

Colossians 1:17-18— Fueling Our Worship of Jesus - Part 2

This morning we continue our study through Colossians and we are looking at a section where the apostle Paul is talking specifically at who Jesus is and what he has done. This is one of the most amazing passages in the NT because it talks in very simple, straightforward terms about who the Lord is.

For many of you these are not new descriptions, you've probably read them before or at least have heard them before. But I think it's important that we slow down and look at the magnitude of what Paul is saying because these have real implications for our lives. What Paul lays out for us in these few verses is at the very heart of why we worship Jesus. And that's important for us to remember: Jesus is the object of our worship.

Put it another way, many people in the world *like* Jesus. They don't worship Jesus but they like him. Unbelievers usually don't mind Jesus because they don't really know who he is. They'll say he taught some good morals, or was a man of peace. What's ironic is that oftentimes people will actually give Jesus more credit than they do his followers. They'll say, "Well, Jesus was a good guy but Christians can be a fanatic bunch." And what that shows is they really don't understand what they're talking about.

It was C.S. Lewis who said that anyone who reads the gospels and takes seriously the claims of Jesus can only come to 1 of 3 conclusions: That Jesus is either a 1) liar or a 2) lunatic or 3) Lord.

He was either the most deceitful man who ever lived. If he claimed to be the Son of God, claimed to give eternal life, claimed to have authority and actually lied about those things, he's the biggest fraud who ever lived and is certainly not worth following.

Or maybe he's just nuts, a lunatic. I once had a person claim to me that they were the prophet Elijah - like the guy from the OT. And they really believed it. Jesus made some pretty massive claims for himself, but maybe he was just crazy, a madman. The problem with that is that everything he ever said made a lot of sense and was perfectly logical. And rarely do legitimately crazy people ever have much of a following.

But if we take all that Jesus said: That he is the Son of God, that following him in faith is the only means of salvation, that he demands complete allegiance to himself, and that one day all of humanity will stand before him in judgment...

And we take all that he did: the healings, the miracles, walking on water, his sinless life, his resurrection, his ascension into heaven...and if he's not lying and he's not crazy then really there's only one conclusion: He is the Lord.

He is the God of all the universe who is worthy of all of our praise and devotion. Our lives should revolve around him and, as our Lord, we should gladly do as he says.

By the way, the belief and confession that Jesus is Lord is actually what saves a person:

Rom. 10:9-10: If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes and is justified, and with the mouth one confesses and is saved.

That conclusion is in perfect harmony with what Paul writes here. These descriptions of Jesus should drive us to worship and drive us to humble and glad obedience to the Savior who is also our Lord.

We looked at the first 3 descriptions of Jesus last week in **Vss. 15-16**. We'll look at 4 more this week.

1) He is Before All Things. **Read 17**

What Paul is speaking to here is called the pre-existence of Jesus. He's saying that Jesus existed before all things which is really another way of getting to the fact that Jesus is God. Only God has existed before all things.

We instinctively defer to people who have been around longer. Most people who start a new job defer to folks who have worked at the company longer than they have. When we go to Home Depot to try to figure out how to fix something in our home, really who we want to talk to is the old retired guy who worked in the trades for 50 years. Here Paul points to Jesus who has been around literally forever. He existed before there was anything.

I know we know that but I think it's worth thinking through that a little bit. Before **Gen. 1:1** what was there? Nothing. Nothing existed.

Heb. 11:3: By faith we understand that the universe was created by the word of God, so that what is seen was not made out of things that are visible.

Rom. 4:17: God is called the God who "gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist."

Before God created there was nothing. Usually when I think of nothingness I think of outer space. This big black void where there is no oxygen, no particles, freezing cold. But that's not what existed before **Gen. 1**. Before **Gen. 1** there was no space, no blackness, no cold, no light. There was literally only God. God existed and that's all there was for all eternity past.

So what Paul is saying is that Jesus existed prior to - before - absolutely every *thing*. Jesus' preexistence as the Son of God is outside of time because he created things that gave us the ability to measure time.

And the Bible talks about the pre-existence of Jesus.

Rev. 1:8: I am the alpha and the omega," says the Lord God, "who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty." This is how God points to his eternality. His continued existence.

