

Jesus Is Preeminent

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Date: 03 May 2026

Preacher: Elliott Lytle

[0 : 00] So today, we're going to continue in our series from the book of Colossians. We're going to be in chapter 1 still if you've got your Bibles or it'll be on the screen behind me.

And we're kind of still in the opening here. And last week we saw how Paul in opening this letter longs for and prays for this church to be filled with wisdom.

And to bear fruit and to embrace what they already have in God's kingdom and to pray for what they yet need to be filled with. And then at the end of that passage, he makes sure to remind them that their entrance into this kingdom of God is only and alone because of God's son Jesus.

And now today, Paul is going to spend the next few verses in the letter to the Colossians ensuring that this church knows who Jesus really is.

Because it appears both from the letter and from some stuff we know about this church and this time period that the church at Colossae had been drifting into and falling prey to some really bad ideas about who Jesus was and what he means.

[1 : 12] You know, the truth is, I don't think I could be a Christian without Jesus. I know, radical, right?

Like a person who calls himself a Christian is really into Jesus. I get it, right? What I mean by that is I am not enamored with like the Christian moral code outside of Jesus.

I mean anyone who's taken any time to study history and philosophy and the religions of this world and literary ideas that explore the human condition, you quickly start to understand the limitations of those pursuits.

Like you find the cracks, the places where the arguments and the searches for meaning and the purpose that these philosophies give start to break down.

And just in truth, the places in life where the suffering of life and the reality of death show up, they often render these lofty thoughts and pronouncements somewhat impotent.

[2 : 23] Because whether it's a creed or a set of morals or a code of honor or religious ritual, when life gets real, there's not much that can offer.

And there's almost always something inside the philosophy itself that you can use to deconstruct it or that can drive you into cynicism or despair.

I think we feel this real time in our sort of post-modern American moment, in which I would say we're in a lot of ways what you might call a Christ-haunted people, to coin an old phrase.

We're a people that, although all the data and the surveys suggest we're moving farther and farther from organized religion, we still seem to have this sneaking suspicion that we're more than just flesh and blood.

Like just, you know, I'm a sack of carbon and water. I'm a complex chemical equation. Like it just doesn't feel like it makes, it doesn't feel like it explains it.

[3 : 31] And behind all that, we're still a people like all peoples of the world that has a truth problem. And we're a people that has a guilt problem. We're a people that have a meaning problem that we can't solve.

And all around us, we're also a people that are surrounded by the images of Christianity as a religion, by the cultural and ethical vestiges of Christian thought in our society, but also, I would propose, a people who live largely without Christ.

And it doesn't work. Creeds, morals, codes, ethics, beliefs, religions, I find them all wanting.

Fraudulent. Nonsensical. Unless they find their foundation in the real person of the real Jesus.

And this is what Paul wants this church back then to know, and I believe it's what God wants our church in our time today to know.

[4 : 43] Jesus is the center of it all, and Jesus is what we really need. So let's pick up the text in Colossians chapter 1 verse 15.

It says this, He, speaking of Jesus, 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 He is before all things. And in Him all things hold together. 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. This is God's word to us.

[5 : 48] Now Paul knows when he's writing this church, one of the errors he's facing in the beliefs that were infiltrating the Colossian church related to who Jesus was, had to do a lot with His importance and His centrality.

And so what he really wants to do in the beginning of this letter is make sure they know that Jesus is central to everything. He is the answer. You know, when I was thinking about this, it's kind of jokingly like, you know, if you grew up in church or if you've ever been a kid in a kid's ministry or like in a Sunday school, one of the things you kind of quickly learn from that is like if you're not, you know, paying attention or your mind's wandering or like the teacher just asks you a question that you don't know the answer to, just say Jesus.

Like if you just say Jesus, you got like some kind of shot at getting it right. And then if the teacher does say something like, well, Jesus isn't the answer, you're like, really? Is Jesus not the answer?

Like you kind of got him in a trap.

Right? You just say Jesus. But in a lot of ways, that's what Paul wants to do. And not just the answer is Jesus.

He wants to use these verses to tell us several things about Jesus. And the first thing he wants you to know is that Jesus is preeminent. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

[7 : 14] You know, that word rendered firstborn here doesn't mean that Jesus was created or he is the first of created things. We're going to see in coming verses that Jesus and God are one and that Jesus is in fact the one doing the creating.

But that word firstborn here signifies priority. He's alluding to something they would know well in the culture of the ancient Near East where the firstborn is afforded rights and privileges that are not due to other offspring.

