

# Colossians 1:15-20

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[ 0 : 00 ] Our text for this morning as we continue our verse-by-verse exposition of Paul's letter to the church at Colossae. Colossians 1. 15-20.

So please join me there in your copy of God's Word. I'll begin reading in verse 15. He, being Jesus Christ, is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation, 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. And He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. And He is the head of the body, the church.

He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything He might be preeminent. For in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of His cross.

This is God's Word to us. It was written for His glory and our good. We would all do well to listen to it in order to believe its promises and obey its commands.

[ 1 : 28 ] Beloved, this is a precious, precious book. Every bit of it, all 66 books that we contain within the Bible, what we call the Scriptures, God's holy writ, is a great, great gift to us.

Rightly, we should come to it expectant. We should invest ourselves in it as followers of Jesus Christ because this entire book gives testimony about Him.

In Luke 24-27, you can read the account of Jesus' appearance to two of the disciples after His resurrection. And the record says, "...and beginning with Moses and all the prophets, He interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself." The Old Testament, what they had in that day, was about Jesus Christ.

In John 5-39, Jesus says of the Scriptures, "...it is they that bear witness about Me." Of all the Bible's teaching concerning Jesus, perhaps none is more significant than the text before us today. And I'm feeling the weight of that. This is a precious, precious text. The reality of who Jesus is demands our obedience. If we are to say that we are disciples of Jesus Christ, that we are followers of Jesus.

[ 3 : 07 ] We're not simply saying that we're following a mere man who taught good things, but that we're following God Himself. It demands our obedience as such.

The reality of who Jesus is makes sure the promises of God. Those promises that we should know and should hold to and so rarely do, but just the same.

Those promises that are of such great comfort and motivation for the Christian life find their yes in Jesus. 2 Corinthians 1.20, Paul says, "...for all the promises of God." All.

Every single one of the promises of God find their yes in Jesus Christ. What an amazing thing. You may be interested to know that the vision statement for our church is based largely on these verses. It's up here behind me. Christ Family Church exists to glorify God by experiencing, proclaiming, and displaying the supremacy of Jesus Christ in all things to all peoples.

[ 4 : 10 ] And you may ask, is that really the thing the church is meant to be about? The supremacy of Jesus Christ? The question has been asked, should not the great thing we should be experiencing, proclaiming, and displaying is the love of God?

I would say that is a subservient thing that we teach to the supremacy of Jesus Christ. Why is Jesus Christ supreme? Because of His great display of God's redemptive purposes in the world, which is God's love.

Comes up underneath, motivates, and carries that along. These verses are what's going through our minds and hearts as we come up with the vision statement for the church.

Note that the focus of this cosmic Christological hymn, which I'll explain in a moment, is the preeminence, or we could say supremacy, of Jesus Christ.

The very focus of the entire thing is the preeminence of Jesus Christ. The last couple of weeks, you've heard me refer to it as a cosmic Christological hymn.

[ 5 : 19 ] Scholars debate this, but likely verses 15-18 at least, but some would say verses 15-20, are believed that Paul is citing a modern hymn to their day, or some confession.

There's some incredibly interesting arguments made to this, although I will not bore you with them, with my explanation of them, at least this morning. They consist primarily of a sentence structure comparisons.

And I'll stop there because you're already glazing over. But likely, at very least, verses 15-18 were a hymn of that day.

And Paul is therefore citing these great truths in order to correct some of the misunderstanding that's happening in the church of Colossae. We don't know exactly what the heresy was, although if you read some commentators, they seem to have figured it all out.

But, it would seem that it has something to do with whether or not Jesus Christ was, in fact, God.

And so Paul brings this text to bear to address that very, very issue.

[ 6 : 31 ] Now, either way, whether or not it's a hymn or just simply Paul's writing, it doesn't really matter. Just the same, the focus is the preeminence or supremacy of Jesus Christ. Notice the last part of verse 18, that in everything He might be preeminent, supreme, first in all things.

Paul states this reality elsewhere. Philippians 2, 9-11 is a good example of this. Where he writes, God has highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name that is above every name.

So that the name of Jesus, every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. There is this real thing that's taking place that Jesus is in fact exalted above all things.

