

One theological college hosted an annual picnic, to which they invited one of the greatest minds to lecture in the theological education center. One year, the guest lecturer was a liberal professor, who spoke for two and one-half hours claiming the resurrection of Jesus was false.

The professor quoted scholar after scholar and book after book, and concluded that since there was no such thing as the historical resurrection, the religious tradition of the church was groundless, emotional mumbo-jumbo, because it was based on a relationship with a risen Jesus, who, in fact, never rose from the dead in any literal sense. He then asked if there were any questions.

After about 30 seconds, an old white-haired preacher stood up in the back of the auditorium.

*“Doctor Professor, I got one question”, as all eyes turned toward him. He reached into his sack lunch and pulled out an apple and began eating it. CRUNCH, MUNCH, “My question is a simple question” CRUNCH, MUNCH... “Now, I ain’t never read them books you read” ... CRUNCH, MUNCH... “and I can’t recite the Scriptures in the original Hebrew and Greek” ... CRUNCH, MUNCH... “and I don’t know nothin’ about those scholars” ... CRUNCH, MUNCH... He finished the apple. “All I wanna know is this: **This apple I just ate – was it bitter or sweet?**”*

The professor paused for a moment and then answered: “I cannot possibly answer that question, for I haven’t tasted your apple.”

The old preacher dropped the core of his apple into his paper bag, looked up at the professor and said calmly, “Neither have you tasted my Jesus.”

The others in attendance could not contain themselves. The auditorium erupted with applause and cheers, and the professor promptly left the stage.

It’s all about Jesus, this morning. For the last two weeks, we have been studying the Apostle Paul’s letter to this young congregation in Colossae who were being threatened by false teachers that had slithered into the area and were trying to wiggle their way into the church. These false teachers were offering their own fusion of religious beliefs to these new believers who seeking knowledge – challenging the foundational truths about Jesus and the message of the Gospel. Ultimately, these false teachers rejected the deity of Jesus, claiming He was not God and they said His payment for sin on the cross was not enough. They had to do more to earn their salvation.

Well, Paul had something to say to counter this false teaching, and in the next portion of his letter, Paul begins to explain who Jesus is.

So, if you have your Bible turn to **Colossians 1** and I am going to read **verses 15-20** to get us started. Paul says – speaking of Jesus,

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. ¹⁸ He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. ¹⁹ For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, ²⁰ and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.

One day, Jesus was with His disciples on the way to Caesarea Philippi and He asked them, **“Who do people say that I am?”** Well, some of the disciples spoke up and claimed the common people were saying that He was John the Baptist who was raised from the dead after King Herod had executed him – that’s what King Herod believed. Others thought He was the prophet Elijah, who didn’t die but was taken up to heaven in a whirlwind and there was a notion that he would reappear before the Messiah came. Then there were those who thought that Jesus might be one of the other prophets.

Although the common people had the wrong idea about Jesus, at least their ideas were positive – for the common people loved Jesus, they were fascinated and amazed by Him, even though they did not fully know Him.

So, Jesus was told what the common people were thinking, then Jesus takes this one step further. Since the disciples have been with Him for over two years now, He asks them one of the most important questions that can ever be asked – **“But who do you say that I am?”** In other words, *I know what others are thinking about Me, but what do you believe?*

This was a question for the disciples, in many respects, it’s the question for the Colossians, and some 2000 years later, it most certainly is a question for us. **Who is Jesus?** Well, in our passage, Paul really lays it out, and beginning with **verse 15**, he speaks first about Jesus as the Creator. Paul says,

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶ For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him.

Let's stop there. We are told way back in **Genesis** that we are made in the image of God, but here Paul tells us that Jesus is the image of God. The Greek word for **image** is *eikon* – it's where we get our English word for *icon*, and it means Jesus is the exact likeness of God. He is the perfect manifestation of the invisible God. Jesus made the invisible God – visible, or we could just as well say if this helps, “*If the invisible God were to look in the mirror, Jesus would be the visible reflection.*” Jesus is the mirror image of God. Seeing Jesus is seeing God, and Jesus said as much when He told Philip “*He who has seen Me has seen the Father.*”

God had a desire to make Himself known to us, to enter into a relationship with us, and so at the right time, God took on flesh and dwelt among us in the Person of Jesus Christ, and in doing so, the invisible and the unknowable God became visible and known – possessing all the nature and the characteristics of God to their fullest extent because Jesus is God.

As God, Jesus is the Creator – the **firstborn of all creation**. Now, that word *firstborn* has created some confusion, and let me say right off the bat that it does not mean Jesus was the first to be created by God. He was not created. In the Greek, that word *firstborn* is *prototokos* and in this context it refers to *rank* or *importance*, and in that sense, firstborn is a title – it's not about timing.

