

# Resolved to Live – As a Witness for Jesus

“...about all that Jesus began to do and teach” (Acts 1:1).

## No One Like Him

Colossians 1:15-23

*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. 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.*

As some of you might have noticed; my sermon text and title does not match that of what is in your bulletin. There is a reason for that. In a discussion I had with one of the men this week; the subject of people truly knowing and understanding who God is came up. There are many people who know about God; yet, as is evident from so many broken lives; so much lack of interest and investment in the things of God; two things are clear. First, too many people do not truly know God and know Him via an intimate and life-changing relationship with His Son Jesus Christ. And second, for those of us who would claim to have such an intimate relationship with God through Christ, we are not doing a very good job of making God known; of presenting to people, Jesus. Of course, this message dovetails with what we have been studying in the book of Acts because chapter after chapter we find the early church, Peter and Paul constantly presenting Christ.

If anyone would know God; He must know Christ. We are familiar with the statement of Jesus made in John 14:6 which says, **“I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.”** That is a most exclusive claim; not made by the wisdom of men, but coming to us from the mouth of God. You might remember the response of one of the disciples, Philip, who said immediately after this statement of Jesus, **“Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.”** (John 14:8). Do you remember the reply from Jesus? He said, **“Have I been so long with you, and yet you have not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father...”** (John 14:9). So, there is no other way to know, to see, or to understand God the Father except through God the Son. Thus, we learn that if anyone would be right with God, he must be right with Christ.

And so, it was upon my heart to break away from Acts for this week and present to you Jesus, for there is no one like Him; there is no other way to a relationship with God the Father; there is no other source or resource of truth; and there is no other path to meaningful, as well as everlasting life except through Jesus. To present this Jesus to you, I turn your attention to Colossians 1:15-23. Before we look at this text however, let me set some context. In the first few verses of chapter one, Paul wrote about the gospel bearing fruit and growing and the church

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bearing fruit and growing. We want to see this church bearing fruit and growing, not merely in numbers of people, but in faithful disciples; followers and learners of Christ who are making more faithful followers and learners of Jesus Christ.

Let me tell you that I regard Paul's letter to the Colossians as one of the most thoroughly *Christ-centered* books in the Bible. Paul purpose or goal in this letter to the Colossians is to reveal the *supremacy of Jesus Christ*, the importance of the gospel, and our duty as God's people to share the good news of Jesus Christ. All of this will be seen this morning because our text speaks much on Christ being highly exalted and the importance of believing the gospel, the good news of Jesus Christ.

We do not know exactly what it was that prompted Paul to write this letter. We know that there were some false teachers who by their teachings were diminishing the significance of Christ. Paul set out to correct this false teaching and exalt Jesus Christ and then to give believers the very reason why all of creation exists. We exist to bring glory to the only Way to God, the only name by which we can be reconciled to God, and the very Author of creation itself – the Lord Jesus Christ. The two verses just before our text, verses thirteen and fourteen, speak of God delivering us from the darkness of sin and transferring us to the kingdom of His beloved Son, Jesus Christ. Through Jesus, we have been rescued from sin. Through Jesus, we have been adopted into God's family.

With all this said, Paul begins this next section of the letter writing about the *supremacy of Jesus Christ*. For those of you that do not know this, verses thirteen through twenty are considered to be an early Christian hymn that recounts the themes of Christ and creation, Christ and the new creation, and Christ and our reconciliation. These three things will serve as our outline in a moment. But in these verses, Paul extols the supremacy of Christ in relation to both all things created and to all things related to our salvation. Let me list these Christ-exalting praises and as I do, note the sense of the supremacy by Paul's use of the word “all”.

- Jesus is the firstborn of *all creation* (v. 15)
- *All things* were created by Him (v. 16)
- *All things* were created through Him and for Him (v. 16)
- He was before *all things* (v. 17)
- In Him *all things* hold together (v. 17)
- He is first in *everything* [all things] (v. 18)
- All the fullness of God dwells in Him (v. 19)
- He reconciled *all things* (v. 19)
- The Gospel is proclaimed in *all creation* (v. 23)

Paul could not make it any plainer. Christ is supreme in all things. Let me take the rest of our time now to show you Christ and His supremacy by use of this hymn.

## I. The Supremacy of Christ in Creation (15-17)

*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.*

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The first part of this hymn declares that Jesus is the Lord, the maker and upholder of all things in the universe. Paul wrote that Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God. God the Son, God who became flesh, became the visible representation of the immortal, invisible, and the almighty God. Jesus has the same essence of being as God the Father in heaven. This should not be confused as mankind being made in the image of God. While God made mankind in His image, mankind is vastly different from our almighty Creator. But Jesus is Immanuel, God with Us, God in the flesh, God who came to earth and pitched His tent in human flesh. He is the visible representation of His invisible heavenly Father. *Jesus is God*. This fact is confirmed by the writer of Hebrews as well as the Apostle John. In John 1:14 we learn that Jesus is “the Word [who] became flesh and dwelt [literally tabernacled – that is “pitched His tent”] among us.”

