

Christ, the Lord of All

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Preacher: Andrew Whitmarsh

[0 : 00] For this morning, so we're going to turn to our Bible reading now. And this morning we're continuing in the book of Colossians. Beginning then at verse 15.

If you're using one of the church visitors' Bibles, that's on page 93. He, that is 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.

[1 : 40] Making peace by the blood of his cross. 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. 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.

Amen. This is God's word. And we'll return to it shortly. Well, if you have a Bible in front of you. It would be very helpful to open it up to the passage Josh read for us earlier.

Colossians chapter 1, verse 15 through to 23. In a world that is so full of so much noise. And so many different and competing worldviews.

[2 : 44] It's easy to feel as if Christianity. As if Jesus is just one of many equally valid people or gods to look at.

One of many amongst a whole pantheon who you can take your pick from. We hear so often people saying, Well, that's fine for you that you're a Christian. But who are you to impose your views on the rest of us?

It would be wrong to legislate on this bill based on my religious views. Jesus belongs in the church. But not in everyday life. Not in the classroom.

Not in the office. Not anywhere else. We hear this so often. And if you're like me, we can easily start to feel on the back foot.

It can get into our heads. We know, of course, Jesus and his gospel are of great importance. If we're Christians to me personally. It's a good thing for our church, yes.

[3 : 43] But when we look around us to our nation, to the world. Well, we can start to feel somewhat discouraged and downbeat and downcast, can't we? We hear these things and we wonder, Well, does Jesus really have that much to offer?

We say we know Jesus is Lord of all. But if we're honest, it doesn't really look or feel like that. Most of the time in our day-to-day lives.

We can be tempted to think, well, perhaps Jesus isn't quite as glorious, quite as wonderful as we first thought. His life, his death, his resurrection don't feel so significant day after day.

We started, we were so excited. It was so positive. But as the grind of life kicks in, we might wonder, well, do we need something a bit more? Something more exciting?

Something more dynamic that will really cause the world to stand up and to take notice? These past couple of weeks, as we've delved into this opening chapter of Colossians, we've seen Paul time and again reassuring his readers, you have received the full gospel.

[4 : 55] You aren't missing out. You aren't lacking anything in Jesus. Paul has told them the same gospel that is bearing fruit all over the world is the gospel that's bearing fruit in your lives.

Last week, if you were here, we saw Paul praying that they would keep going, keep bearing fruit as they are being filled with knowledge of God's will. And he finished that section by giving great thanks for the great rescue that Christians know through the beloved son.

And in the passage we're going to look at this morning, Paul carries on speaking about the beloved son as he lifts our focus to the Lord Jesus. Really well-known verses that speak of his person and his work.

But Paul is not simply giving a theology lesson here. This passage is carefully placed here for the purpose of putting us clear on why these things matter.

It gives even more reassurance that this Christ, this Jesus, he really is enough. If the Colossians, if we have been filled by him and through him, well, we can have confidence that we truly have all that we need now and forever.

[6 : 14] As we read the passage earlier, I wonder, did you spot the phrase that was repeated again and again? All things or everything is repeated over and over in this section, further emphasizing in other places as well the all-encompassing nature of Christ's lordship and his rule.

Paul is making clear knowing Jesus is not just a private matter. He's not one of many valid options. Jesus is not of relevance simply to Christians and no one else in the world.

But rather his rule and his reign and his reconciling work takes in all things. This message truly is the most important message in the entire universe.

That's an important perspective for the Colossians in the midst of the world they were living in. And it's important for us in our world today. It gives us great confidence that Christ truly is above and over all things.

And he can be trusted because he truly is sufficient to put all things right. And therefore knowing him, obeying him, and keeping going in him, that is the only thing that Christian believers need today and tomorrow and forever.

[7 : 40] Because following Jesus is not some local fad, but a global force to be reckoned with. He's not just lord of our little church here, but he is the one who is above and over every single thing in this entire universe.