Whether we recognize that or not, He is the Lord of all things. So these are weighty matters, weighty truths before us today.

If we rightly understand who Jesus is, we must make some type of response to it. You can't simply know this and not have it change who you are.

[ 7 : 49 ] So how should we consider the truths contained within this text this morning? The Puritan John Owen wrote in his book entitled The Glory of Christ the following.

Listen carefully as I read this to you and I quote, The revelation made of Christ in the blessed gospel is far more excellent, more glorious, more filled with rays of divine wisdom and goodness that the whole creation and the just comprehension of it if attainable can contain or afford.

Without this knowledge, the mind of man priding itself in other inventions and discoveries is wrapped up in darkness and confusion.

This therefore deserves the severest of our thoughts, the best of our meditations, and our utmost diligence in them. For if our future blessedness shall consist in living where He is and beholding His glory, what better preparation can there be for it than a constant previous contemplation of that glory as revealed in the gospel?

That by a view of it we may gradually transform into the same glory. His encouragement is that we ought to be consistently and constantly giving a great deal of attention in our minds to who Jesus is.

[ 9 : 19 ] It is my job as a preacher not to boil down a text for you and to give you some trite little phrase that you can walk away with to access at any given moment.

This is not the job of the preacher of the gospel of Jesus Christ. To set this down before you and simplify it for you in such a way that you could print the saying on a t-shirt or put it on a sticker on the back of your car.

My job as a preacher is to draw you up into who God is. Who Jesus Christ is to us. That you might rightly come to the Scriptures and understand them and how it is that they affect your lives.

And this is the task before us today. That's my job. Your job is to listen and take notes and try to comprehend everything I'm about to say in the next, I hope, 30 minutes.

Right? But let me kind of help you frame up what we're going to do together in this text. I want to show you Christ's preeminence. Why He is preeminent.

[ 10 : 24 ] Why He should be held as supreme. First in all things with four points. Firstly, Jesus Christ is preeminent because He is God. Verses 15 and 19. I'm going to come back to these so don't worry about scribbling now.

Jesus Christ is preeminent because He is God. Secondly, Jesus Christ is preeminent because He is the Lord of the universe. Verses 16 and 17.

Thirdly, Jesus Christ is preeminent because He is the head of the church. Verse 18. And lastly, Jesus Christ is preeminent because of His redemptive work.

We find that in verse 20. So firstly, Jesus Christ is preeminent because He is God. Verse 15, He is the image of the invisible God.

This word for Greek image is icon. It's the word we get icon from in our English language. It means image or likeness.

[ 11 : 24 ] Now the Scriptures refer to man as the icon of God, but we are not perfectly so. Much like a shattered piece of glass returns a poor reflection, because of sin, our image-bearing capacity has been damaged.

There are still some qualities about mankind that are reflective of who God is. But it has been spoiled. It has been altered. But Jesus is both the perfect representation and manifestation of God. A great parallel text is found at the beginning of Hebrews 1. The first part of verse 3 reads, He, being Jesus Christ, is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature.

Christ shines forth God's attributes as the sun gives light and heat to the earth. This is what we go to. This is what we want to see and access.

This is God-made flesh living amongst us. The Word of God. Logos. A manifestation of who He is.

[ 12 : 37 ] Jesus is God. John 1.1 in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God.

He is the icon, the image or likeness of God. Paul proceeds to describe Jesus as the proto... I'm going to mess this up. I wrote it out phonetically so that I wouldn't and I still did.

Prototakis. The firstborn. The firstborn of all creation. Now, while this word can certainly mean chronologically first in a family, born first in that way, it refers primarily to position or to rank.

Now, from the Arians of the early church to the Jehovah's witnesses of our day, those who seek to repudiate the deity of Jesus Christ refer to this phrase.

This is often their go-to phrase. Don't you see? Colossians 1.15 says that Jesus is the firstborn of all creation. This must mean that He was a created thing.

[ 13 : 46 ] He can't possibly be God is the argument they would make. But they fail completely to both understand the Word itself and what it typically means and how it is used in the Scriptures as well as its context.

