17 And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*

**Not only is all about Jesus**, He is greater than all things. Remember what we said in the introduction that Paul was dealing with Gnostic heresy that held that Jesus was not actually God and not even a demi-god or almost god that was common in Greek Mythology. Paul clearly states that Jesus is superior to everything else, nothing is superior to him.

Now, look at the last phrase of this verse. Not only is Jesus superior to everything in the world. He is also the one who holds everything together. This is such a fantastic statement but we most often skip over it without thinking about what it really means. I won't go through the grammar here but the grammar here tells us that Jesus is the one who is currently actively maintaining the world. Right now Jesus is holding the world together. He is expending energy to keep the world in existence.

Science teaches that there are certain "laws", scientific laws are at play in world that maintains our world. Various laws of thermodynamics that make solid things solid and liquid things liquid and gas things gas. Gravity which attracts things back to earth. Laws which describe the transformation of energy. Why do we have these various scientific laws? Because Jesus is actively holding things together. Jesus did not create and just

spin up the world and become disinterested. He is still actively involved.

Have you ever seen plate spinners? You know people who put plates on dowels and spin them. They start with one and add plates all the time having to go back to previous plates to keep them spinning. What happens when the plate stops spinning? It falls. The spinner needs to be actively involved in keeping the plate spinning. That is Jesus' involvement in the world. He actively keeps it going. Not just spinning but keeps those laws of thermodynamics and all those other scientific laws in place. He has to be actively involved, all the time, for the world to exist. If Jesus stopped being actively involved it would all go away.

I want you to think about that for a moment. The creator/sustainer of the universe is the one who sacrificed Himself to save you from your sin. The one who actively holds the universe together knows you by name and everything about you and yet He still died for you. How cool is that?

*Colossians 1:18 (ESV)*

*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.*

Not only does He hold everything together, He is also the head of the church. That organism that grew up after Jesus' sacrifice. Why is Jesus the head of the church. Using the metaphor of the human body Jesus is the head, the control center. My hand does

not do what my head can do. This hand cannot think at all. Some would say my head doesn't think at all either but I think you can see the point. Our brain, our head, controls what we do, where we go and how we do it. That is the role that Jesus has in the church. He tells us where to go, what to do and how to do it.

Not only the head of the Church He is also the "firstborn" from the dead. Remember what we said about firstborn earlier.

Function over form. We just celebrated Resurrection Sunday, Easter. Jesus coming out of the grave, victorious over death and sin. Rising from the dead with a new glorified body capable of transcending time and space. We know this because He entered locked rooms without opening the doors. In my thirty plus years as a cop I had several opportunities to enter locked rooms without opening doors. But it usually involved breaking doors down not going through locked doors without opening them. Jesus' new glorified body allowed Him to pass through walls and then later ascend up to heaven. The first to have such a body and the most important to have such a body. Preeminent. It is all for Him, for His glory and His preeminence. **It is all about Him and not you or me!**

*Colossians 1:19 (ESV)*

*19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,*

Remember that Jesus is the image of the invisible God. He is also the one in who all the fullness of God dwells. Paul was

dealing with the heresy taught in Colosse and other churches of the time that Jesus was not God. He is God, completely God. He is not God lite, He is not sort of God, He is God and holds all of the fullness of what that means. He is completely God.

*Colossians 1:20 (ESV)*

*20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.*

Jesus, who is fully God, the creator/sustainer of the universe, including the spiritual world and the physical world, the first in position and the first in priority to receive a new glorified body, reconciled to Himself all things. All spiritual things and all physical things ultimately will be reconciled to Him. Every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is Lord.

How does this reconciliation occur? Through His sacrifice on the cross. We celebrated last week the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. Why did He die? To pay the price of your sin and my sin. God as a holy and just God demanded satisfaction for our sins. He demanded justice. God as gracious and loving God provided a way to pay the prices for us. Jesus died and shed His blood on the cross to pay the price that God demanded.

We live in a binary world, one choice to make. Accept Jesus or not to accept Jesus. There is no middle ground. You are either a follower of Jesus or you are not. Jesus paid the price and

through that payment purchased us from the slave market of sin. By paying the price He reconciled us to Him. We were His enemy before He reconciled us to Him. Now we are His slave and His adopted Child.

The end of the story is that ultimately everything and everyone will be reconciled to God. **Remember it is all about Him and not us.** We need always keep that in mind, **it is about Him and not us.** You were saved for His glory not to make you happy or wealthy or healthy.

This entire paragraph of God's word was written so that we see the position of Jesus and recognize that it is all about Jesus, about God and not us. That we recognize that Jesus is God in bodily form, the creator/sustainer of the universe. The God who loves us is the same one who created the universe and is actively maintaining it. We love and serve the preeminent Jesus.

Let's pray!