

The Whole Christ

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[0 : 00] Well, I don't know what the weather is doing for you up in Aberdeen just now. Where I am, it's pretty overcast, pretty grey.

Even when we're getting as much daylight as we can get, it doesn't necessarily mean that we're going to get much sunshine. But if you lived in parts of Asia and Africa today, you could go outside and see as in full daylight.

The sun stops shining completely. The moon will cover up the light of the sun in a solar eclipse. And if you ever get to see a solar eclipse, it's something you never forget.

But the twist is, you don't get to see it. If you're even shielded by the moon, the sun is still too bright to look at directly.

You can see it in shadows. You can watch its reflection. But the rule is, don't look at the sun. It's too dangerous.

[1 : 07] It's not safe. It's too bright. In the passage that we read together earlier and that we're coming to now in Paul's letters to the Colossians, his instruction, in a way, is exactly the opposite.

Look at the sun. Gaze on him in all his glory. Take him in. Set your eyes on the sun of God. Because it's the only safe thing for us to do. For our spiritual life, shadows will not be. Reflections will not cut it.

The only thing that will keep us safe in our walk with God is to gaze directly on his son. Paul introduced him to us when he told us about the new life that God has given us with himself in verses 13 and 14.

He writes, He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

[2 : 13] So we see God's son is at the heart of God's rescue of us and his purpose for us. And in this section of the letter, Paul simply unrolls like a long ancient scroll the wonder of who he is.

This is one of the highest and deepest descriptions of Jesus anywhere in the Bible. Here we see the whole Christ.

And what Paul really wants us to see is that in reality, there is nothing and no one bigger or better than him.

Nothing comes close. So when we come to God, we need nothing more and nothing less than Jesus Christ. He is supreme. Therefore, he is sufficient.

Who then is it who we are called to set our hope on today? Well, first, we are called to worship Christ as our creator. Paul begins in verse 15 saying of Jesus, He is the image of the invisible God.

[3 : 25] In other words, he's saying here, if we want to see God, here is where we go. On the 12th of April, 1961, a man named Yuri Gagarin became the first person ever to travel to space.

And on his return, he gave the world an answer to one of its oldest questions. He said, I looked and I looked, but I didn't see God.

Was God really up there to be seen? Well, the man who had been said he wasn't. No, I didn't see God, he said.

Actually, Paul had beaten him there by a couple of thousand years. Where do we go to see God? Well, we don't go to space to see him.

No, God came down to find us. The Bible tells us that no one has ever seen God. But Paul adds a condition. We can't see God, he says, unless we are looking at Jesus.

[4 : 35] He is the image of the invisible God. He is God with us. That's an incredible thing to say, that the creator steps down into his own creation.

This is the wonder that God, the son, the second person of the Trinity, was born a human, but did not stop being God.

So that in his one single person, the invisible God, could be seen in the flesh, in Jesus. There is nothing in God that didn't fit in Jesus Christ at his birth.

For in him, Paul writes in verse 19, the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. So, if we know Jesus, there is no more God left to be found.

There are no bits left over. Jesus himself said, whoever has seen me has seen the Father. So, if our eyes are not on Jesus, then our eyes are not on God.

[5 : 46] But what else might our eyes be drawn to? Well, Paul goes on to say in verse 16, by him, all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, thrones, dominions, rulers, authorities, all things were created through him and for him.

There are plenty of things that he has created that we can set our hearts on, but Paul puts all those things in their rightful place.

For hundreds of years, we have been trained to draw a line between physical things that we can touch and spiritual things that we can't.

And we're trained to set mind over matter, soul over body. But if Christ created it all, then it is all his. The astronomer, Johann Kepler, famously described science as simply thinking God's thoughts after him.

The best, most mind-blowing discoveries about planets or bacteria or human bodies. It's simply uncovering the work of Christ when he created those things in the beginning.

[7 : 07] All creation is his creation. And so the divide that matters is not between the physical and the spiritual things. No, it is about the sun who is set over all his creation.

Christ is creator. And knowing that puts everything else in its place, including ourselves. Christ is the one who knitted you together in the womb.

He was there when your grandparents were born and their grandparents and their grandparents. He is the one who formed the earth.

He is directing the solar eclipse. He invented light. There is no point at which we can say he was not there. He has no beginning and no end.

He is above and beyond any and everything. There is simply no comparison between Christ and what he has created.

[8 : 12] Because not only are all things by him, not only do all things hold together in him, but all things, Paul says, are for him. everything that exists, exists for Jesus.

Perhaps you noticed that phrase we read in verse 15, first born of all creation. Now some have twisted that phrase out of its context to say that the sun was somehow the first thing that God created.

But since we see the sun is the creator, then that's clearly not the case. instead, the phrase first born, it means nearly exactly the opposite of that.

To say someone was the first born was to say that they are first in line to inherit whatever the father owned. So first born here is describing Jesus' position as supreme, heir over all things.

He is the son of the father who all things are ultimately for. In other words, Jesus is the point of reality.

[9 : 26] Everything that exists, exists for him, angels and animals, atoms and spirits, bodies and souls. They are all from him, through him and for him.

We know what it's like, don't we, not to have things. And Jesus knows what that is like too. He lived an ordinary but perfect human life.