Look at the rest of our passage for today. They fail to note the following two verses in which Paul presents Jesus as the Lord of the universe. Specifically, verse 17, and He is before all things.

He made all things. He was not created. He is the Creator. Creator. So when Paul describes Jesus as the firstborn, he's simply saying He is preeminent.

He is supreme. He holds the highest position possible in all of the universe. Not created.

He is the Creator. In verse 19, Paul says, for in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.

[ 14 : 56 ] And I love that phrasing that He was ample to the task. God was pleased to manifest Himself in Jesus Christ. Jesus is where all that can be known or experienced of God is to be found.

That is why Jesus was able to say in John 14, 9, whoever has seen me has seen the Father. So Jesus Christ is preeminent because He is God.

Secondly, Jesus Christ is preeminent because He is the Lord of the universe. Because He is the Lord of the universe. 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.

And He is before all things and in Him all things hold together. Jesus Christ is the preeminent creator of all things.

This includes everything. This list that Paul gives to us or that he's accessing from some hymn of the day just includes everything. It means everything.

[ 16 : 09 ] Everything that ever was made was made by Jesus Christ. Everything that we can see and everything that we cannot see were created by Christ for Christ.

Christ. This is such a magnificent thought and it should capture our minds. I know that so many of us process information differently but it's amazing to me to think about the reality that Jesus Christ created all things.

We do some catechizing with our children and I love right now Judah's getting the answer wrong kind of when I say to both of the boys who made you and Cate says God which is the answer that we've taught them to say and Judah says Jesus and I like that answer it's such a good answer Judah knows his Colossians 1:15 through 20 I think rather well both are certainly true answers to the question I like the three year old mind I don't even know if he knows what he's saying to me I'm!

sure he things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made the entire universe created by him and for him in 2012 a picture was released that the Hubble Space Telescope had captured which I just really encourage you to look at this it's amazing which was the farthest ever view into the universe a photo that reveals thousands of galaxies billions of light years away they honed in one particular snapshot of the universe and there's thousands of galaxies billions of light years away if you care to look it up it's called the extreme deep field or XDF and it combines ten years of images of this portion of the sky that the light so faint that they layered and layered and layered and layered these images together to get this very vivid picture of what these galaxies all of that by the power of his word he made all of this everything that you can see and everything that you cannot see

Jesus Christ made Jesus Christ is preeminent as he was before all things verse 17 says and he is before all things Jesus says to the Jews in John 8:58 Jesus said to them truly truly I say to you before Abraham was I am Jesus Christ is eternal eternal in the past and eternal in the future there was never a time in which Jesus Christ did not exist him stating before Abraham was I am as a reference to Exodus 3:14 it's the first time that God gives his name to mankind it's when he meets Moses the burning bush and he tells Moses to go back to Pharaoh and to ask Pharaoh to set free his people right so here's Moses trembling in front of certainly the creator of the universe right in this bush that's burning but not being consumed and he simply wants to know who should

[19:27] I tell him sent me please tell me something that I can tell them! because this whole burning bush thing is not going to make a lot of sense to them verse 14 God said to Moses I am who I am and he said say this to the people of Israel I am has sent me to you you have ever heard the Hebrew name for God Yahweh that's what this is this self existent phrase right you've heard me say many times before!

everything plugs into God he plugs into nothing right he's self existent self generating he has always existed and this makes Christ preeminent first before all things Jesus Christ is preeminent as the sustainer of all things further in verse 17 and in him all things hold together have ever thought about what keeps you in your shape what causes the atoms that make up your body to bond in the way that they bond science gives some explanation to this but certainly not an adequate one what holds Nathan in the shape of Nathan Jesus Christ we talk a lot about the shape I'm in I'd like to be in a different shape sometimes right Hebrews 1:3 again says that Jesus Christ upholds the universe by the word of his power he simply speaks and things happen he says to a planet go in this orbit and because he is the lord of the universe that happens until he says something else swayed by the very power of his word!

only is the universe created by him and set into motion by him but it is sustained by him if he were to cease to exist or decide to quit in his sustaining work all things would cease to exist everything in the universe is made of atoms Do you remember this?