Rev. 1:17: Fear not I am the first and the last, and the living one.

He is the one who always lives. He has life in and of himself. That's why salvation is often called eternal life. There is certainly a quality of life that that phrase points to, but the only way a person can live forever is to be united to Jesus who himself lives forever.

When you hook someone up to life support their entire life is dependent upon that machine. Their body does not have the ability on its own to sustain life. If you disconnect the machine, they die. In the same way, we don't have the capacity of living eternally all on our own. We have to be united to Jesus by faith to receive eternal life. He is the living one and we have life only through him.

And not only does the Bible describe Jesus in these terms, Jesus himself talks in these terms. **Look back at John 8:48-59.** This is when Jesus was talking to the religious leaders and he basically accused them of being children of the devil, children of Satan. They took that charge about as well as you'd expect. **Read 44**

How can he make that claim? Who's he to judge them? He says they are children of the devil - he says it sincerely. They charge him with being demon-possessed. But look at the whole interchange. **Read 48-59**

What causes the people to want to kill Jesus with stones? What did he claim? He claimed pre-existence. "Before Abraham was, I am." He actually claims pre-existence in 2 ways. First, that he actually existed before Abraham. Abraham lived about 2,000 years before Jesus - Jesus is saying he existed *before* to that.

The second way is that he actually uses God's divine name for himself. In the OT, when you see the word "LORD" in all capitals, it's actually God's divine name, Yahweh. It means "I am that I am." My name is Jason, my wife's name is Jodee, God's name is not God. God's name is Yahweh. And in a brilliant play on words in Greek, Jesus is saying "I'm Yahweh" and "I've always existed" all at once. He's claiming pre-existence at the very same time he's claiming to be God.

And that's not lost on the people, is it? They pick up stones to kill him. Stoning was a brutal form of punishment. In the OT it was the way God had told Israel to kill people guilty of blasphemy. They would take rocks the size of baseballs and throw them at the guilty party until they had died (**Lev. 24:16**). And they think Jesus is guilty. How can Jesus claim to be eternal - he's not even 50 years old?! They understand exactly what he's saying.

Jesus doesn't try to deny it, or clarify what he's said. They understood exactly what he was trying to get across. And **Vs. 59** indicates that Jesus supernaturally hid himself from the people. **Read**

The Temple was a massive open area, there was nowhere for Jesus to hide. He wasn't running away hiding behind something. The Greek actually says Jesus ***was hidden***. The implication here is that the Father supernaturally hid Jesus from this mob because his time to die had not yet come.

But all of this is in line with exactly what Paul is saying back in **Col. 1**: the Son of God has always existed. Even though he only came in the flesh 2,000 years ago - he has existed as God for all eternity.

2) In Him All Things Hold Together. **Read 17**

This is an amazing statement about our Lord and really flies in the face of how many people view God.

There are many people who believe in what is basically called deism. Deism basically says that there was some kind of god who created the universe but he really doesn't care about what goes on in the universe. Or maybe he cares what goes on but he doesn't get involved in his creation at all. The analogy that is usually used is a spinning top. You know one of things you wind up and then let loose and it spins on the floor for a minute or so? They believe that God basically set the universe in motion but just sits back to watch what happens. He's not actively engaged at all.

I actually knew a guy who believed this. He believed God created the universe - I mean, look around, it's so complex and amazing someone had to have created it. But he didn't think God cared about the universe. And I asked him if he had ever made anything. He said he had. And I asked him if he cared about the things he made. And he said "yes, of course." And I asked him if he cared more about things that were complex or things that were simple. I think you see where this is going. The more amazing and complex something we make is, the more we care about it and are engaged in it.

That's exactly what we see in Scripture. The sovereign God of all the universe made the entire universe and he actually cares about it. He didn't just wind it up and let it go, he holds it all together. He actively and intimately sustains it.

Look at Heb. 1. I mentioned this last week. There are several chapters in the Bible that are really foundational for understanding exactly who Jesus is. **Heb. 1** is one of those chapters. And here we see the reality that Jesus sustains the whole world. Just like **Col. 1**, we could spend a lot of time unpacking each description here. We'll read the first 2 verses, but what I want us to focus in on is the first part of **Vs. 3. Read 1-3a**

So again, Jesus upholds the entire universe. I like the NIV: he sustains all things. He keeps them together, keeps them going.

