

One Savior: Christ Alone

Five to One: How the Reformation

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Our Father in heaven, we are small but we think we're a big deal, we are desperately needy and we think that we have it all together, we are anxious to portray ourselves as people who are fine and we need our world wrecked tonight and rebuilt by the Holy Spirit around Christ, a sure foundation, the cornerstone. Behold, this is your doing and it is marvelous in our eyes. Make Jesus beautiful to us we pray in his mighty name. Amen.

Colossians 1 beginning at verse 15. This is God's word.

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 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. 17 And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 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. 19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

The grass withers and the flowers fall but the word of the living God will stand forever and ever. Amen.

I read an excerpt from a sermon this week that cited a book by the name of "The 100" by an astrophysicist named Michael Hart, and he ranked the 100 most influential people of all time and the usual suspects were on the list, scientists, philosophers, artists, statesmen, and of course if you're a Christian and you read a book like that and you look over a list like that, your first question is, "What about Jesus?" And I don't think Hart's a Christian, I don't know for sure, but when it came to Jesus he said, "There are some really interesting things in his personality," and ranked him #3 behind Mohammad and Sir Isaac Newton, who ironically was a Christian and thought Jesus was supreme. Third place. The bronze medal Savior.

Paul wants us to put to death such thinking tonight and that's why he wrote this book because he was writing to a group of Gentile churches in Colossae that had begun to

drink deeply from the wells of false teaching and he sets the one for the entire letter tonight in these verses which a lot of scholars believe were an ancient hymn, they read like a hymn, they've got a very sectioned kind of feel to them, as we'll see in a moment, but Paul used that word there in verse 18 that he wants us to see for the rest of this epistle and the theme of Colossians is the preeminency of Jesus, because these Colossian Christians had become enamored with this teaching that said Jesus may have been like a really great created being, he may have been a bronze medal being even, but certainly not God in the flesh, and certainly not the preeminent Savior and Paul wants us and wanted them to have nothing to do with such thinking. And what we'll see tonight is that Christ alone is sufficient for us in all things because he is the Creator of all things and the Redeemer of his people. He's sufficient for all things, he alone because he is the Creator of all things and the Redeemer of his people and we'll look at this text under three headings. In the first place, the Son is the Creator in verses 15 and 16. In the second place, the Son has always existed in verse 17. And then in verses 18 through 20, the Son is the Savior.

First of all then, the Son is the Creator. Look with me there again at verses 15 and 16. "He 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 as Paul sets the tone here, he's transitioning from verse 14, he's prayed for the Colossians and in that prayer he's told us something about Jesus and now he amplifies that and he begins in the strongest possible terms, he says he's the image of the invisible God. That theme of image-bearing runs straight through from Genesis 1 to the end of the Bible, but Paul doesn't want us to compare Adam and Christ in the same way as Adam was the image of God, as we are the image of God, he's going to tell us that Jesus is the image of God in a completely different way, and as he opens with these words, what he wants us to do is see that they function as a foundation for our understanding of who Jesus is. That language of image means he's the exact likeness of God. It doesn't mean that he shares God's image in a creaturely way like Adam did or like we did, he's saying, "No, no, no, he's the exact representation of God. If we were to ask Paul what is God like, he would say to us God is Christ-like. That's what God is like.

And when he uses this language of firstborn, that can trip us up. Cults have read this verse and say, "See, Jesus is created. He's firstborn." But that language is very Jewish. All over the place in the Old Testament God calls Israel his firstborn son, he calls David in Psalm 89 his firstborn, it is a term that has to do with first in rank, not in time. He's not saying Jesus was created first, he's saying do you want to know what it means to be the exact likeness of God, it means he is over all of creation, as we'll see in just a second. But that's what that language of firstborn means and in this first section of this teaching here, Paul is connecting Jesus with creation and he's saying that before there's anything else, there's the Father and the Son, and he's going to go on to tell us the Holy Spirit, all three of them together, three persons in one God, and now he wants us to focus our attention on Jesus as the one who is first over everything in creation.

Stop and think for a moment how shocking it would have been for a former first century rabbi to write those words because his whole life, Paul's whole life, the people who he's writing to who grew up Jewish, their whole lives lived under the pagan pantheistic rule of Rome where there's a ton of different gods and you burn incense to the emperor and there's this one little outpost of these despised people who had spent so much time enslaved, who kept looking at Roman religion and saying, "You're wrong. There's one God. Only one God." Creation was not always there, in fact, Roman religion didn't even have a concept of creation, and you had the Jewish people, their life-blood was there's one God and how do you know he's the real God? Because he made everything. He's the Creator. And so when Paul starts using this language, he's doing something that had never been done in the history of the Jewish people, never until you get to the New Testament, saying, "This Creator God of Israel, Yahweh, the covenant God of the Old Testament became one of us in the person of Jesus of Nazareth." And that's why he uses this language here to continue his point in verse 15. Did you count how many times he says "all things"? And when he keeps repeating that phrase in relationship to Jesus, he wants to make it absolutely clear to us and leave no wiggle-room who he is. And so he gives us a reason. How do we know he's the image and likeness of God and the firstborn of all creation? Because "by him all things were created."