Protons? Electrons?! Neutrons? We learned some things about this in our science class scientists have labored absolutely driven hard over the past century to explain away the existence of God for many they've done an adequate task of that but they have failed to explain how it is that the atom remains in its state they do not know they do not understand why and how a single atom exists the way that it does that the orbits happen that the spacing is just as it should be they cannot explain it in fact they have a phrase for this let me see if I can find it real quick the strong nuclear force it's a mystery the strong nuclear force Carl K. Darrow a physicist cited a book entitled The Atom Speaks in reference to what scientists are calling this strong nuclear force he says and I quote do you grasp what this implies it implies that all the nuclei have no right to be alive at all indeed they should never have been created and if created they should have blown up instantly yet here they all are some inflexible inhibition is holding them relentlessly together the nature of the inhibition is also a secret one thus far reserved by nature herself science can't answer this question but the bible has the strong nuclear force is Jesus Christ and the word of his power so I'll start calling him that the strong nuclear force that is Jesus he holds it all together so he's preeminent because he is God and he is

preeminent because he is the lord of the universe thirdly jesus christ is preeminent because he is the head of the church verse 18 you see how paul's logic is kind of working down hierarchy working down jesus christ is preeminent because he is the head of the church and he is the head of the body verse 18 the church he's the beginning the firstborn from the dead and then the axiomatic statement that in everything he might be preeminent he is the head of the body there are many metaphors in the new testament used to describe the church it's called a family a kingdom a vineyard a flock a building and a bride but none is more helpful in our understanding of its form and function than that of a body made of many parts with jesus christ as the head all of us with our varying gifting meant to work together all underneath the lordship of jesus christ this metaphor helps us to see the church as a living organism inseparably tied together with life and mission by the living christ he controls every part of it he coordinates together the diversity of gifting and ministry he does not merely just save the church but he is the head of the church the great promise of matthew 28 and lo i am with you even to the end of the age this is not our church this is christ's church and we serve him as such paul states that he is the beginning the originator of the church the greek word used there for beginning has a two-fold sense of both source and primacy right that it came from him and that he continues to remain in charge of that things the church emanates from out from him as a result of him being

the source in ephesians 1 4 paul states that god chose us in christ before the foundation of the world that jesus christ is not some plan b right it pains me when people talk about god's original intention and how we got the better of him our power over him and now he's he's brought in the second string well jesus i thought for all eternity you were just going to get to sit on a throne but guess what i've got to send you to earth to redeem my people right the church the way in which god is displaying himself to the world was always his original intent now let that bake your noodle i would encourage you not to do so to not play too much with the tension between god's sovereign purposes in the world and the way in which we choose and act and are held responsible for the things that we do but ephesians 1 4 says that we were chose as the church in christ before the foundation of the world before anything was ever created that was created we were chosen in him mind-blowing amazing amazing truth he is the beginning the originator of the church he is the firstborn from the dead here again we see that word that i butchered earlier so i'm not going to pronounce it again but firstborn of all those who have ever been raised from the dead he is of the highest rank this is what he's saying those of us who have come to life in christ worship christ because he is preeminent so he's preeminent because he's god he's preeminent because he is the lord of the universe he is preeminent because he is the head of the church and fourthly jesus christ is preeminent because of his redemptive work verse 20 says and through him to reconcile to himself all things whether on earth or in heaven making peace by the blood of his cross this phrase reconcile to himself demands our attention should draw us in to consider this idea of reconciliation there are many ways in which our salvation is explained in the scripture ways that we are meant to understand to really get what jesus christ has done on our behalf the bible says that we are justified in christ that prior to christ we stood before god guilty and condemned but instead having placed saving faith in christ we're declared righteous we are redeemed we're described as god's redeemed ones in the scriptures that we before christ stood before god as a slave but we've been granted freedom in him the scriptures say that we are forgiven we once stood before god as a debtor but the debt has been paid and forgotten the bible describes us as adopted we once stood before god as strangers but we have now been made sons with all the rights that come with that but perhaps the richest of these explanations is that of reconciliation reconciliation if we have placed saving faith in christ we have been reconciled to god we once stood before god as his enemies and that should cause us rightly understanding who god is lord of the universe with the holy standard to tremble before him to fear him that we would be enemies of the creator is the thing to be greatly greatly feared that's the bad news that the scripture teaches to us but the good news teaches us that if we place our saving faith in christ