Paul is giving us a bigger view of who Jesus is and all that he's done as he spurs us to keep on going. So let's get into the first few verses of our passage this morning, where we'll see in verse 15 to 18, Christ is ruler of all.

Christ is ruler of all. Paul here is teaching us that Jesus Christ is supreme. He is sovereign over all things. He is lord of creation, having made and sustained every single thing that exists.

Notice in verse 15 how he begins. He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. He's highlighting that Christ truly is God, drawing our attention to creation, highlighting his unique position as lord over all.

[8 : 52] These believers lived something like 30 or 40 years after Christ walked the earth, and they're being told in no uncertain terms. This man who walked the earth, who lived and died and rose again, was no less than God himself in the flesh.

Verse 15 is emphatically clear. Paul is saying everything that is true about the father is true about Jesus, the son.

We can't see God, but Jesus has made known the father to us truly and fully. That's wonderfully reassuring. This is all you need to know about God found in him.

We're not going to get a nasty shock down the line as we get to know God more. There are no dark aspects to his character. It's not that the father is angry and cruel, whereas Jesus, the son, is gracious and kind.

They're cut from the same cloth. They're made of the same stuff. If you want to know what God is like, look to Jesus, the son. You don't need to speculate.

[10 : 08] You don't need to guess. You don't need to be worried that we're in for a nasty shock down the line. We see how God thinks and acts and relates to humanity in the work and the person of Jesus, the son.

There are no hidden parts of his character that might prove him to be other than what we see in Jesus. It's reassuring even if those who are nearest and dearest to us have at some point let us down or hurt us.

That will never be true of God when we look to how he's revealed himself to us through the beloved son. Jesus is the image of the invisible God.

And because of that, Paul tells us, he is also the firstborn of all creation. When we hear that term, the firstborn of creation, perhaps we think it sounds strange.

We might be a little shocked. Jehovah's Witnesses and others would use this verse to suggest Jesus is a created being. He's lesser somehow than God the Father. The first one out of everything that has been made to be made.

[11 : 14] But that is not what Paul is saying here. It can't be given what we've just thought about and what we see later. He is truly and fully God. He's not a created being. He is the eternal son, the one through whom everything that has been made was made, as we'll see later.

What it means is not he's the firstborn in terms of the origin or sequence, but rather he's the firstborn in terms of inheritance. He's not the first one who's been made, but rather he's the first in line to receive all that belongs to God the Father.

Think the firstborn son of the king. Prince William is the one to whom the titles will be passed, to whom all the rights and the privileges belong. He's in an esteemed position above all others in the nation.

Paul is saying so to Jesus. He is above all things in this created realm. Everything belongs to him. He is the heir of all things.

And the reason he's above them all is because, verse 16, he has created them all. All things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible.

[12 : 27] He's Lord not just over the kings and presidents and princes of this world, but over all things. Things in heaven and earth, visible and invisible.

You and I have been made by him and are sustained by him. The beautiful countryside of Scotland has been made by him. The sun, the moon, and the stars made by him.

Things we can't see. Things we haven't even thought of. Galaxies as yet undiscovered have all been made by him. When Paul speaks of thrones, dominions, rulers, and authorities, these are not just earthly rulers in view, but rather it's speaking of the unseen spiritual realm.

They have been made by Christ too. In Colossae, some seem to have been paying particular attention to the spiritual realm, looking to angels and other spiritual beings to enhance their spiritual experience, to add them to Jesus.

But what Paul is saying here is you don't need to look to them. They were made by Jesus. They're below him. They have nothing to offer in addition to the one who made them and the one who sustains them.

[13 : 43] And notice at the end of verse 16, they've not just been made through him. They're not just made by him, but they're made for him. Paul says the purpose of all things in this universe is to glorify the sun.