So there's two different levels of being in the Bible. There's the Creator, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and he exists separate from that creation but relates to it by his covenant and by his providential governance of that creation. Then there's this lower circle that's creation. Two different kinds of being. Every other world religion, there's just one big circle of being, the circle of life, because "Lion King" is coming out in a few weeks and that's wrong. It doesn't mean you can't see the "Lion King." I've had people say, "You've ruined Disney for me forever." Not trying to do that but what we've got to see is that for Paul here, he's saying there's angels, there's principalities, there's authorities, there's powers, there's rulers, there's governors, there's all manner of created being and they're on this side and Jesus and the Father and the Spirit are on this side. And Jesus is not simply another created being, he's not even just a really good or perfect man, he's not a man who was born and then was adopted to be God's Son, he's not a man who had existed before the world but created by the Father, he is God and that is what Paul is trying to burn into our minds right here under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, "all things were created through him and for him."

Then he's telling us here that if Jesus is the Creator, you cannot ignore him. You see, deity never allows for indifference. You can't just say you like his personality and give him the bronze. You can't just say he's a really good teacher and I like his morals. He doesn't want you to say that about him and leave it there. Yes, he was a great teacher. Yes, his moral teaching is the greatest the world has ever seen, better than the Koran, better than the book of Mormon, better than the Jehovah's Witnesses, better than any other cult or other religion the world's ever seen. Yes, it's that but if you leave him there, you've missed him altogether because Paul wants us to see that the option of just thinking of Jesus as the best of our perfections, or the best of our highest aspirations, or the noblest yearnings of humanity is not an option. Everything's made by him. He's the Creator. He was there before it all began, the Father, the Son and the Spirit, all three of them together

before there's anything else. He's there when the world was spoken into existence. He's there when Adam and Eve were in the garden. He's there before even galaxies existed. God wasn't lonely, didn't need to make us, didn't need to make the world, had no lack, didn't have to do it, and did it and did it through Christ and for Christ.

Don't miss it. Don't be indifferent. That's what Paul wants us to see. And then in the second place, he says to amplify this point in verse 17 that the Son has always existed, "he is before all things, and in him all things hold together." This is the doctrine of Christ's pre-existence. It's what we alluded to just a moment ago. This is what every false religion denies, every one of them, that Jesus is God like the Father is God, like the Spirit is God. He's always been there, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, one God, three persons. Paul makes it so clear here.

He is before all things. There's that line again. He keeps drawing that line for us. There's all things then there's Jesus. There's all things that remain, then there's Jesus. There's all things that were created, then there's Jesus. He is before them all, and I love this phrase, and in him all things hold together. Look at that wood on your bench that you're sitting on made up of molecules, the reason it's holding you up right now, the reason this wood doesn't dissolve underneath my fingertips, the reason that chemistry works, the reason that astrophysics works, the reason that physics works, the reason that the laws of gravity work, the reason why you and I don't disintegrate on the spot is because Jesus is holding all things together. Everything in the universe from the furthest reaches that the Hubble Space Telescope can transport back to us, to the space station wandering around the cosmos, to the 400 billion galaxies out there, all of them are held together by the one whose hands worked at a carpenter's bench in Nazareth two millennia ago.

Stop and think about that. Stop and think about Jesus, apprenticed to his father, earthly father, Joseph, helping him build houses, mud and clay, and hands that needed to be washed after a day's work were the hands of the one who made up hands, who created our hands to move in such a way that the best of our robotics are pale comparisons to the wonder of just a human finger. And he holds that together. And the laws of the cosmos which have yielded such advances in our technology, the laws of physics without which none of what we enjoy today would be possible, our laws because Jesus holds them together, as one commentator put it, he keeps the cosmos from becoming chaos. He keeps the cosmos from becoming chaos and that's why this verse functions as something as a bridge between the two sections of this, the two main sections of this teaching. There's the Son as Creator and Paul wants to amplify that in verse 17 and says he's always been there and he's providentially governing all things, and he's holding all things together, and then in the last place there, turns our attention to the Son of God's work as our Redeemer, as our Savior.