For example, King David was called the firstborn in **Psalm 89** but we know that David was the youngest of eight brothers. So, it was a title of importance given to David, and so it is with Jesus. Jesus is the *firstborn* – a title of preeminence – He's supreme over all creation – in fact, He preexisted before creation, and we know this because in **verse 16** we are told that Jesus created all things – everything, and if He created everything, **then how could He be created? How could He create Himself?** So, logic holds, Jesus is supreme over all creation for by Him all things were created.

If you noticed, the words “**all things**” appear several times throughout this passage, so it would seem that under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Paul wants us to understand that *all things* mean just that – *all things*, and to avoid any confusion, Paul still points out this includes all things in heaven and on earth, all

things visible and invisible, and he also includes “thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities,” which are references to supernatural beings such as angels. In short, nothing – from subatomic particles to massive galaxies exists apart from the Lord’s creative power.

Jesus is supreme over all creation because all creation was created **by Him, through Him and for Him**. Jesus is the source of all things – He planned it, He produced it, and it was for His purpose.

Jesus created all things, but not only that, He sustains all things. Look at **verse 17**.

He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together.

Jesus is before all things – He has always been, He has always existed before creation, and according to Paul, all things – all of creation are sustained by Jesus. He’s the one who is doing it – even now. Everything that exists, exists because of Him and continues to exist. He is holding it all together, and if it was not for Jesus, everything would fall apart and cease to exist.

There’s an interesting law of science called Coulomb’s Law of Electricity which very simply says “like charges repel”. If you have a magnet in your right hand and a magnet in your left hand, and you push the positive ends towards each other, they push away. So, opposite charges attract; like charges repel. But here’s a great mystery: in the nucleus of the atom, protons are packed together which are all positive-charged particles. What keeps these positively-charged protons from repelling each other like the magnets? What holds them together? What keeps the negatively-charged electrons from invading the nucleus and attaching to the positively-charged protons?

Science doesn’t know, but here’s what they say. “There is a strong force that holds the nucleus together, overpowering the repelling action of the protons and the attracting force of the electrons to invade the nucleus.” That’s all they got. It’s a strong invisible force – a mystery to the scientists, but to us – it’s not mystery at all, in fact, the force has a name. It is Jesus who holds all things together.

Jesus was before all things, before planets, before galaxies, before matter and energy, before time and space – as far back as our minds can imagine – God the Son was already co-eternally existing with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit, and He holds all things together even now.

So, Jesus is God – the Creator of all things, the Sustainer of all things, and He is the head over His brand-new creation at that time – the church. Let's continue beginning with **verse 18**.

¹⁸ He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. ¹⁹ For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, ²⁰ and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.

The church is described in many ways, and here it is described as the **body**. The body is a living organism that is organized. It has many members which are joined together, with different roles and various functions, and yet it is one body, and the body has a **head** – and that's Jesus. Jesus is the head of the church – like the head of a river, He is the "*origin*" of the church, the church is dependent upon Him, and He has the authority to control every aspect of it. Jesus began the church – it's His new creation, He is the source of life for the church, and He is sovereign over it.

Paul tells us that Jesus is the beginning – the starting point of everything – even the **firstborn from the dead**. There's that word "*firstborn*" again – and in this context – the resurrection of Jesus was the first of its kind – it's supreme over all other resurrections for without His resurrection, there could be no resurrection for believers to follow.

Now, the Bible tells us of many people who were raised from the dead both in the Old and the New Testament, in fact, even Jesus raised a few from the dead, **so how is Jesus the *firstborn* from among the dead?** Well, here's the answer. All of the people who were raised from the dead before the resurrection of Jesus had one thing in common – they all eventually died again.

Jesus is the first to be raised from the dead with an indestructible glorified body and because Jesus died for our sins and God raised Him from the dead – never to die again, He is the *firstborn from the dead* and He has **first place in everything**.

We know that God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

You know, when I read passages like this, I have to ask myself – *Is that true of me? Is Jesus first place in my life?* I mean I say it – we say it all the time, but is it really true – does it really show? Listen we all have priorities – for all of us, some things are more important than others – it has to be that way, but with that said, God is to be given the top priority over everything and everyone else in our lives. Now, we could spend all day sorting this out – describing what that might look like to give Jesus first place, but I will simply ask, *“Are you truly invested in growing in your relationship with the Lord?”* If the answer is yes, what does that look like? *“Are you striving to follow Him – not my will but Yours be done – or are you just going through the motions?”*

Jesus is to have first place in everything because He is first place in everything. He is the Creator, He is the Sustainer who holds everything together, He is the Head of the church, He is supreme over all things, and beginning with **verse 19**, Paul tells us why,

¹⁹ For it was the Father’s good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, ²⁰ and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.