The reason they exist is to serve him, the one who made and sustains them every second of every day. Paul says all creation in verse 17 exists and is sustained and held together by Christ. He is the focal point, the one it's all about. Creation is not an end in itself. It exists to bring glory to Jesus.

That's a mind-blowing thought, isn't it? When we look around the world, that's not our first thought most of the time. But Paul is teaching us the Lord truly is worthy of our worship.

He can be trusted with everything. All things that have been made and will be made owe everything to this Jesus. He truly is ruler over all things.

[14 : 53] So that means Jesus is not some unwelcome invader in life. He's not imposing himself on politics or the world around us when his people seek to get involved.

No. Faith in Jesus doesn't merely belong in private. It's not some niche hobby for strange people with no relevance to real life. Every single thing in the whole universe exists to give him glory. Perhaps you've heard Abraham Kuyper's famous line, the former Dutch prime minister and theologian. He said there is not a square inch in the whole of creation, or sorry, in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry, mine. Everything and everyone and every part of this world belongs to him and he is Lord over it. He cries, mine. All of life belongs to Jesus.

He's ruler over every single area of life in this world. And every single aspect of our lives. This means he isn't just interested in our spiritual lives.

[16 : 02] It's not just about religious rights and duties to please him. Again, that was a problem in Colossae. They were seeking to pursue asceticism. That is rejecting good physical gifts from God,

like food and marriage, so that he could somehow get to a higher spiritual level.

Paul says that is not the way to know God truly, to know God fully, to experience fullness. We today might be tempted sometimes to think in such ways.

It's all about the spiritual things we do that please God. How many verses of the Bible have I read today? How many minutes have I spent in prayer? How long have I fasted for or done this or done that?

But Paul here is clear. Jesus is Lord of all of our lives, all of the world. He cares about how we live in each and every area.

He's pleased when we work hard for him in the office, when we study diligently for his glory in our studies, when we seek to put his word into practice, in politics, when we seek to obey him in our marriages, to bring our children up looking to him in faith.

[17 : 16] Towards the end of this letter, Paul tells us in chapter 3, verse 17, whatever you do in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

He's Lord of all these things. So as we enjoy God's good gifts of food, as we savor marriage, as we enjoy sports and hobbies and the great outdoors, we can do all these things in a way that gives thanks and gives glory to Jesus, who is Lord over all.

He is ruler over all these things. He has made them all. And he is Lord of every single inch of this whole universe. And he's Lord of our lives.

As we do that, we are fulfilling what we were made for. Our chief end, our purpose in life, to enjoy him and glorify him forever.

We can please him as we work hard and enjoy life for his glory. And when we live life in this way, looking to him, obeying him, following him, well, we're living life the way it was meant to be.

[18 : 28] That's what we're made for. That is our purpose. It's what it means to be truly human. And when we consider Christ as ruler of all in this way, doesn't it bring home the awful seriousness of sin?

When we think of sin in these terms, it's not just a list of bad things that we do, but rather it's a failure to relate rightly to the Supreme Lord of the whole universe, the one we owe everything to. It's cosmic treason. That is why its effects in the world around us are so devastating. Perhaps you're here this morning and you're not a Christian, but you recognize something of the brokenness of the world.

We live in a world, don't we, that's filled with warfare, filled with strife, filled with brokenness, homes, families, disorder, depression, despair, all around, and so much uncertainty about what lies ahead. The Bible is clear. That is not how things were first created by God. These things came about as a result of human sin in the world, a rejection of this Jesus' Lord, lordship over all things.

[19 : 42] It's ruptured the very fabric of creation. That's why the world, as scripture describes, is in bondage to corruption. It's decaying. It's breaking down.

It's characterized so often by heartbreak and pain. When humanity fails to relate rightly to the Lord Jesus, things do go dramatically wrong.

There is a brokenness at the heart of creation. We live under curse. So much of life is marked by futility, because the world is out of kilter with its maker.

