

A Spiritual Spring for the Week

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Sermon Text: Colossians 1:15-20 (John 1:1-14)
Sermon Title: "More to Jesus Than Meets the Eye"

Morrow Presbyterian Church, Morrow, GA
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{SLIDE 1} When parents have children, they want to make sure they teach them the right things at an early age. Parents want to make sure that their children understand from the very beginning the proper things they should know. Crawling and walking are easy – infants want to get up and get going as soon as they can. It seems to be in our DNA to go out and explore. But learning the alphabet or learning math takes someone to teach them. Learning how to speak properly – how to use one's words properly – takes the patience of parents to teach their children. Infant learn The Golden Rule from parents. Children learn how to say "Please" and "Thank you" from parents. These and other things do not come naturally for a child. Parents want to make sure that their children understand from the very beginning the proper things they should know.

{SLIDE 2} The Colossians are kind of like little children. They are a city of people who have listened to the word of God and have believed, but now they

need to be instructed properly on how to follow God's word. You see, there is a whole bunch of other stuff that they have picked up. They believe Jesus to be God's Son, but they also believe that Jesus is a higher being who isn't God.¹ They believe that Jesus exists but they do not think him to be as powerful as God Almighty. Maybe they think of God as Zeus, the God of the gods in Greek mythology, and Jesus is one of those minor gods that runs around and does nice things.

The Colossians are young in their faith, and if they are not instructed properly they can pick up some bad ideas. They could go a certain direction that taints their faith in Christ altogether, and they may end up believing some other idea or philosophy. Paul writes his letter to straighten them out. He wants the Colossians to understand who Jesus really is and what Jesus' purpose is for us and all of creation. As we said before, parents want to make sure that their children understand from the very beginning the proper things they should know. Paul wants to make sure these young believers understand from the very beginning what it means to be a Christian.

¹ Thomas Nelson Publishers, *The Nelson Study Bible (NKJV)*, cf. 2008.

{SLIDE 3} Scholars believe that Colossians 1:15-18 is a song of praise. Paul breaks into song in the middle of his Chapter 1 to teach the people about Jesus Christ. He may have done this as a teaching tool: it is easier to remember words when we are singing them. Music seems to do that for us. So why not sing a praise song about Jesus, since he is the Author and Finisher of our faith?²

Paul starts off by saying that Christ is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of creation. What would this sound like to a group of people who believe Jesus is a demigod compared to God, higher being who is not God? What does Paul mean by image? One could interpret that as statute or profile like a picture. If this is what Paul means, then the Colossians are right. Jesus is only a higher being made up to look like God. The Roman emperors loved to do that all the time, build statues of themselves to make it look as though they were gods born from the gods. Funny thing is that the statues always looked young, even though the Roman emperor was old and gray.

Let's go back to that word *image* and interpret it this way: representation, resemblance. These words

² Cf. Hebrews 12:2.

are getting to the root of what Paul is saying. Paul is not saying that Jesus is a copy of who God is, but that Jesus is the image that shares in the reality of God and is God himself.³ {SLIDE 4} In Greek philosophy – and the Colossians were Greek – when something was the image of something else, both were thought to be one-and-the-same. This is how the Roman emperors could get away with calling themselves gods: they believed themselves to be the image of the gods and so they convinced people they were gods. But Jesus being the image of the invisible God is not sham. {SLIDE 5} Paul is saying that Jesus is exactly as God is, and Jesus was the visible God on earth once. Jesus represents God and Jesus is of the same substance as God. They are one-and-the-same without separation. Jesus is not a higher being. Jesus is God, the firstborn of creation, the first begotten, the first of all existence with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit.

{SLIDE 6} So, you Colossians, get this “higher being” nonsense out of your minds, Paul says. You may be young in faith, but you don’t have to be stupid. Understand who Jesus truly is. Sing the song of

³ David E. Garland, *The NIV Application Commentary: Colossians/Philemon*, 87.

praise, and learn about your awesome Savior.

Paul does this by moving to the next verse, 16. “For in [Christ] all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers – all things have been created through him and for him.” There’s a lot going on there that may change anybody’s ideas of who Jesus is.

I am on the Examinations Committee through the presbytery, and we interview pastors who want to enter the presbytery and candidates who want to be pastors and minister in churches of the presbytery. We ask them a bunch of questions including who God is, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Some of these pastors or soon-to-be pastors write just that: God is Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Some go a different direction by stating that God is Creator, Jesus is Redeemer, and the Holy Spirit is Sustainer. All of these are biblical and acceptable. But never do we see a pastor or soon-to-be pastor call Jesus Creator. Do we even think of Jesus as Creator, or is God the only One who gets that tittle? We may not think of Jesus as a lower being to God the Father, but we may unintentionally dismiss the fact that Jesus is Creator along with God the Father, and dare I say, the Holy Spirit.