Look with me there at verses 18 through 20, "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." And there's that language of firstborn again, the first in rank, and now Paul

has connected and brought everything full circle. The Son is worthy of our honor and worship because he's preeminent in creation but he's worthy and he's preeminent most especially for Paul now because of his work for our redemption, for our salvation. And that's why he begins there talking about again firstborn. He is the head of the church. This is why when Luther and Calvin and Zwingli and all of the rest of the Reformers read a verse like this and heard the pope saying he's the head of the church, they said, "No way. Not the head of the church. Can't change the Lord's Prayer. Doesn't have supreme authority over all the visible church of Christ." This is also why they said human wisdom, which is what we're enamored with today, human reason that says, "We can solve it all, we can penetrate the deepest mysteries, just give us enough time, government funds and scientists and stay with us." And the Reformers looked at a claim like that in the 16th century and said, "No," and we need to look at in the 21st century and say, "No, he's the head of the church. Human reason is not the head of the church. It's a good servant but a poor master. Not the head of the church in terms of one pastor or one teacher. Jesus is the head of the church. He's the one who's in charge. He's the King of his people and he does not share his throne with anyone else."

And friends, as we think about that, we also have to stop and say that we live in a time where people are very suspicious of authority figures, and we all need to sympathize with that because there's been a lot of hurt and wrong done by those in authority, particularly in the church. I remember hearing Derek preach one of the first times, probably 15 years ago, and he quoted a friend of his who said, "I used to want to see, you know, all this stuff happen in my ministry, and after 40 years of ministry," he said, "I just want to make it through without a massive moral failure." And I was in my 20's and I thought, "What? No, man, let's get after it. Let's get the kingdom going here." Now as I do this a little bit longer, I know exactly what he meant. I know exactly what he meant because I see my own weakness, I see the weakness of people around me who are in authority, I see the weakness of people who have fallen and I go, "I am not different in kind from them but only in degree," and that's a frightening realization, isn't it?

It's frightening to realize that all of us stand one decision away from disaster and particularly for those who hold an office of authority and particularly spiritual authority, it is so easy to abuse people with that. And if we think as Protestants that it was bad with the Roman Catholic sex abuse scandal, our house is out of order and it will get bad and further revelations will happen and it breaks my heart every time they do. And if you've been wounded by someone in authority, here's all you need to know from this text according to Paul: Jesus is the only King who's always gentle and never harsh with his subjects, and he's the only King who dies for rebels. He's the only authority figure you'll ever meet who never exercises it wrongly. That's why you can trust him as the head of the church. That's why I'm really thankful he is because if it's left up to me, to other pastors, to elders, and let me just say here not simply because I am employed by this church, but we have good elders here, folks, and if you've ever been in a church with bad elders, you'll really appreciate how good the elders are here. But it's not their church, it's not my church, it's not Dr. Thomas' church, it's not Dr. Mohler's church, it's not First Presbyterian Church's church, it's Jesus' church. He's the King and the head. He's the firstborn from the dead.

And now Paul wants us to go even deeper with him as he says, "How's Jesus do this? How does he exercise this authority? What does it mean for us in our daily lives? He's come back from the dead. He is going to make all things new in himself one day." That's the meaning of this last verse here, "reconcile to himself all things in heaven and on earth." It doesn't mean everybody's going to be saved, it means that no part of the cosmos will be left untouched by his work. Boy, that's really good news in a world of sex trafficking, in a world of abuse, in a world where everything seems to be tottering on the edge to know that one day all things are going to be made right.

Everything will be touched by his work and that's because as verse 19 tells us, as the Savior of his people he's the one in whom "all the fullness of God dwells bodily." He's going to repeat that in 2:9 of this epistle. And why Paul does that and puts all this together for us is because he wants us to see that the great hope of the Old Testament is realized for every one of us tonight, and accessible for every one of us tonight. And the great hope of the Old Testament was God dwelling with his people, "I will be their God. They shall be my people and I will dwell among them." He did it in a tent and in a temple, and then he comes in Christ to dwell among us. And once again, there's the strongest possible statement of deity, "all the fullness of God pleased to dwell in Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ."

And all things made new through him, how? Peace for us how? Friends, have you realized if you're not a Christian here tonight that you're at war with God? You might be a really nice person, in fact, I don't think I've met anybody in Columbia who's been a jerk, like we're all kind of nice. In the Southern culture we're nice people, we're just friendly and that's wonderful and I love how God has done that in this culture, but if you're just kind of nice and you don't love Jesus, you're his enemy. That's why Paul uses this language of peace because we're at war with him, and we're at war because we want our own sovereignty, we want to be our own saviors, we don't want to say, "I need the blood of the eternal Son of God shed for me in order to have any hope." Our pride hates that. Our flesh recoils against it. We want nothing to do with it and here Paul says, "You were an enemy but if you love Jesus and you'd only love him if he first loves you. If you've come to him, if your faith is in him, then God is no longer your enemy. Everybody's at peace."

