

April 6, 2008

Colossians 1:15-16

Good morning. I hope you are glad that you are here today. I am. Because the verses we are going to begin looking at in Colossians this morning are some of if not the main reasons why I wanted us to study this book.

Dr. Martyn Lloyd Jones once explained that Christianity “is essentially something that concerns the person of the Lord Jesus Christ...Christianity is not primarily a teaching, nor a philosophy, nor even a way of life...it is before all, a relationship to a person.”

The whole message of the New Testament is to say certain things about Him. Everything it says is in terms of Him. It starts with Him – the gospel of Jesus Christ. It makes the amazing claim that He was none other than the Son of God, that He came into the world to save it, that there is no heaven apart from Him. And after making that claim, it goes on to say the most important question that we have to face is the question of Jesus Christ – our life in this world here and now, the whole meaning of death, our life through eternity – everything depends solely on our answer to the question, “Who is Jesus Christ?”

And of all the statements in the Bible, none are more significant in response to that question than what we find in Colossians chapter 1. Look with me if you will at verses 15-18.

“He...” – now before we go any further understand that this “he” is referring back to verse 13 where Paul says that God has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. This “he” is that “Son” – Jesus Christ – the King of the Kingdom, the Redeemer of men, the Forgiver of sins. So verse 15 – “Jesus is the...”

We’re going to look at these verses over the next couple of weeks and just celebrate Jesus together. Today let’s just look at verses 15 & 16. Paul says that Jesus is the image of the invisible God.

Now it doesn’t take a long study of the Bible to discover that God is invisible. The OT says that no man has seen God, so does John chapter 1. In 1 Timothy Paul says that God is the invisible God. Jesus says that God is Spirit. God is invisible – we get that – but that invisible God has been made visible. There is one who is the **image – the eikon in Greek – the image of God**. That word used to mean a dye or a stamp and came to be used to describe **an exact replica, a precise copy, a perfect REPRESENTATION. God is invisible but God has become manifest and He has done so in the PERSON of Jesus Christ.**

Now don’t forget the context of those to whom Paul is writing. The heresy that was causing problems for the Colossian believers was a teaching that matter – creation – was evil and the spirit was good. And in that, God, who is spirit, is good – which meant two things – God could not create and God couldn’t become a man because God couldn’t touch evil matter nor make evil matter.

So what happened was that once there was only God, but then God began to beget or create what they called emanations – these lesser beings – basically these angels – one after another. And at first they were good, but as you got down the ladder, they went from good to bad and one of the bad ones down far removed from God created matter and the earth and everything else as evil.

And Jesus was just one of those emanations way up the line while they were still good. What it amounted to was that Jesus was just a good angel. And so in this one phrase and the one after it – that “Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created...” – You’ve got to love this. Paul makes it clear that Jesus is God. He is God in the flesh and He is the Creator. And that alone takes one great swipe and wipes out their whole position.

And notice the phrase here – “the image of the invisible God.” He isn’t saying “in the image of God” – that’s Genesis 1:27 talking about man. We were created in the image of God, but Jesus is God’s image. There’s a huge difference there. He is the replica – He is the copy of God – He is the

exact representation. Which is why Jesus says in **John 14:9** “If you’ve seen me, you’ve seen the Father.” Awesome.

And then Paul says that this same Jesus is the “**firstborn over all creation.**” Now that sounds like a step backwards doesn’t it? That right here it says that Jesus was created. There was God. Then God created Jesus first. In fact, that’s what a Jehovah’s Witness will tell you this verse means. But that completely misses the point. This is a statement of position, not of time. And this idea is huge in this passage, we’ll see something like it at least three other times in these verses.

What does “firstborn” mean? The word is **prototokos in Greek and it refers to POSITION. It refers to rank. It refers to the right of authority or primacy, not chronology. The firstborn is the one who has the rights of INHERITANCE.**

Remember the birth of Jacob & Esau. Esau was born first, but Jacob was the prototokos. He got the blessing. In **Psalm 89:27** God explains this – He says “I will make him my firstborn” and then he defines what that means, “the most exalted of the kings of the earth.” What is a firstborn? The highest – the elevated.