It's not as it should be. But wonderfully, this is not the end of the story, for the next section speaks of new creation, where we see in verse 18 to 20 that Christ is reconciler of all.

The focus in these verses shifts from his lordship over creation to how Jesus brings about the new creation through his peace bringing death.

[20 : 46] And reconciliation is right at the heart of this section, bringing creation and God back together. What was once at loggerheads and enmity is now restored.

Verse 18 begins by pointing to the church, God's new humanity, living in restored relationship with the Lord of all. We can't easily think, can't we, of the church, the Lord's people today, as a small, insignificant, marginalized institution.

But this is how Paul leads this section in Christ's amazing work of new creation. The church, the worldwide people of God, are the only people who are truly functioning the way God intended when we were first made.

We're right at the center of God's plan for the universe. And Paul says Christ is the head of the church, his body. He's not just the leader, but he's the life giver, the one who sustains and

strengthens them, who brings growth, who brings maturity, who keeps them going. Just as if my body was to become separated from my head, it wouldn't go too well. Well, so too, if the church is separated from their head, Jesus, things are going to go badly wrong.

[22 : 02] If the church fails to keep under Christ's headship, to keep listening to him and keep heeding his word, things will go badly wrong. And notice, Paul shows us now the reason why he is head of the body of the church, why he is the one who is overall in the new creation too.

He writes, for he is the beginning, the firstborn, that word again, from the dead. It's the same word, but with a slightly different emphasis this time.

His supremacy, his lordship, is being emphasized once more, but it's with regard to born from the dead. Paul is saying Jesus' resurrection marks him out as the first human to come back from the dead.

But he is only the beginning, the first of a great multitude of all who will share in his victory over death when he returns. Death could not hold Christ.

His victory over death marks the start of something even greater. As God's people today, we already have his life-giving power at work in us by his spirit, having been united to him in faith.

[23 : 15] But today, his tomb is the only one which lies empty. But one day, that will be true for all who have been united to him through faith.

Because he has been raised, well, that reaffirms his supremacy, his lordship over the new creation. And the purpose of this is so that in everything, he might be preeminent.

He is the one who strikes the final blow, who opens up the way for the penalty of sin, death, to be done away with forever. But his lordship means much more than that.

Paul says it's not just limited to the church. The nature of this reconciliation is cosmic. This applies to all things, verse 20.

Jesus' work doesn't merely affect the church, here or around the world. Miraculous though it is that we can be reconciled to him, it's even bigger, it's more significant than that.

[24 : 20] It's great and glorious. He is above and over all. And the reconciliation is seen in overcoming all the aspects of the fall, all the brokenness in the world.

Look with me at verse 19, where Paul emphasizes nothing of God is lacking in Jesus. This idea of fullness has come up already in the letter. All the fullness of God was pleased to dwell in him.

Jesus didn't set aside some of what it meant to be God and taking on real human flesh. He's not quite like God, but without a few of the key parts. Paul says the man who lived and died and rose again was truly and fully God.

He truly is preeminent. He is reigning and ruling over both the old and the new creation. And all this emphasizes he is perfectly qualified to bring about the reconciliation that humanity and the whole created order needs so badly.

Paul is making clear Jesus fits the bill perfectly. He ticks all the boxes. This is the creator stepping down into his creation to bring an end to hostilities.

[25 : 35] He doesn't need anyone else to broker a peace deal. There's no need for Donald Trump to rock up to sort things out. Verse 20 is clear. God is the offended party.

It's him who needs to reconcile things to himself. He must take the initiative. And that's exactly what he does in Christ. The breakdown of right order is due to humanity's sin and our rebellion against Christ's lordship.

Yet reconciliation and peace are brought about because of Jesus' blood shed at the cross. That reconciliation, this peace declaration, can be freely embraced by his people through faith.

Or, it will ultimately be imposed as God's wrath on all who refuse to bow the knee to Christ comes when Jesus returns. Nothing in this universe exists beyond God's reconciling work putting all things right in Christ.