It means he is the representation of the father. He manages the state. And in fact, you can see that in throughout Scripture, there's instances where the status of firstborn is given to someone who's not actually the oldest child, which means the title is not about birth order, but rank.

The firstborn possessed the inheritance and then the leadership. And in verse 18, he goes on to even say that he is preeminent.

He is first. And then Paul kind of hammers this home with this next idea by making sure that you know not only is Jesus preeminent, but also that Jesus has no rival.

[8 : 33] 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.

One thing the Bible shows really clearly is that Jesus is every bit of man, but he is not like any other man who has ever been.

One of the reasons I said at the beginning I couldn't be a Christian without Jesus is also because I find Jesus to be the most compelling human in all of history.

And though there are certainly in the vast pages of history all kinds of religious leaders and thought leaders and prophets and gurus and wise people throughout the centuries, I would submit to you they are all manifestly different in form and quality from Jesus.

There is nothing that has ever stepped on the scene like him. And in truth, I actually think it's one of the silliest things you can do to try to compare Jesus to other religious figures, to make him just one more wise person that we can consider because Jesus himself doesn't really leave you that option.

[9 : 59] He doesn't fit that mold. C.S. Lewis has a really famous passage in his book, Mere Christianity, where he tries to get at this reality. He says, Jesus told people that their sins were forgiven and never waited to consult all the other people whom their sins had undoubtedly injured.

He unhesitatingly behaved as if he was the party chiefly concerned, the person chiefly offended in all the offenses. And this makes sense only if he really was God whose laws are broken and whose love is wounded in every sin.

I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about him. I'm ready to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don't accept his claim to be God.

This is one thing that we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic on the level with a man who says he's a poached egg or else he would be the devil of hell.

You can shut him up for a fool and you can spit at him and kill him as a demon or you can fall at his feet and call him Lord and God. But let us not come with any patronizing nonsense about his being a great human teacher.

[11 : 24] He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to. Jesus isn't just one more human for you to consider.

Jesus has no rival. More than that, Jesus is actively holding it all together. And he is before all things and in him all things hold together.

One of the reasons I've actually always found engineering and science really interesting is that when you start to pull back the layers of the laws and the forces that govern our universe, it's not just a math experiment.

What you find is this stunningly immense and complex and fascinating universe that frankly seems almost impossible that it can hold together.

I mean, part of that is just the unfathomable depths of what is beyond us. Like anything you study, it feels like there's always another layer, right? You remember that thing in high school or wherever where you thought you learned something about gravity and Isaac Newton and an apple and all that, but we still don't really understand it.

[12 : 47] Like you may think of gravity of just like this force. Like you realize it's actually a reality we've learned is mass warps space time and that curvature causes things to fall towards it.

I mean, why do I even point that out? Because that's not science fiction. Like we actively have to modify the clocks on satellites in orbit because time works differently the farther you get from the earth.

The fabric of this reality we live in is beyond comprehension. And though these may just seem like material for the sci-fi nerds in the room, I mean, fair enough, right?

But things like first and second law of thermodynamics, Maxwell's equations, quantum mechanics, strong and weak atomic forces, what you learn when you study those is that if any of them were different, the universe isn't possible.

It would just be cold and dark and empty. I mean, in creation itself, the line between order and beauty and pizza and chaos and nothing is so much thinner than you think it is.

[14 : 14] What Paul wants you to know here isn't just specifically like a sterile science lesson. He wants you to know that the God who lovingly crafted this universe lovingly makes sure it doesn't fall into chaos.

And because of that, it means it doesn't just go for the natural laws of this world, all the crazy things that you can't see and understand. Whenever it feels like something is spiraling out of control, God's still holding it together.

Sometimes that's by divine providence and things we can't see and sometimes that's by using his image bearers.

Part of what he does is he uses people to hold it together. April 15, 1912, as the Titanic is slowly sinking into the cold waters of the North Atlantic, unbeknownst to most of the people on the ship, there's a crew of about 35 engineers and electricians who make the choice at the cost of their lives to stay in the engine and the boiler rooms for two very specific purposes.

To keep the lights on as long as they can and to keep the pumps running right up into the final moments of the ship. And I'm sure that all the people on board and all the chaos that's happening and all the people trying to get to safety and panicking, they probably felt like this is the worst it could possibly get but they didn't know.

[15 : 55] No, there's an even worse fate here because they had no idea that in the bowels of this ship there was a secret hand that was keeping the lights on so people could escape to boats.