So Paul says that Jesus is the firstborn over all creation. **Hebrews 1** says the same thing in different words when it says that “in these last days [God] has spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things...” The inheritance goes to Christ.

Folks that’s what the book of Revelation is all about. Christ taking his inheritance. In chapter 5 we see God on the throne with a scroll in His hand – basically the title deed to the earth – sealed with seven seals. And John says in verse 2, “I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, ‘Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?’”

Who is the heir to take over the world? Who has the right to control the earth?

And then John says, “I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside.”

Where is the firstborn? Where is the prototokos? Where is the heir?

And then John says in verse 5 “Then one of the elders said to me, ‘Do not weep! See the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.’ Then I saw a Lamb, looking like it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne...[and verse 7] He came and took the scroll from the right hand of Him who sat on the throne.”

Here is Christ taking the title deed to earth as the prototokos to reign as King of Kings and from here through chapter 19 is the takeover of the earth until He finally reigns in chapter 20.

This verse in Colossians is not about the TIMING of Jesus – it is about the position of Jesus – the highest one – the ranking one – and the inheriting one over all creation.

And then Paul hammers home this truth. He says in verse 16, that “For by Him all things were created, things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible...” Now that’s pretty clear. Hard to mess that up. Jesus made everything. And we get that – we say He’s creator all the time. We praise Him for the mountains and sunsets and trees and babies and us and all that we see, but I know at least for me, I don’t really get that it is more than that very often. I mean that Jesus created the earth *and* the heavens – everything that’s out there. And when I think about space – about the universe - two things about the universe blow me away – the vastness and the bigness. Here’s what I mean.

We know light travels at 186,000 miles per second. And in case you’re wondering, you aren’t going to find that on your speedometer. That’s fast. So when light leaves the sun, it’s already made it past Mercury & Venus & then it gets to us. And let’s just say we could hitch a ride. We can jump on a sunbeam and go along for the ride at 186,000 miles per second.

In 4 minutes and 21 seconds we’d hit Mars – 34 million miles away.

Next is Jupiter – only 367 million miles away – that’d take us about 35 minutes. And then we go on cause we’re making such good time.

Saturn is next – an hour and 11 seconds – 790 million miles away.

Then Uranus a billion miles away then Neptune 3 billion miles away. And when we get way out there, we're still barely on the porch! I mean we've opened the screen door and taken a simple step out and there we are. Here's what I mean, the nearest star is 20 billion miles away. The North Star – that shines so bright you'd think it would be close to us – no – it's 400 billion miles away. And that's just one star out of the billions of stars out there and that's just in our galaxy. That's vastness. That blows me away. And Paul simply says "By Him all things were created, things in heaven and on earth..."

Speaking of earth – we know earth is pretty big, right? I mean it's a planet – there are 6 billion of us on this thing. You know if you were to bore a hole in the sun, you could pour in 1,200,000 earths and still have room for 4,300,000 moons to fill up the gaps? The diameter of the sun is 385,000 miles – but the next closest star, Alpha Centari, is 5 times larger than the sun! But here's where it just gets stupid.

If you go 880 quadrillion miles away, you find a star called Beetlegeuse. And Beetlegeuse is 2 times the size of the earth's orbit around the sun! Two times the orbit – not the earth – not the sun – the orbit of the earth around the sun.

I know we're all lost in the numbers right now so I want you to watch this clip that Louie Giglio used to try and explain the greatness not just of creation – but of our God. Watch this. VIDEO CLIP

When you see this I don't know what happens to you, but I know what happens to me. A shrinking feeling comes over me & it's not a bad shrinking feeling – it's a good one. **See sin has a way of SHRINKING God down & puffing us up in our own estimation – but just a glance into the universe Jesus has made RESIZES everything in a heartbeat.**

And when that happens – as that happens even today - you realize we are worshipping an unrivaled, uncontested God of all kinds of might and power and glory and awe and that there is none like Him in all of creation.

We are not worshipping some little teeny tiny God. We are the teeny tiny ones – in this massive universe that God has made.