Nothing that is in earth, nothing in heaven can withstand it. Jesus' death brings about peace, not just between God and man, but between the whole created order and its God.

[26 : 55] No person that stands against him will remain. No place on earth will stay tainted by this curse. No element of the fall, disorder, discord, hurt, grief, pain, or disease will persist.

Doctors, undertakers, police, and all manner of other professions will be put out of work because there's no need for them. There's no more sin. There's no more fall. There's no more brokenness.

God takes the initiative in Christ. He accomplishes it all through his death. So Paul is clear that means there are no add-ons, no extra requirements needed.

This is all a gift of his glorious grace, fullness. Fullness is not found in other places. It's found simply in Christ and his cross.

That must be at the center. That must be all that our faith is about. Paul says Christ's life, the incarnation and his crucifixion and resurrection are right at the center of world history.

[28 : 02] This is the most important event ever to have taken place. Nothing is beyond the scope of his work. His great reconciling peace bringing death that will usher in the new creation.

A world put right. These verses are clear. Christ is the only savior. Other religions might attempt to please God through various other means, but it's only the beloved son who can bring about peace between the creation and the creator.

Our efforts in light of that as Christians seeking to do extra things or experience more, well, they contribute nothing. Our only hope before God is embracing Christ as Lord and Savior, receiving his salvation and obeying his word.

Paul says nothing can make you more saved. You have all that you need in Christ. He is the only reconciler of all things. He's the only way to God and he's the only mediator.

He's Lord of all the unseen spiritual realm. There's nothing, there's no one there that can offer anything to him, that can enrich him or give us more.

[29 : 18] He made them. To think that by praying to Mary or other so-called saints might sound spiritual, might sound more humble, but it's actually to denigrate what Christ has done.

It deems his finished work at the cross inadequate. And any so-called work of the Holy Spirit, which doesn't make much of Jesus or which seeks to add to or leads us away from him and his cross, well that likewise must be rejected.

Fullness comes from Christ alone, not anything or anyone else. When we open God's word together, when we hear it preached, all that we need is there.

If anyone comes seeking to offer more that goes beyond this, that isn't part of his word, well that too must be rejected. It's Jesus alone that the fullness is found.

It's in his word, nothing more. He is the one through whom God has reconciled all things to himself. And this reconciliation that has been achieved at the cross means peace has been declared.

[30 : 29] Evil powers are disarmed. His opponents held to account. The curse is ended and death is defeated. All things will be put right.

Its effects will encompass all things. And all creation will be restored and renewed because Christ is the reconciler of all.

But of course this reality is not seen in our experience now. The world we live in continues to be marked by the effects of the fall. The full effects of this reconciliation are not yet visible.

We're waiting for the fullness of these things to be revealed. And that is why there is that temptation to look elsewhere, to seek fullness in other places and other things, to drift from where we started. But in the final section, verse 21 to 23, Paul is emphatic. Christ can be relied upon for all. Christ can be relied upon for all.

[31 : 38] In these final verses, Paul is saying Christ and his gospel are all you need, so don't give up. Paul begins these verses by looking back to what they once were.

They were alienated, hostile in mind, doing evil deeds. Humanity as part of creation at odds with God, separated from him with no interest in turning to him, far from him, minds distorted and doing wrong.

There's simply nothing going for them. But Paul says the difference here couldn't be more stark by the time we get to verse 22.

Through his physical death, Jesus has reconciled all who come to him in faith, gladly submitting to his lordship. Reconciled in his body of flesh by his death so that this remarkable transformation can be possible.

Going from enmity with to being pleasing in God's sight, to be holy, blameless, above reproach, not even tainted by slight issues, not 70% holy with a top up of spirituality required somewhere else.

[32 : 57] Paul says the legal standing of a believer is to be fully justified before him. No one can disqualify you, no one can question your standing if you are in Christ.