I know this won't come as much of a news flash but you and I can't do that. Most of us can barely keep our own lives together, let alone the universe. And angels can't do that. Angels, as powerful as they are, don't have the ability to uphold the universe.

Only God has that ability. And Jesus - God the Son - who is the radiance of the glory of God and has the exact same divine nature can do that. And does do that.

I remember when I was a kid I saw this guy who could spin plates on a pole. Have you ever seen that? And he would get one going, then another, then another, so. But at some point you realized he was running out of ability. He could only keep a dozen or so going before having to run back to the first one. And eventually the whole thing would come crashing down because he just couldn't keep up with all of it. That's not how Jesus sustains the universe. Look how Jesus does it. **Read 3a**

Jesus sustains the universe by the word of his power. I have to tell you, sometimes my life feels a lot like the plate spinner. I'm trying to keep all the things going and sometimes it seems like some plates are crashing down. You know what gives me comfort in those times? That Jesus has all of this in perfect, sovereign control. He created all things by his words. And he keeps all things going by his words. Jesus perfectly and sovereignly sustains all things because he is God.

3) Back in **Col. 1**, the next description is that Jesus is the Head of the Body. **Read 18a**

Now, there are several things I think we need to note here.

First, when we talk about someone being the head of something, what we're talking about is their authority. Someone who is the head of household has the ultimate responsibility for the

household. Someone who is a head of state or the head of a company has the final authority, the final responsibility. That's Jesus. He has the ultimately authority in the life of the church.

If you remember in the opening chapters of the book of Revelation, Jesus is pictured as being in the middle of the seven lamp stands - do you remember that? And the seven lamp stands are the seven churches in Asia minor. And Jesus is depicted as being in the middle of them, he's intimately involved, actively watching. And if you go on to read the seven letters to those seven churches in **Rev. 2-3** what you realize is that the Lord is not only very involved and concerned for his churches, but he has active authority within the churches.

He encourages them, exhorts them, he rebukes them, he defends them, protects them. The Church as a whole, and individual local churches, are all under the authority of Jesus.

Look at Eph. 5:22-24 for just a moment. We usually look here to talk about the roles of husbands and wives. But what we have to remember is that our roles as husbands and wives are a parallel to the relationship between Christ and the Church. **Read 22-24**

Paul goes on to talk about how husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church. But what Paul is doing is explaining how husbands and wives *should* relate to each other by showing how it actually happens between Christ and the church. And because Christ has saved us, redeemed us, we therefore submit to him in everything.

Our primary concern is not the opinions of people or current social trends and fads or what psychologists tell us is best for our mental health. Our greatest concern is that we are submitting to everything that the Lord has said in our lives. And because all of the Bible is the Word of the Lord - the Word of Jesus - we can look to his Word as an authoritative guide for our lives.

Jesus is our head, he is our authority. Back in Colossians, Paul says he is the head of the body, the Church. Two more comments on that. First, is the idea of a body. When believers gather together we are a body. The Bible often talks of Christians as a body. We are all different parts, we have different gifts, we have different backgrounds and struggles. But we are all one body. If you want a more detailed look at this analogy, you can read through **1 Cor. 12**. Some are hands, some are feet, some are noses, ears, eyes, so on. We are many parts - but we are all one body.

So no matter what part you are, you're part of the whole. My hand is not less a part of my body than my ear. My shins are just as much part of my body as my thyroid. So individually - and collectively - we are all under the authority of Jesus. The entire body of Redeemer Bible Church is to be under the authority of Jesus. He is our final say. What I say isn't final, what Andy says isn't final, books by our favorite authors aren't final, Pew Research polls aren't

final, Barna polls aren't final. What Jesus says in his word is final for how we go about life in the church.

So Jesus has authority, it's individual and collective. And he is the head of the body, the Church. Or we could say "he is the head of the body, which is the church." The word "church" is used in 2 ways throughout the NT. It's often used as the local church, the local gathering of believers in a particular place. But it's also used of all believers. Every believer of every age is part of the Church. Church just means gathering, a collective group. And every person who has been redeemed by Jesus from every era and every nation is part of the church.