[ 29 : 38 ] we have been made god's friends it's incredible the greek word for reconcile means to change in relationship we were once one thing now we are another thing we've moved in position all together right we've changed in type we are completely different once enemies now friends in romans 5 10 paul says for if we while we were enemies we were reconciled to god by the death of his son much more now that we are reconciled shall we be saved by his life jesus christ became the enemy of god on our behalf he received the punishment that was due us on our behalf god turned his back on him and poured out wrath upon him that was due his enemies that we might be called

his friends we've been reconciled to god if we have believed in christ he has paul goes on to say done this to reconcile all things whether on earth or in heaven so the scope of his reconciliation doesn't rest just with man although i would argue primarily with mankind in genesis 1-3 we see that after the world was created by and for christ that it was very good and then sin entered the scene and began to destroy and rip apart and and alter that world all of that goodness was marred by man's sin i am suffering from pollen this month i don't know if you can join me in that right and every time somebody says like why are we all sneezing so much rather than the answer being pollen my answer lately has been sin it's sin that's causing this to happen to me and all of that will one day be restored will be reconciled the reconciliation of mankind is just one aspect of christ's restorative work there's much debate to be had about how the end of things will come to pass but we do know that they will come to pass that heaven and earth will fade away and be made new what a wonderful blessing that is that someday we will live with christ forever in a new heaven and a new earth there will be work to do there will be no pollen and we will worship him for eternity in that way and he did this by making peace by the blood of his cross this is the means by which this reconciliation happens the shedding of blood for the remission of our sins

Jesus christ became the enemy of god and god justly punished him for being such so that we might be reconciled this is the wonderful promise and truth of the gospel so jesus christ is preeminent because he's god because he's the lord of the universe because he's the head of the church and because of his redemptive work for all these reasons jesus christ is of highest ranking and should be worshipped as such those who have been reconciled by his death on the cross rightly should experience proclaim and display his supremacy it demands of us a response beloved this is not a burdensome task because he is preeminent not merely a man but god himself that we worship we can cast all of our anxieties and fears our doubts our troubles our depression on him there is no situation that escapes his attention or his power there is no circumstance that surprises him or evades providential control he is our confidence in life and death he is the reason we can boldly share the good news of his kingdom he is the reason that we can bring our lives into conformity with his the reality of who jesus is demands our obedience the reality of who jesus is makes sure the promises of god and so in the words of john owen we should set ourselves to a constant previous contemplation of who jesus is i am thankful for a church that holds as precious the word of god this is evidenced in a number of ways but yet we fail in so many ways to value it the way that we ought to to hide it away into our hearts to let it be our constant meditation and the evidencing of this is the way in which we deal with troubles so many troubles and they will come our way and they'll continue to come our way the way that you respond to those troubles gives evidence of what you believe to be true about god right we have all responded in faith to the gospel i hope i'm making some broad assumption of everybody in the room but how readily we turn our gaze away from the gospel right the redemptive work of jesus christ the reality that he is the head of the church that he is the lord of the universe that he himself is god we begin to look for the dumbest solutions to our problems in all cases when i deal with people who are going through tough times in their life and they don't know how to access the truth of god now now hear me we need one another like i need to be reminded of the truth of the gospel right sometime my sin so blinds me right to how good god has been to me in christ that i need people to tell me that this is a thing we ought to be doing to one another preaching the gospel to one another but so often someone is just oh there's a problem that's going on in their life and you simply say how much have you been reading your scripture and the answer is little to none little to none because in this is this picture of who jesus christ is right again draws our minds and hearts up into who he is who we worship who we belong to these little trifling problems that we deal with in our life fade away they're no longer burdensome because we recognize that we

worship the god of the universe holds all things in his sway nothing escapes his attention works all things for good this is the god that we worship so in closing let me remind you of the words of John Owen this therefore deserves the severest of our thoughts the best of our meditations and our utmost diligence in them please join me in prayer