

Colossians 1.15-23, Jesus Is Greatest

This is the focal point in the book of Colossians. Paul has given us his welcome, and now he dives right in. Everything that follows this section points back to it.

It is one of the high points of the New Testament. It is the single greatest piece describing Jesus.

I. Jesus rules creation, v. 15-17 (5 reasons)

1. Paul begins by stating that he is the *image of the invisible God*.

Jesus is, in the flesh, the God whom we cannot see. He is God in the flesh.

We read in Genesis 1, that Adam and Eve were created *in* the image of God. But Jesus is *the* image of God. They were created after his likeness; Jesus is his actual likeness.

We will get to it shortly, but down in v. 19, Paul writes that, “In him all the fullness of God was please to dwell.”

And then in 2.9, “In him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily.”

Paul uses the same words in both of these passages to say the same thing: that the fullness, the completeness, the totality, all of God is in Jesus. Not a part, not a piece, not just certain qualities. All of God.

And no, God is not possessing or embodying a human being. Paul makes it clear in verse 15, Jesus is the *image of the invisible God*. God in the flesh.

2. Not only is the image of the invisible God, he is also *the firstborn of all creation*.

Now, we have to be careful here. We need to understand what Paul means by firstborn. He doesn’t mean that Jesus is the first created thing or being. Because if he is God, then he couldn’t have been created. As we will see in verse 16, “*by him all things were created*.” If all things were created by him, then he couldn’t have been created, because *all things* were created by him! He didn’t create himself.

Throughout this section Paul uses words that designate Jesus’ position in the universe: he is before all things, he is the head, he is the beginning, he is preeminent—he is the firstborn. Jesus is the top dog over all creation—over heaven, over the earth. There is nothing above him.

So why say ‘firstborn’ and not ‘top dog’? Because Paul wants us to understand something: The firstborn son, in first century life, had authority over his father’s estate. He was head of the family. Jesus has authority over the entire estate—all of creation. He is the head of the family, known as the human race.

Jesus is God. Jesus rules over creation. He isn’t a part of creation. He is not the god of the rivers or the god of thunder or the sun god. He is THE God. He is also not a part of creation. He rules over creation.

3. Paul adds to this that Jesus is the Prime Cause in creation: *For by him all things were created...*

I was leading a middle school small group one time and somehow we got off on the topic of creation. One of the students wasn’t sure what he believed and was trying to make sense of the Big Bang theory. So a girl in the group (middle school) spoke up and said, “What caused the bang? There had to be a chemical reaction. What caused the reaction? What caused those chemicals to move so they could react? What created the chemicals to begin with? What created the supposed big rock that everything sprang from? How long did that rock sit there before those chemicals decided to start moving so that they could react?”—this girl was clearly out of our league!

Paul says that *by him all things were created*. John, in the opening of his gospel, says that “*all things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.*”

What was made by him? All things. Everything in heaven, everything on the earth. Everything you can see, and everything you cannot see. Thrones, dominions, rulers, authorities. By the way, these categories speak of those things that you cannot see. Paul uses them in Ephesians 6, when he says that *our battle is not against flesh and blood, but against rulers, authorities, cosmic powers, and spiritual forces*. They do not have to always refer to the evil and demonic, but they do refer to the unseen spiritual world. This means that *by Jesus* the angels were created—the cherubim and seraphim, the angels Michael and Gabriel. The angel who announces the human birth of the baby Jesus was created by the eternal image of the invisible God Jesus.

Although he appeared in human form, Jesus is not simply human being like you and me; since we are created. Although he came from heaven with a message, he is not an angel; since angels are created. Jesus is the uncreated God, the prime cause of creation.

4. Not only by him, but Paul adds to this that *all things were created through him and for him.*

By ‘*through him*’, Paul means that he is the source of everything. Jesus created everything from nothing. There was not already matter existing, which he then formed into the planets. There wasn’t one giant ball of fire that he exploded into billions of stars. There weren’t even molecules that he could press together to make things.

And it was all created *for him*. For his joy, for his good pleasure, for his glory. Psalm 19 begins, “*The heavens declare the glory of God, the skies above proclaim his handiwork.*”

We need to understand that the universe was not created because he was lonely, or to fill some void. But we also were not created simply for his entertainment. We were created for his joy, because what a wonderful thing this all is.

Have you ever seen pictures from the Hubble Telescope? Or personally visited the Grand Canyon? Wow! It truly is glorious. And so it the one who made it all.

5. Finally, in speaking of creation, Paul says in v. 17, *He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*

The word “before” could have a time element to it—meaning that nothing existed before him—but it is really being used to reinforce Paul’s point that Jesus rules over all things. He has created all things, he rules over all things, and he sustains all things. He holds together the molecules that make up our bodies. He makes our hearts beat and our lungs fill with air. He makes water have surface tension.

Jesus Rules Creation

II. Jesus rules salvation, v. 18-20

Paul writes that he is the head of the body, the church. But this is only possible, and is only true, because of what follows. Paul gives us three reasons he is the head of the church.