It was God’s joy to fully dwell – to settle down and be at home in Jesus. All that God is – was emptied into Jesus, and if you want to see God, just take a good look at Jesus.

We are told the work of salvation in Christ was the joyous work of God. God took on human skin, He came into the midst of His own creation, and in joy, He reconciled us to Himself through the blood of Jesus.

On January 26, 2005, at 6:03AM, a southbound Metrolink commuter train collided with a sport utility vehicle that had been abandoned on the tracks in Glendale, CA. The train derailed and stuck another train, causing eleven deaths and over 200 injuries. There was one story coming out of that accident that gripped Southern California. It involved a man who was on that train. Normally, he later said, he would not have taken the train, but he was called in early to work at an aerospace plant in Burbank. He was sitting upstairs in the double-decker car, asleep, when the wreck occurred. He recalled waking up to find himself trapped under the debris and covered with blood. He realized he had been badly injured, and with the blood oozing from his own body, he used his finger to write a note to his family, telling them that he loved them.

In essence, that's what Jesus did. With His own blood, shed on a cross, Jesus bore our sin and told us that He loved us. Jesus took the full wrath of God, He took our place – the place of judgment we deserved, and for those who trust Jesus as their Lord and Savior – finally there is **peace** – the sin barrier that once separated us from God is removed once and for all. Without Jesus, there is no other way to make peace with God.

Now beginning with **verse 21**, Paul starts to get a little personal. He says,

²¹ And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, ²² yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach — ²³ if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.

And although you – he's getting personal – you were once enemies of God – you were once hostile with God – you were indifferent towards Him, and your wicked works showed it, **yet** – *that's another little big word* – yet, Jesus in His physical body through His death reconciled you to Himself. He did it. Jesus carried out the transaction so that He might personally present you as **holy** and **blameless** and **beyond reproach**.

That's how God sees us in Christ. He will look down on us and see us without a spot or a blemish – beyond a single accusation because it was all settled 2000 years ago on a cross. That is God's joyous work of salvation.

Okay, let's look at that last verse – **verse 23**, and you will notice it begins with the word "**if**" – another little big word. Normally, we might see the word "*if*" as if there is a *catch* to what Paul is saying or as if there is some *doubt* about one's right standing with God, but actually that's not it at all. What Paul is saying is this, "*If you are truly a child of God, if you are really saved – then I am sure you will continue in the faith and nothing will move you away from the gospel.*"

That's what Paul is saying – it's a positive assumption, it's an expression of confidence in these Colossian believers that they will continue in the faith, and if I might add for the sake of clarification – we are not saved by continuing in the faith, instead we will continue in the faith because we are saved – that's Paul's point – he's confident about it – continuing in the faith is proof of our genuine salvation,

and if a person does not continue in the faith, then they were really never in the faith in the first place. Hopefully, that makes sense. Yes, there are times that we will waiver in our faith, and yes, there are times when our faith grows dim – that goes for all of us at times, but true faith – gospel faith in Jesus never ceases.

Lastly, Paul concludes this portion with his words, *“Me, even me, the guy who once hated Jesus and His movement with a passion – me, of all people, I was made a minister of this very hope that we have in Jesus.”*

There is an old recipe for a rabbit stew that starts out like this – *“First catch the rabbit.”* That puts first things first, and that’s the message Paul is driving home. Without Christ, nothing else matters. Christ must be first in our lives.

Source Material:

The Bible Knowledge Commentary, New Testament – Walvoord & Zuck
John F. MacArthur Jr., The MacArthur Bible Commentary (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2005)
Enduring Word – David Guzik
Daryl Ellis, “Commentary on the Book of Colossians,” in Galatians through Colossians, ed. Robert E. Picirilli, First Edition., The Randall House Bible Commentary (Nashville, TN: Randall House Publications, 1988).
Warren W. Wiersbe, The Bible Exposition Commentary, vol. 2 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1996).
Charles R. Swindoll, Philippians, Colossians, Philemon, vol. 9, Swindoll’s Living Insights New Testament Commentary (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 2017).
R. Scott Pace, “Colossians,” in Exalting Jesus in Colossians and Philemon, ed. David Platt, Daniel L. Akin, and Tony Merida, Christ-Centered Exposition Commentary (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2021).
Max Anders, Galatians-Colossians, vol. 8, Holman New Testament Commentary (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1999).
Colossians 1 – Joe Focht, PhillyResources
Through the Word, Colossians 1 – Kris Langham