That was keeping the pumps running so that the boat would sink slower and it was making sure that power stayed on so that they could send a distress signal so that somebody could come rescue whoever was left.

Paul doesn't mean this to be a cold truth. I know that there's so many things in this world in our country and in your own lives and families that send to you the message there is no hope.

It is all going to fall apart and Paul testifies back to you no, Jesus is still holding it all together. Jesus is also the head of the church 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. I'm not going to say a whole lot here other than what I think should be really self-evident.

[17:17] The church the bride belongs to Jesus. It is not the property of a denomination. It is not the property of a pastor.

Or a guru or a committee. And though we certainly see in scripture that God establishes leadership in his church no one should ever forget that our eyes should only alone long to see Jesus.

In the Old Testament when the nation of Israel came to God and they asked for a king the reason that grieved God so much was not that God despises or doesn't use human authority.

You see him doing that and setting that up in other places. The reason it grieved God was because in that place in that context it was a rejection of God as the one that Israel trusted.

God was always meant to be the head of Israel and he knew when I give you this figurehead this king you're going to want to replace me with that person or with the nation with the things that you can do but God was meant to be the head of Israel just as Jesus is meant to be the head of the church.

[18:49] Jesus God is the head of the church. And speaking of that Jesus God Paul wants you to know that Jesus is all of God.

For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. You know many if not most of the heresies in the early church that believers were fighting had specifically to do with this idea of people not being able to grapple with the fact that Jesus was both fully man and fully God.

So they would create these doctrines that in some way would diminish one or the other. They would say things like okay well Jesus was purely divine but he only appeared to have a real body.

I mean it wasn't like a real body because real bodies are gross. That would mean Jesus had to go to the bathroom and stuff like that. No. That doesn't make any sense. Jesus is holy like oh you know he's divine.

So they would diminish that he walked the dusty streets. Or they would say things like no Jesus was born human because we knew he was born but then he was adopted as God's son and kind of became God's son but he wasn't he wasn't actually with God creating in the beginning.

[20:20] Or they would extend that and say Jesus is above all but he's also the first created being. He's the first thing that was made. They would say Jesus had a human body but not a human mind right?

Like I mean he still had to be God's mind because I don't understand how you would cram all of God into like your grave and that doesn't make any sense. they would say Jesus can't be God because now that's not even monotheism that's like you got like one God and two gods and now you're adding the spirit like three gods like that I don't that don't work.

And here in Colossae what we know you're going to see this in other places in the letters they were very hung up on God is holy and unapproachable and if Jesus is part of that so like they kind of had this belief that you needed angels to mediate between you and God because again God is just too far other ignoring all of the clear teaching of scripture diminishing that Jesus is the mediator.

Like you're right you can't approach a holy God and an angel can't get you there either. So they come up with all these things and we do the same thing and I think some of it just comes out of frankly our hubris like our unwillingness to accept that if I can't logically reason something out there's no way it can be.

Like if I can't understand it or it doesn't obey the rules of logic it can't be right like you can't have free will and God be sovereign or God can't be like uncreated like who created God there's just you can't have father son holy spirit I don't understand it of course you don't because the person of God father son holy spirit three in one is not something that you should expect to understand.

[22:24] Somehow he is one God in three persons and here's the trick you will not find any seams in the Trinity. You're not going to find the place where Jesus ends and the father begins or the spirit's at and that also means you're not getting any less of God like when Jesus goes away he

doesn't feel like he's giving them less of God because he's sending the spirit.

Somehow and I don't understand this either like I understand all the things you would think in your brain same things I think. Jesus is every bit a man and he is every bit God.

And you can also take heart because you're not the first or last to have struggled with this. Jesus has this problem with his own disciples in John 14 it says Jesus said to him I am the way and the truth and the life.

No one comes to me except through the father. Side note sounds like Jesus has no rival. And he goes on to say if you would know me you would have known my father also from now on you do know him and you have seen him and Philip said Lord show us the father and that is enough for us and Jesus said to him have I been with you so long and you still do not know me Philip whoever has seen me has seen the father.

How can you say show us the father? I mean Jesus is telling his disciples this isn't a game of like you know just kind of pick which God you want. If you get the son you got the father and if you get the spirit you get the son and it is crucial that you do get the son because Jesus is the one who reconciles the world to God and through him Jesus to reconcile to himself all things whether on earth or in heaven making peace by the blood of his cross the term rendered reconcile there refers to the act of transforming former enemies into friends to taking something that is broken back into harmony.