{SLIDE 7} Paul dares to tell the Colossians that Jesus is Creator God. All things on earth and in heaven were created through Jesus. Anything you can see – a tree, a flower, a human being, a dog, a cat, a bug, anything – was created through Christ. Anything you cannot see – molecules, atoms, dark matter, air, wind, anything – was created through Christ. He is also Creator God. Back in Genesis 1 when God says, “Let us make human beings in our own image,” scholars believe that when God addressed himself as us, God was in communion with all three Persons of the Trinity.⁴ Christ and the Holy Spirit were with God, three Persons in one, before creation came to exist. When King David writes Psalm 139, and imagines God knitting him in his mother’s womb and creating a fearful and wonderful person, we image Jesus Christ as the part of the process with the Holy Spirit, forming us, developing us, blessing us.⁵ Christ is not just a person in time 2000 years ago. Christ is eternal. Christ is as eternal as God, because they are one and the same. Christ is builder, Christ is manufacturer, Christ is creator. A being lesser than God would not have the ability or the wisdom to be there, when all things were created.

⁴ Cf. Genesis 1:26.

⁵ Cf. Psalm 139:13-14.

{SLIDE 8} Paul seems to double down with this image of Christ in the next verse: “He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”⁶ Christ is the initiation of all things – he is the start, he is the opening, he is the launch of all things. Maybe we can think of it as a building with a sure foundation. Jesus tells a parable in Matthew 7 about two people who build their homes on sand and rock. The one who doesn’t listen and do God’s word is like one building on sand, and the house will come crashing down. But the one who listens and does God’s word is like one building on the rock, and the house will never fall.

The parable is about faith in Jesus Christ – it has to be built strongly on rock, but add Paul’s words to that parable, and it seems that faith in Christ is not the only thing that falls. All of creation falls apart without Christ as its foundation. Every nation, every government, every living things on earth will crumble to the ground, if it weren’t for Christ being before all things.

And all things fall apart without Christ being the glue, as well. Paul tells us that all creation, and we, need Christ as our foundation, but we also need him

⁶ Colossians 1:17.

as our divine glue or spiritual gravity. All creation depends on Christ to build and hold together. All things are in need of Christ to remain like sturdy concrete and bind together like unbreakable adhesive. For if Christ is just a higher being without being God, all that we see, all that we know, falls apart in a heap. Nothing is left with his complete control over all creation.

{SLIDE 9} Christ is the Head of the Church, Paul tells the Colossians.⁷ If someone is the head of something, that means the entire organization follows the lead of the head. Everybody falls under the authority and guidance of the one in charge, believing that the one in charge will work with the organization to make it prosper.

If Christ is the Head of our church, then there is no other authority. We do not submit to somebody else and call her or him the Head. We do not follow the direction of someone, thinking that she or he is the Savior of our church. Only Christ is. Only Christ leads and teaches and encourages and gives us strength along the way. If Christ is our Head, then we submit to Christ without question. No hesitation. No

⁷ Cf. Colossians 1:18.

excuses. We follow Christ's lead in the ministries we carry out. We follow Christ's lead in the worship, the study, the prayer, and the fellowship we express as God's church.

{SLIDE 10} Now, let us insert what Paul had been saying about the universe being created for Christ and through Christ.⁸ We have heard it said before that Christ is the Head of the Church, but to Paul Christ is the also the Head of the entire world. No other god occupies that space, not Zeus or Allah or Buddha or Krishna or any other gods we can create. Only Christ. Just as Christ is our Head of the Church, so is Christ the Leader, the Guide, the Protector, the Savior of the world. The destinies of all creation submit to Christ just as we submit our lives to Christ. All the plans, all the dreams, all the goals of every person and of every nation is under the authority of Christ, and they cannot dispute it, they cannot ignore or fight it.

John puts it succinctly in his Gospel, 1:10: "[Christ] came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him." When John says that Jesus came to what was his own, the image that comes to mind is Jesus coming to his home. It is his home, the world. It was created through him, and it

⁸ Cf. Colossians 1:16.

totally belongs to him. If this world is Christ's home, it is his property. It is his possession to do with as he sees fit. And we, we are the lodgers who are permitted to live in Christ's house. We are renters who come under the authority of the owner of the house, which is the world and even the church. We all submit to Christ's authority and guidance, believing that the One in charge will work in this world and in God's church to make them prosper.

{SLIDE 11} Paul tells the Colossians and tells us that there is more to Christ than meets the eye. He is not a higher being who is lesser than God. He is not a great Teacher with great ideas, but that was it. He is the foundation of our existence. He is the authority over all our lives. He is the One who creates and sustains, and he is the One who redeems. “[In Christ] the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,” because Christ and God are one with the Holy Spirit. “[Christ] is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything... and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross.”⁹ Another way of

⁹ Colossians 1:19, 18, and 20.

putting all that is this: All things might have been made through Christ and for Christ, but sadly all things have fallen away from Christ. Sin tainted it all. The world is corrupt and broken and lost. Yet, the One who created the universe and called it his own is also the One who claims the universe. Christ is the One who is determined to fix it, and he did through his sacrifice on a cross. The King, the Owner, the Authority of the world and the church stepped down from his throne, and he became a human being (who was also fully God), and he gave up his life so that all things would be made whole again. The owner of the house cleaned house. The Head of the organization lifted the organization out of sinful ruin. The One who was in the beginning of creation entered the middle of creation to make sure that creation's final days would find themselves with God in all joy and peace and life.

There is more to Christ than meets the eye. Not a lesser being than God but God himself. Not a person in time but the Creator of time and space. Not just Someone who loves us, but Someone who means to take charge, pick us up and clean us up, and lead us back to God where we will be perfect and eternal.

Assurance of Pardon

“For when we were still without strength, in due

time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him.” Friends, believe the good news: In Christ you and I are forgiven. Thanks be to God.