Peace with God. Friends, that's going to be really precious to everybody sitting in here one day. When there is no more Lord's Day to keep, no more worship to attend and death comes knocking, if there's one thing I want to know before I cross the river to the other side, I want to know I'm at peace with God. And Paul says we can all know that and we can all know God through Christ and we can have a relationship with God unlike anything we've ever had.

So let me close by saying this. What we need to see here is that Jesus is sufficient and I think if you were to put an emoji over modern life, even though we live in the most materially prosperous age ever, if you live in Columbia tonight, it doesn't matter if you're super-rich, middle class, poor, you live better than 98% of the world's population who

ever lived. And now I just read an article this week in the Atlantic about how our houses in 1975, the average square footage was 1,500 square feet, now it's 2,500, and guess what the author found, it was a Christian writing? No one's any happier. They've got bigger houses, better medicine, more money, more leisure, more vacations, more pleasure, and we're empty and we have full bellies and hollow souls. And if you were to put an emoji over modern life, it would be like meh. That's how we feel and there's no reason for us to feel that way. Every other world society that has lived is going to look at us and go, "We like had to walk four miles for a glass of water. Our life expectancy was about 25 to 30 years."

But here we live unsatisfied, depressed, anxious, fearful, and Jesus comes to us and says, "I have something so much better for you and it's me, and I'm sufficient to meet your needs. I'm sufficient to meet your deepest needs when you don't realize them, when you think you have other needs. I'm sufficient to meet your need of being indifferent to me. I don't want you indifferent to me. I'm going to bring you to the place where I'm attractive to you, more attractive than sin." I think the greatest injustice we do to Jesus is just to be indifferent, just to be indifferent to the one who has such love for sinners like us. Don't you love that title that he tells us of himself, that he's a friend of sinners? And this friends of sinners pursues indifferent people like us. He's sufficient for all of your needs. You can pray to him as the Creator who is the one who said to you, "When you look out and see the world around you and then you think of the richest man who ever lived, Solomon," he says, "look at a dandelion growing out there in a weed patch and think of that dandelion and say that dandelion is better than anything Solomon could have ever asked for, and if God provides for dandelions and birds and animals, he'll provide for you."

And the one who spoke those words is the one who can answer those prayers. He's sufficient to meet your material needs and he's sufficient to meet your spiritual needs, and he's the only one who will walk with you to the other side. He's the only Advocate you'll want when you come to that day when there's no more hiding, no more pretending, no more masks, no more wealth, no more pedigrees, no more education, nothing to protect you from the anxious and glaring gaze of God as his wrath burns against sin and the only hope you have between you and him is the Mediator, Christ Jesus. Amen.

That's who we need and when that gaze comes upon you and pierces you, you will want him, and you can know him now. Isn't that glorious? You can know him. You can speak to the Creator. You can close your eyes tonight and say, "O Jesus, I want to talk to you," and he's going to listen every time. Every time. And he's going to answer prayer and he's going to fill you with the Spirit when you come to him, and he's going to empower you and enable you to live in a world that is dying and lost. And we look at the brokenness and it breaks our hearts and we just want it sometimes to be over with because we're overcome by how bad it can be and he says, "I'm sufficient to walk you through that."

I think what I'm trying to say was said so much better by a minister names Dr. S. M. Lockridge. He was a leader in the Civil Rights movement, amazing preacher and minister, and he preached a sermon once called "That's My King." I encourage you to go and watch it. It's on YouTube, everywhere you can see it. And he finishes the sermon this

way talking about the supremacy of Christ. "He's the key to knowledge. He's the wellspring of wisdom. He's the doorway of deliverance. He's the pathway of peace. He's the roadway of righteousness. He's the highway of holiness. He's the gateway of glory. Do you know him? His life is matchless. His goodness is limitless. His mercy is everlasting. His love never changes. His word is enough. His grace is sufficient. His reign is righteousness. His yoke is easy and his burden is light. He's indescribable. He's incomprehensible. He's invincible. He's irresistible. You can't get him out of your mind. You can't get him off your hand. You can't outlive him and you can't live without him. The Pharisees couldn't stand him but they found out they couldn't stop him. Pilate couldn't find any fault in him. Herod couldn't kill him. Death couldn't handle him and the grave couldn't handle him. Yes, that's our King, Christ alone."

Let's pray.

Our God in heaven, help us, help us to be enamored with Jesus. May your word make him beautiful and believable to us and may we walk in the light of his glory and grace this week. We pray in his name.