We're not an island here. We have brothers and sisters who are part of the Church who gather all over the world. We are one small part of the grand plan of God to redeem people from every tribe and tongue and nation. And you say, "Well, how do we know who a true church is?" "How can we know if they're really part of us?" The answer is: Is Jesus their authority?

If you've watched any news recently you know that our country is just as confused as its ever been. And sadly you get all kinds of people who call themselves Christians chiming in on all of these issues. And probably one of the funniest comments I've heard in all of this is that it's pretty easy these days to spot someone who claims to be a Christian but who denies the true authority of Jesus. They said it's easy to spot someone who denies Jesus' authority because they'll tell you that they know for sure what Jesus' tax plan would be, but they have no idea what Jesus has to say about when life begins, what true sexuality is, and who should be married to who.

We don't hold hold to what Jesus says only when it's popular or easy or accepted by the majority. We hold to what Jesus says because he is the head of the body, the Church. He has authority and supremacy in our lives.

4) He is the Beginning of the New Creation. **Read 18b**

One of the neat things about this passage that most of our translations don't bring across is that **Vs. 15-20** is a hymn, a song. If you have the NLT translation or the NET translation it looks more like the psalms. In the original language it's easier to see that the style is different, the language is a little different, and there are parallels happening throughout the section.

I haven't mentioned that before because it doesn't really change the meaning of anything. But I think we might miss a neat connection that Paul is making.

Paul has already talked about how Jesus was in the beginning. He is before all things. We just saw that. But now he says again that is the the beginning. What's that all about? Why is Paul repeating himself?

I think he's making a poetic connection. Jesus was at the beginning of creation and Jesus is at the beginning of the new creation and sovereign over the new creation. Jesus made the heavens and the earth and all people. And through his death and resurrection Jesus will *remake* the heavens and the earth and all people. He is the Creator and the New Creator.

Let me see if I can show you that. Look at **Vs. 15. Read**

So Jesus is the εἰκών - the image - of God, the first born over all creation. Here, Jesus is the ἀρχή - the beginning - the firstborn. **Read 18**

So it goes:

He is the εἰκών - the image - the firstborn of all creation.

He is the ἀρχή - the beginning - the firstborn from the dead.

Paul is transitioning to the significance of Jesus' resurrection. He is the firstborn from the dead. Remember, Jesus isn't the first person to ever rise from the dead. The Bible gives us about a half a dozen or so people who rose before Jesus. But what the Bible teaches clearly is that Jesus' resurrection is the most significant. It's the most important.

Why? Because the resurrection is what proves that Jesus is who he claimed to be. Can you imagine if Jesus died and never rose? He would have been a fraud. All of his prophecies about rising would have been false. His ability to raise his followers on the last day would have been a joke.

But he did rise. And the resurrection of Jesus not only proves that he is God and that he conquered death. But that one day every believer will rise, too. You realize that the Christian hope in life isn't to die and go live forever floating around as some kind of spirit forever?

The Christian hope is that just like Jesus rose from the dead, one day we will rise from the dead as well. Just as he went into the grave, we'll go into the grave. But just like it wasn't the end of the story for him, it's not the end of the story for us.

2 Cor. 5:17: Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.

There is a sense in which when a person trusts in Jesus for their salvation now, they are a new creation. Their sins are wiped away and they have been spiritually raised from the dead.

But there is coming a day when Jesus will return and there will be a literal resurrection. A literal new creation. Where all the followers of Christ rise from the dead and live in glory.

Our hope isn't based on some fanciful wish. Our hope is based squarely on the resurrection of Jesus. It's his resurrection that secures the reality that millions, if not billions, of people will one day rise from the grave in glory and worship the Lord forever.

That's why Paul says he is the firstborn from the dead, *so that* he might be preeminent. He might be first place, the highest rank. Through his resurrection we give Jesus all the glory because what began at the empty tomb 2,000 years ago is just a preview of what will happen. When our risen Lord completes the work he started in us.

Pray