There is more. For Jesus is also the firstborn of all creation. At first glance, this may seem as though Paul is saying Jesus had an origin. Groups like the Jehovah’s Witnesses take it this way; that there was a time when Jesus did not exist. To be sure, Jesus was born of the Virgin Mary. We will celebrate His human birth in a couple of months at Christmas. But it would be entirely incorrect to think that Paul was stating that Jesus had an origin or was somehow created. It is wrong unscriptural to think of the Son as anything other than existing eternally with the Father and the Holy Spirit, in the Godhead – Father, Son and Holy Spirit, three Persons but one God.

In the Old Testament, a firstborn son would be the principal heir of an estate, which is still true for many cultures today. What Paul wrote here about Jesus as being the firstborn of all creation was like the rights and privileges of a firstborn son, the son of a king who would inherit the kingdom. This is what Psalm 89 means when speaking of King David saying, **“I also shall make him My firstborn, The highest of the kings of the earth.”** God the Father gave this honor to Jesus Christ not because He is the oldest son in the family, but because He is the only begotten, the unique and beloved Son of the Father. There is no one like Him.

Paul goes on to say that it was by Jesus that all things were created. Jesus did not come into existence when he was born of the Virgin Mary. On the contrary, Jesus was the very *agent of creation* through whom God made everything. Jesus could not be the first thing created since he created **“all things”** without exception. Paul went on to clarify some of the things that were created by Jesus; things in the heavens and on earth; things visible and invisible; thrones, dominions, rulers, and authorities.

Jesus created all these things. But not only is Jesus the *agent of creation*, He is also the *reason for creation*. Paul wrote that everything was both created **by Him** and **for Him**. The idea of all things being created for Him means that it is for His honor and praise. Everything exists for Jesus – the mountains, the seas, the land, the church, you and me – we all exist to bring Him glory. How are you doing at this task? Do you know Jesus well enough to bring Him glory? If not, why not?

But there is one more aspect of the supremacy of Christ in creation that Paul mentions. Notice at the end of verse 17 that it is Jesus who holds or sustains all things’ **“in Him all things hold together.”** The point is this; since creation itself exists because of and for Jesus; and because it is Jesus and He sustains it, holds it together; He must be fully God; God to be praised; God to be glorified. This is why there is no one like Jesus. But there is more:



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## II. The Supremacy of Christ in the New Creation (18-20)

*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 first part of this hymn declares Jesus as our Creator God. The second part declares Him to be our Savior. After Paul made clear statements revealing the divinity of Jesus, he then speaks of Jesus' role and relationship with His redeemed creation. In verse eighteen, one of my favorite verses, Paul wrote:

***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.***

Beloved, this theme of Jesus being all in all is at the heart of the gospel. In 1 Corinthians 12 we read how the church is the Body of Christ and in Ephesians 5 we read how Jesus is the Head of this body. Here in Colossians we read that Christ is the head of the church. Jesus is the leader of the church; He is the coach of this team; the captain of this army. But He is more than all this; for He is the very reason the church exists. We, as the church, exist because Jesus Christ died for it. No one else died for the church, only Jesus did. This means we belong to Him. His “headship” over the church also implies His role in sustaining of keeping the church. Jesus gives life to us by His Holy Spirit. He seals us, protects us and guards us by His Holy Spirit.

We have already seen were Paul stated that all creation is a result of Jesus Christ. Creation, however, is broken. It has been infected with a disease – a sin disease. Now we see that Jesus is not only the *agent of creation*, but He is also the *agent of the new creation* – of the redeemed. The event that marked the beginning of this new creation was Jesus' resurrection from the dead. In verse eighteen, Paul calls Jesus ***“the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place [preeminence] in everything.”*** This is a reference to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. His resurrection marked the beginning of the new creation, a new era prophesied in the Old Testament. He was the first to rise from the dead never to die again; and because of His resurrection, His new creation, those who believe in Him and place their trust in His work on the cross, will also rise from the grave. Isn't that good news?

Paul then reminds his readers in verse 19 that it is through Jesus that God reconciled all things to Himself, ***“having made peace through the blood of His cross.”*** It is through Jesus' incarnation (His becoming flesh and dwelling among us) and through His atoning death (paying the price and penalty our sin deserved) that God's righteousness is satisfied and peace between God and man is restored. As the ***“Prince of Peace”*** (Isaiah 9:6), Jesus will ultimately crush all rebellion against God. For believers, this means reconciliation to (being made right with) God. It means restoring the broken relationship that Adam and Eve initiated in the Garden of Eden. This is why Jesus is so utterly necessary for us. Without Him, we live in rebellion to God. We have the wrath of God hovering over us like a bad storm. But with Christ, we have peace and reconciliation, and the basis for this peace is His blood on the cross. The cross of Christ and His subsequent resurrection is the pivotal point in human history. Because of Jesus' work, God's corrupted creation has been re-created into a new order. Thus Paul would tell the Corinthians in 2 Corinthians 5:17-20...