If God can do this in the lives of sinful people, then he truly can be trusted for all things. That is where we stand before God, but of course it is not our experience.

We do sin, we do stumble. Life can often be characterized by feeling more like those who are alienated and hostile. Our sinful tendencies must be put to death, as Paul tells us later.

But nevertheless, believers are counted righteous in God's sight if we are united to Christ in faith. Our experience as individuals, and indeed of the world around us, does not look like this glorious reconciliation has happened.

But Paul is clear that the glimpse we get in the lives of believers who are transformed will one day be seen fully and finally on the last day.

[34 : 05] That is why Paul characterizes the gospel they must stick to as one of hope. Verse 23, the hope of the gospel that you heard. Paul says the best is yet to come.

Keep relying on Christ. The full demonstration of his resurrection power lies ahead. It comes in the future. In chapter 3, verse 4, Paul says this, when Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

This lies ahead. It's hidden now, but it will be revealed. Christ's invisible rule will one day be made visible.

The glory of all things reconciled to him will be seen by all fully and finally. So Paul's message here is continue.

Keep going. Don't shift. Stable and steadfast. Verse 20, sticking with the gospel that you heard, the gospel that you received, the gospel that has saved you.

[35 : 13] hope lies ahead. That's what keeps us going. Some might suggest, well, you can have it all now. You don't need to wait. But Paul says that's not the pattern of Christ.

It's not the pattern of his gospel. Paul, remember, is writing from prison. The full reality of this cosmic reconciliation lies in the future. We don't yet share in Christ's resurrection life, but we will one day.

So we're not to embrace new things which offer more now. Either Christ is all or he is not. As we read the if at the beginning of verse 23, if you keep going, you will be presented.

Well, we might be concerned about this. We can ask the question, does that mean it's possible for Christians to fall away? What if I fall away? But these words are not here to plant doubt in believers' minds.

That would go against everything Paul has been saying so far in this letter. It's here rather to urge believers to prove the reality that they belong to Jesus by keeping going.

[36 : 24] Paul isn't getting caught up in theoretical discussions of whether a Christian might fall away. He's emphasizing don't. Keep going. Keep relying on Christ.

Keep looking to him. Keep listening to and obeying his word. God and this is making use of the endurance and patience that comes from God's power that he was asking for back in verse 11. God gives what they need to keep going. He can be relied upon in all and for all. His power is at work in you to give you endurance and patience.

So don't look elsewhere. Keep going. Keep relying on him for that. these remarkable words that we've read this morning have been making clear to us.

You have glorious spiritual riches in Christ. Wealth beyond your wildest dreams. So don't look elsewhere for more. To do so would leave you bankrupt.

[37 : 24] When others around us make us feel like we need something more like Christ is lacking. Well we can remember these verses. Jesus is the ruler of all things.

He's of all powers greater than anyone we could possibly look to for help or reassurance. He's perfectly sufficient. He's all we need so we can keep relying on him.

If he has created and sustained all things, if he's reconciling all things to himself by the blood of his cross, well surely he's more than capable of sustaining and bringing me and you and our whole church family and all who look to him in faith today in this world safely through to the last day without the help of anyone or anything else.

So we don't need to look elsewhere. Christ is truly all that we need. Amen. Let's pray. Heavenly Father we come before you this morning with hearts that are filled with thanksgiving and awe and great worship for all you have done for us through your son the Lord Jesus Christ.

We acknowledge and give thanks that he is Lord of all. The one who is supreme over all things. We rejoice that you have reconciled to him all things through his finished work at the cross.

[38 : 54] We pray Lord that you would sustain and strengthen us giving us all that we need in him to keep going. Keep resting on his work. Keep relying on him for all that we need in life and for our ongoing perseverance.

Please strengthen us with your power to keep us going with endurance and patience that we as your people here would continue to bear great fruit for your kingdom. Amen.