

ALL THAT IS EVER NEEDED**Colossians 1:15-23****(Read Colossians 1:15-23)**

Intro: Take a look at the quote by A. T. Robertson on the cover of our worship folder this morning. It says, *The permanence of the universe rests . . . on Christ far more than on gravity. It is a Christ-centric universe.* It's a good way of saying what Paul is saying here in this text, Jesus Christ is, and always has been, and always will be, ALL THAT IS EVER NEEDED. It is for that reason that, in the estimation of many of those who study it, this is the most important passage in the letter to the Colossians.

We saw last week that Paul was addressing several things here and the foremost was the fledgling heresy known as Gnosticism. It was in its formative stages but already it was obvious that it was making inroads in the Church and Christ Followers needed to know then, as we need to know now: We need to know what we believe. This is why Barclay says, *It is one of the facts of the human mind that a man thinks only as much as he has to. It is not until a man finds his faith opposed and attacked that he really begins to think out its implications. It is not until the Church is confronted with some dangerous heresy that she begins to realize the riches of orthodoxy. It is characteristic of Christianity that it can always produce new riches to meet a new situation.* This is why Colossians is such a rich study and we can learn much from it. It is also important in a day when we find so much of what we believe and have always held dear, attacked on a regular basis.

I attended the Ashland Public Library Board of Trustees meeting on Thursday night because of my concern about some very inappropriate books that had previously been easily accessible there for children far too young to peruse them without parental presence and guidance. This issue has been the subject of four meetings and I'm sure that most of you are aware of it. The reasoning given by those in support of the accessibility of the books was, of course, contrary to my thinking and that of about half of the crowd. The other half of the crowd held placards that stood against the banning of books and censorship – which, by the way, is not what we are seeking. One person marched back and forth across the room with a small placard on a 4 or 5 foot long stick held high in the air that proclaimed “Ban the bible!” One person stood and read a statement from “clergy” in Ashland which certainly didn't represent what this clergy person believes and he even brought the Bible into his argument. It was then that I was reminded that Christians need to know what the Bible teaches and what Jesus would do in a world that is very confused. It's not too late, fortunately we aren't singing along with Joni Mitchell, *You don't know what you got till it's gone.* Not yet anyway.

Paul says, look to Jesus. In order to put it into context we need to go back and pick up a couple verses from last week, where, referring to God the Father, he says, *He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.* Colossians 1:13-15

Notice how . . .

We clearly see God the Father in Christ the Son

- Going back to Genesis 1, where at Creation God said, *Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.”* Genesis 1:26, we know that humanity is in God's image. And then God became man in Jesus Christ. And Christ, being the image of the invisible God makes it possible for us to have the visible picture of God. That way the invisible becomes visible to man. And here is another key: the image of God relates not to his physical manifestation as much as it is to his moral nature.
- This is very important to note because Paul points out that not only is Christ the visible picture of God, he was there WITH God at Creation because he IS God.
The idea of Creation and Christ's involvement in it is an aggressive response to the teaching of Gnosticism which held that God was not the Creator. They taught that creation was brought about by some lesser god. Gnosticism, like Mormonism and so many other present day cults, insisted that Jesus was not at all unique. Paul's mission was to make it very clear to the Colossians that Jesus is utterly unique and that in him is the complete picture of God.
- When verse 16 says that *all things were created through him and for him* it shows that he wasn't just an interested bystander or a go-between in creation. No! Instead he was right there with God, because he is God, carrying out his purpose in creation.

- But, before we go further . . .

What about this “firstborn of all creation” thing?