[25 : 08] I think it's important to note here that the Bible doesn't just view sin and its consequences as well you did a bad thing now and God is very disappointed with you.

the Bible views sin as a declaration of rebellion that renders you an enemy of God.

One of the reasons we've probably lost some of the wonder of Christ is that we've also lost the horror of sin but the truth is in your sin you are in much worse shape than you know.

if you want to understand all the places in the Bible where it seems like God is wrathful or harsh or full of judgment it's because you don't understand what it's done.

And I'm not sure how to convince you of that other than to maybe simply show you from what we see in this verse in Colossians what our sin did and what it cost.

[26 : 17] You know it tells us here that the scope of it is not just you it's all things it says Jesus has to reconcile all things meaning it is a cosmic reconciliation something is broken in the world now and it's interesting that it doesn't just say people it says the entire universe and creation are subjected to this curse.

it also tells you what it costs it says by the blood of his cross which means the peace is not just some mere agreement it's not something where God just says you know I'm glad you came it's all good and I forgive you it is something that is settled by Jesus death and whether you agree with that or not I promise you that to the father Jesus didn't die by accident or just as some kind of symbol for us it was the only way that God could make right what was broke and so Jesus comes not just to give good words not just to be a wise teacher not just to be another guru but to give his life so that the enemies of God can be made the friends of God and the

Bible says it's not just a legal transaction it says it's an effective sacrifice that washes you and makes you a new creation you can have peace with God because you've been made new so what the invitation is saying this Jesus who has no rival this Jesus who is holding the world together this Jesus who is in very fact God invites you into him into union with him and that's why Jesus has no comparison you won't get that from reading someone's book or from looking at their pithy sayings it's why when we sing worship songs there is only one name that gets in those songs there's only one person that you should offer your hand like this is cult kind of stuff right unless it's

Jesus Jesus does what no one else can do so that you can be made right with the one who made you as the band comes up today a couple of ways we can respond if you're here and you're not a follower of Jesus I don't know what brought you in today I know we're always just honored that you come I mean that like your presence is welcome and you know if there's any part of you that suspects that what you see taste smell is not all of it if there's any part of you that knows that you want peace with God Bible says there's one way you are not going to stand before God and impress him with your resume please do not let that be your plan God

I am a good person I fight for good things I've been a good family member like the Bible says that's like laying dirty rags at his feet come to Jesus he has made it possible if there's any part of you that wants to be right with God no matter what you've done that's the other thing about Jesus having no rival is here's how big my sin is doesn't matter Jesus is sufficient and he has made it possible to be

made new I am not inviting you into a new moral code a new religion a new set of check marks that will make your life a little better I'm inviting you to meet Jesus if you want to do that I would just you know there'll be a prayer on the screen that might be a way you can express that but I would actually encourage this morning just come and talk to someone there'll be some men and women to the left of the stage have some pastors down front if you want to know

[31 : 01] Jesus you can know him but it takes a step for those of us who are followers of Jesus I think passages like this are always just a good moment to pause and number one just be thankful!

just remember who you serve I've heard it said before that if you were trying to characterize Jesus one of the things we don't think about that often about him being on the earth is he seems relaxed not uncaring but he is not running around in a panic he knows who he belongs to and who he is you have that too and if there's anything that you feel like maybe you've let become a rival it's like Jesus plus something else maybe that's what God has shown you it's time to put that something else away maybe it's you've just kind of lost hope like man there's no way this thing isn't going to fall apart I know life life is full of suffering but I promise you Jesus is still holding it together it can't get any worse it can and it doesn't because it goes not one inch farther than the son allows so why don't you take a moment and take that to him and then if you're a believer a follower of Jesus you can come to the communion table and again it's such an amazing thing it's like another testament that he's not inviting you into a code he's not inviting you into an ethical framework there are things that follow from that in scripture but that's not the invitation the invitation is come and feast on me be a part of me embrace being one with me and as he said you get me you get the father you get the spirit all of that is available today so when you're ready you can take the communion take it back to your seat fellowship with

Jesus father we give this moment to you whatever is needed God we come here because we want to see Jesus we come here because we want to see you do things that only you can do I just pray if there's something here something someone feels like now Jesus can't fix that just somehow you'll give them enough faith to reach out and ask Jesus can you God we give you this moment please Holy Spirit do the things that only you can do I ask in Jesus name