1. *He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead.*

This is another one of those phrases that places Jesus first, before, above all things. But I think Paul is also suggesting something else. He is literally the beginning of something. By his resurrection, Jesus is the beginning of a new life.

He is the firstborn from the dead, ruling over life and death. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5, “*If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has passed away, behold the new has come.*”

Because of this, he is *preeminent—he is first*—in everything. In all things visible and invisible, in life and death, in everything physical and spiritual, he is first.

2. *In him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell*

At the beginning of this section Paul was speaking of Jesus the creator. Now he is speaking of Jesus our savior. The God-man. Just as he was fully God in heavens for eternity past, he was fully God as he walked the earth in human form.

3. *Through him to reconcile to himself all things*

In him—or in his body—the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. And through him—or through his body—he reconciled all things to himself.

By his sacrifice on the cross, Jesus has dealt with sin. All of creation is under its curse, and by his death he has brought peace. We might not see it right now, but as firstborn from the dead, all brokenness, evil, despair, sadness, death will be no more when Jesus returns.

So, because the fullness of God dwells within him, because he died to reconcile and make peace, and because he was resurrected as the firstborn from the dead, he is the head of the body, the church.

Not you, not me. The church, in a sense, began on his resurrection day. We don’t get to make up what we believe. We don’t get to interpret the Bible however we want to, to fit our desires.

As churches try to figure out how to best navigate getting back together, two questions we need to constantly ask are, “What does it mean to be the church, and how do we best do that in our present context?”

The Bible doesn’t give us all the details and address every issue, but it does give us a framework to work within. And Jesus is at the head.

Now, I have been speaking in generalities in terms of creation and what Jesus has done. I have given the who and what, but not the why.

Who: Jesus

What: He Created and Reconciled

But why?

III. Creation needs saving, v. 21-23

Specifically, as his greatest act in creation, humanity needs saving.

- You — you, me, every person who has ever lived.
- Alienated — separated from God. In our sin, we choose our way instead of God's way.
- Hostile in mind, doing evil deeds — at odds with, enemies of God. In our sin, we don't want God's way.

He has reconciled you

- **How?**

- In his body of flesh — meaning, the sacrifice he made was physical, not spiritual or metaphorical. God became man, bound himself by the limits of this world, experienced hunger, loneliness, and endured the full agony of the cross.
- By his death — again, literal death. He didn't pass out. It wasn't just the Spirit of God inside a human.

- **Why did he do this?**

- In order to present you holy, blameless, above reproach — no longer alienated. No longer hostile. No longer guilty. Free from sin. As we saw last week, worthy of him and his kingdom. Forgiven of all our trespasses and sins. The debt has been forgiven. The guilt has been removed.

So get this picture:

- In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God and the word was God. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth, as he spoke it into existence. When he created man and woman, he looked around and said, "It is very good."

- And then we messed it all up! The first man and woman chose to do things their way, not trusting God. Through their one act, sin entered the world placing a curse on all of creation, and man and woman were cast out of the presence of God.
- Since then we have been trying to find our way back to God—to eternity, paradise, peace with the universe. But we have been trying to do it all on our own. By our own efforts. God sees that this is all hopeless. And even though we messed it up, he's going to fix it up.
- The fullness of God came down as Jesus. To redeem and reconcile, bring forgiveness and peace. His own creation rejected him. John writes in the opening of his gospel, "*He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world did not know him. He came to his own, and his own people did not receive him.*"
- Yet he still died for those who rejected him.
- He created *us*. We rejected *him*. So he died for us to bring us back to him.

BUT, Paul says you must *continue in the faith*.

Jesus did not bring a universal salvation. Yes, he died for the sins of the world, but it is only granted to those who place their faith in Jesus.

AND...

- Continue in the faith — it is not a one time profession and now you're good to go.
- Stable and steadfast — not weak and withering. But Unmoving and Enduring in your faith.
- Not shifting from the hope of the gospel — believing the Good News about Jesus as it has been laid down for 2,000 years. Not adjusting it to fit the culture or to make it more palatable.

Have you done that? Are you doing that?

Application Points

1. If Christ is the image of God, and the fullness of God dwells in him, then nothing but the fullness of God in Jesus will fill or satisfy us.
2. If all the things in heaven and earth, visible and invisible—thrones, powers, rulers, authorities—were created by him, then he can bring them to nothing; meaning we have nothing to fear.
3. If Christ reconciled and redeemed us while we were alienated and hostile, then there is nothing else we can do other than continue in faithful obedience based on the new life we have received. And to add to that, if you didn't work to earn it, then you can't work to lose it.
4. If Christ can sustain the entire universe, then he can sustain individual believers.
5. Christ is the head of the church. Not you or me.
6. If Christ created the world and died for the sins of the world, then salvation is for all people throughout the world. Jesus is not white, or American. If he created all of humanity, then he died for all of humanity. Therefore, the gospel must go out to all of humanity. Including all of Coffee County.