- It’s simply this: which, by the way, would have been clearer to those who read Paul’s letter: In the culture Paul was writing to, to be referred to as firstborn means he is in the most honored position. He wasn’t actually born first since he always was. He is eternal because he is God the Son and one with, and in community with, God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. To be referred to as firstborn means that he is the one that is at the right hand of God.
- A bit ago I referred to the Mormons. Let me pick on them again since this is probably one of the many places where they misinterpreted the Bible and one of the reasons they are a cult and anything but Christian. The Mormons take the firstborn of all creation reference in verse 15 quite literally. You see, in their teaching everyone is on the way to being gods. According to them, Jesus has simply had a long head start on the rest of us as he works his way towards godhood. His advantage is we will never catch up, because he’s the firstborn. I respectfully say to all Mormons, and to Joseph Smith who wrote it down in the first place, that that’s hogwash. Christ being the firstborn is simply that he is God the Son and he is supreme to, rather than being born before, others.
- Not only that, everything was created in him and by him and it is this which shows him to be in God the Son with God the Father. And as such . . .

Jesus Christ is the Glue that Holds Everything Together

- Archibald Hunter writes, “Christ exists, as God exists, prior in time and dignity to all things. Paul’s last assertion here is that the unity in the order of the universe are not accidental; they are due to Christ. The universe owes its coherence to him, and because of him holds together.”
- Christ is preeminent. What does that mean? Well, the Oxford Dictionary defines it this way, “pre-em-i-nent: adjective; surpassing all others; very distinguished in some way.” Merriam-Webster adds this, “having paramount rank, dignity, or importance : OUTSTANDING, SUPREME”
- We hear Christians who sound more like Chicken Little as they fuss and fret and weep and throw their hands in the air in resignation as they mourn the demise of the Church and Christianity. And by the way, I know how they feel. I’ve often found myself wondering where this world is going and why I’m in this handbasket. But that always happens to us when we forgot who is in charge. We need to remember this:
*This is my Father’s world:
 O let me ne’er forget
 That though the wrong seems oft so strong,
 God is the Ruler yet.
 This is my Father’s world:
 Why should my heart be sad?
 The Lord is King: let the heavens ring!
 God reigns; let earth be glad!*
- That is what preeminent means. Jesus is the glue holding his creation together with the strongest of glues. He IS. That’s the New Testament equivalent of I AM.
- Finally . . .

Jesus Christ is the Reconciliation of All Things

- Jesus came to reconcile everything there is by the blood of his cross to God and to himself. We know that, right? We do, but let’s review it again.
- Reconciliation is necessary because humanity in its natural state through the fall of Adam and Eve, is in revolt against God, and at enmity and outright hostility against him. I saw this in full view in that crowd at the Library meeting the other night and it broke my heart. The temptation is to get mad, but what is really needed is a broken heart for the rebellious sons and daughters who need Jesus. So instead of getting mad, we need to get sad and then do something to turn that sadness to joy. But, I’m a little ahead of myself . . .
- The answer is in Jesus Christ, the Lord of the universe. He is Christ the Lord of the Church and we are his instruments of reconciliation. Hunter says, "*The issue was, and still is, crucial. If Christ is to be truly the Savior of the World, the Christian must be sure not only that Christ is big enough for the task assigned*

him, but that what he has done is all that is needed for the world's redeeming.” Paul is sure of that. And we must be too. If we are to be faithful to the Word of God, we need Christ. He is a gentle Savior, yes. But He is King and he is the victor. Let me ask, how big is your Jesus? How big is your God?

Conclusion: Paul writes, *And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him.* Colossians 1:21-22. We are a forgiven people. Yes, he is preparing to present us holy and blameless. A holy people means to be set apart for God. Doing his bidding and sharing the Good News.

Paul finishes out our passage with this, . . . *if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.* Colossians 1:23 Donald Guthrie says this in response, “*This moving passage is concluded by a condition - the need for stability. Firmness of faith will be evidence of the reality of the reconciliation. Not shifting from the hope of the Gospel is another challenge to those tempted to fall for false teaching. The apostle considers it to be unnecessary to define Gospel any further except to say it is that which had been preached, not only to them, but to every creature under heaven, a phrase which shows that Paul is dwelling on the possibilities rather than actualities.*” I pray for us that it always is the actuality that we are standing firm on the Gospel and in holiness and in being ministers of the reconciliation of Jesus Christ who is all that we ever needed. Amen.