And we ask who made all that and science tries to tell us "well there were these gases and they exploded and boom – the bigness and vastness of space and everything else." What? Once there were these gases? No. Once there was a God and his name is Jesus Christ.

So Paul says, "for by him all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether **thrones or powers or rulers or authorities.**"

That last set of words **most commentators understand to be describing different kinds or ranks of angels.** Thrones, powers, rulers, authorities. And in the context of the heresy at Colossae, that makes sense. Whatever angels there are out there – they were created and they were created by Jesus. He isn't one of them, He made them. And He is over them. **Philippians 2** tells us that every knee will bow in heaven, on earth, and under the earth – man, angels, whatever's out there – we're all going to bow. **1 Peter 3:22** says it again that Jesus Christ "has gone into heaven and is at God's right hand-- with angels, authorities and powers in submission to him."

Jesus is not some angel created by God. Jesus is GOD and Jesus is creator. And that's what Paul says again at the end of verse 16. Look at it – "all things were created by Him."

And you know what's mindblowing about that? Not just what God made, but how He did it. You know how God did it? You want to know how God created the vastness and the bigness of space – of all there is?

He spoke it.

Listen to **Psalms 33:6**: “By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; their starry host by the breath of his mouth.” Whooooooooooew. And the stars and the galaxies and all that is came to be. He is the star breather. That'll change your prayer life. You know most of my prayers are about giving God advice. Advising God. Counseling God. Correcting God. Suggesting things to God. Drawing diagrams for God. Reviewing things with God. Directing God. No. Back in **Psalm 33:8-9**: “Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the people of the world revere Him. For He spoke and it came to be; He commanded and it stood firm.”

And you know what's really cool about this? Genesis tells us God spoke and it came to be. Psalms 33 we just saw says that by the word of the Lord were the heavens made. And then John 1:14 tells us that “in the beginning was the Word and the Word was with God and the Word was God” and then he goes and says “the Word became flesh and dwelt among us” – Jesus Christ. Which is exactly why Paul can write that all things were created by Him. It's beautiful.

And then here's the last and maybe most important point today “all things were created by Him [and what?] and for Him.”

People look at all we talked about today – all that is out there – all that is around us and they wonder “what's the point? Why are we here? Why does the universe exist?”

And if you start with us then that's a great question. If the universe exists as a place for me and you to live – for humanity to exist – then yeah, it does seem like an awful waste of space. But if it's not about me. If it isn't about us. If the primary purpose of the universe isn't to be a home for us, if the primary purpose of the universe is to declare the glory of the God who made it, then it's not too big, it's just about the right size.

But that question isn't just about the universe. The why are we here – what's the purpose of life – what's the meaning of life issue becomes personal real fast. Take a look at this video clip from The Truth Project. VIDEO CLIP

Do you see why what Paul writes at the end of verse 16 is so crucial and so timely even today? All things have been created by Him and for Him. All that is, is for Him. He's the point. This world – this universe – this existence has a goal. And it is Christ's glory.

You want to know why you're here? You want to know the purpose of the vapor that is your life in the stream of human history? You want to know the meaning of your life? Right here. You – I – we were created for Jesus.

And until we stop trying to make our story center stage and instead realize we are a part of his story, then we are doomed to frustration and pain and confusion. But **when we see ourselves as a part of a LARGER plan – a larger story – our purpose as a part of the purpose of God – the glory of God – then every moment has meaning – every decision has purpose – every action is important – because we were created for and we LIVE for the King – the firstborn over all creation.**

Folks the goal of all this and my prayer this morning is that Christ would be great in your eyes. That we as believers would love Christ with a sincere love. Not just come to church, go through the motions, sing our little songs, outward show of whatever – but that we would love Jesus with a supreme love – fervent and constant. And this is why. Because Jesus is the image of the invisible

God – the firstborn over all creation. Any teaching – any idea – any thought that minimizes the importance of Jesus is a lie because He's the creator of the universe – He's the point of the universe – and as a result, our lives should be all about Him.

Let's pray that that would true. **JESUS, show us your glory and help it change our lives today.**