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**17 Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come. 18 Now all these things are from God, who reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, 19 namely, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and He has committed to us the word of reconciliation. 20 Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were making an appeal through us; we beg you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God.**

We are ambassadors of Christ's supremacy, that through Him, through faith in Him, we are made right with God. There is no one like Jesus. This brings us to the third and final consideration. We see the supremacy of Christ in creation; in the re-creation and finally...

### III. The Supremacy of Christ in Reconciliation (21-23)

*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.*

In these final verses of the hymn, we find the meaning of this reconciliation. Here Paul gives us a contrast between our lives before knowing Christ and then after knowing Him. This was a message Paul believed the Colossians needed to be reminded and I believe it is a message the church needs to hear today. Our lives before knowing Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior are marked by the very things we see there in verse 21, alienation, hostility and being **“engaged in evil deeds.”**

Beloved, this describes the condition of every person before he or she repents of sin and turns to Christ. We are all alienated (strangers) from God. This is what sin does; it breaks our relationship with God. Paul Tripp describes sin as “antisocial” – and it is. The first social relationship sin destroys is the one we need with God. And so, just like parents and children who may be alienated by bad choices, by selfishness, or a lack of love for one another, sin destroys our relationship with God. Scripture declares that we are enemies of God (Romans 5:10). We have hostile thoughts (not wanting to do things God's way) and evil desires (doing things that are opposed to God). We do not want what is good and pleasing to God, but we desire what is evil, and we act upon those thoughts. We do things to displease God and actually one another. These bad actions are an outflowing of our sinful desires. Jesus declared that it is not what goes into a man that defiles him, but what comes out of his heart. That is the condition of everyone without Christ and it is not a pretty picture.

But, there is hope. Jesus has reconciled (made peace for) us by His death. Jesus Christ was born, in order to die for us, so that we can have life and a restored relationship with God. While we were once alienated to God, we are now reconciled to Him by the death of His Son. This is available to anyone who believes in Jesus, who repents of his or her sin, and places his or her trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior. But there is more. Our salvation, believing in Jesus Christ, has a purpose. To be sure it reconciles us to God; it restores our broken relationship with Him. But God did not *just* bring us peace at the cost of His Son's life. Salvation through Jesus Christ is so much more. This is what we find in verse 22:



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**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 —**

Beloved, God does simply want a restored relationship with us. He wants to re-create a people of His own choosing. God wants to present us, the church, holy and blameless and beyond reproach. Can you imagine? Not one flaw; not one ungodly inclination. God does not want just any kind of people. He desires to have a particular kind of people – a holy people, a set apart people. A people that reflect His character and goodness. Jesus reconciled us and is now working in our lives in order to present us holy and blameless to His Father.

This brings us to verse 23, which, if not read in context, may lead some to think that there is a condition to be met in order to keep your salvation. Is there something you need to do or can do in order to remain saved? To be sure, we must come to Christ in faith and believe the work He did on the cross and this is *sufficient* to save us. We have to believe that. Now we read that we have this salvation if we **“continue in faith, firmly established and steadfast and not moved away from the hope of the gospel.”**

Paul's expectation, underscore this, his expectation is that the Colossians had this saving faith. Saving faith is a persevering faith. Scripture declares that those whom God draws to Jesus will come to Jesus and He will never cast them out (John 6:37). In the letter to the Romans, Paul wrote that nothing will **“separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”** (Romans 8:39) Salvation is not based on your works, but solely on the work of Christ on the cross. Jesus paid it all. And the point Paul was making in verse 23 is that this is the kind of faith God gives to His people. Not a wishy-washy, sometimes I will be a Christian, sometimes I will not kind of faith. But a faith that longs to be like Jesus and longs for the day when he will be like Jesus. God's salvation is complete, it is finished and this is good news.

And so, do you know this Jesus; the Jesus who created all things, including you; the Jesus who recreates and redirects all things; and this Jesus who reconciles those who believe in Him, in His work, to God? Have you responded in faith, in trust, to this Jesus? Have you given up on trying to save yourself, thinking you can do it without God? Have you turned to the only One Who can reconcile you to God? Have you? There is only one name in all of creation by which we can be saved (Acts 4:12), and His name is Jesus Christ. The good news of Jesus Christ has been proclaimed in all creation. God has revealed His immeasurable love for us and His plan to redeem His creation. It is as simple as turning from ourselves and turning to Jesus Christ. Have you done that? And if you have, will you share this news with others? May it be so to the glory of God and the exaltation of Jesus Christ!

*Soli Deo Gloria*

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