He got hungry. He got tired. He suffered need. But ultimately, Jesus wants for nothing. He has no lack.

He needs nothing from us. It all belongs to him. He doesn't even need the help of angels and spirits. He is supreme beyond imagining, glorious beyond comparing.

And so Paul's question to us today is, what could possibly be added to him that would be of any value by comparison?

[10 : 32] Sometimes we imagine that we must need to do something for Jesus to come to him. We need to get that sin sorted in our lives before we worship him.

Or because he's done so much for us, we need to do X, Y and Z things for him. But you really need to add anything to this Christ to have a full life with God.

what could we add to his perfection? What could we do for him? What could we give to him? To think that we could add to him is only our pride dressed up in humility.

So as we gaze at Christ, Paul calls us simply to worship him, to drop our contributions, to simply gaze at him in awe, to set him at the center of our prayers, to listen to his words in his scriptures. So that as we fix our gaze on this Christ and set our hope in him, the things of this world would be dimmed into shadows and reflections in the glory of the true giver of life.

[11 : 47] we worship Christ because he is creator, supreme over all things. And because he is supreme, therefore he is sufficient for us.

So coming to our second point, we are called to rest in Christ as our redeemer. Notice that Paul now turns from Jesus creating work to his saving work.

In verse 17 he writes, and he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead. What does a head do for a body?

Or to put it another way, what can a body do without a head? Separation means death. A body cannot live without its head. Headless chickens are the exception that proves the rule.

So this picture of the church as the body of Christ, it's a picture of the permanent life-giving union that we have with Christ our head.

[12 : 52] The head gives life to the body and the body lives and grows under the head. We saw before that Jesus gives us organic life as part of his creation, bones and blood and breath.

But there is also a new life that we have from Christ as his church, such that we belong to the new creation. Paul says in verse 18, Jesus is firstborn from the dead, speaking about his resurrection from the dead.

Christ was dead, but now he is alive forever. He was raised again. So our life here, we know, is destined for death and decay.

death. But Jesus is already on the other side of death. And if we are connected to him as a body is to its head, then we cannot help but follow him into his resurrection life.

That's the life that Jesus gives us now when we take hold of him. That's the lifeblood that flows through the church. Resurrection life. Jesus is at the heart of creation, but he is also the head of a new creation.

[14 : 13] And the church, our very own lives, if we belong to Christ's day, belong to that new creation. Jesus' resurrection, says Paul, was the beginning, the first day of a new creation.

And Jesus' return will be the final day when all things are made new. But on all the days in between, that new creation is seen right here in our churches.

Our everyday churches of ordinary people like me and you who have set our hope on Jesus is the embryo or the seedling of a new world to come.

Only because we are united to Christ like a body is to its head, we are the body of a risen and reigning head. But the church in Colossae was being pushed by false teachers to remove the head or replace him or renew him.

They were being pressured to upgrade from Christ to better spiritual things. But even if we don't lose our head, so to speak, we can sometimes feel headless.

[15 : 28] spiritually cut off, distant from God on our own, weary and without hope, flat and lifeless.

And at those points we may wonder, even without thinking it, is this it? Is this really new life? Is this life to the full? Is Christ really enough for life with God?

Is he sufficient? resurrection? And so Paul goes on, as if it wasn't enough that Christ's resurrection has raised us to new life. He writes in verse 19, for in him the fullness of God was pleased to dwell and through him to reconcile all things to himself, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

In other words, the one who created all things has now reconciled all things to himself by dying. And Paul presses those thoughts so close together, the hands that flung stars into space, pierced by nails, the creator on the cross, so that his blood would bring peace, not only to the church, but to the cosmos.

Because not only are our lives part of this cycle of death and decay, but so is everything else. Ever since humanity first turned against God since Adam's sin, God's universe has been corrupted, decaying into death, resisting its creator.

[17 : 12] But Paul writes here that Jesus' death brought peace between God and his world, not so that everyone will be saved, but so that everything that is saved, not only ourselves, but the cosmos, comes back to God through Christ on the cross.

He is the one mediator between human beings and God. He is at the heart of reality, and he is the heart of God's rescue, so that in every way he would be preeminent.

there is no other way than Christ, but no other way is needed. If Jesus' death was enough to bring all things back to God, how could it not be enough for his church?

If Christ's blood was enough to bring the cosmos peace with God, how much more does it bring peace between God and you? He is supreme, therefore he is sufficient.

And so the question for us today is, does this Christ fill up your vision of life with God? If Christ is simply a moral rescuer, who gives us rules for a right way to live, then we will long for something to bring us peace and rest from our works.

[18 : 44] if Christ is simply a future rescuer, who saves our souls to heaven one day, then we will search for other things to give us life now.

If to us Jesus is a religious rescuer, he saves the church but not the cosmos, then we may well worship him on Sunday but look for other things to give our lives purpose for the rest of the week. In short, if we have anything less than this dazzling view of Jesus in his glory and fullness, then we will go after other things instead.

But if this is who Christ is, then how could he not be enough for each one of us and all of us together? And so Paul calls us to rest in this supreme and sufficient saviour, to gaze at the hands of the creator nailed to the cross and thank God that that was enough to bring you to himself.

That's where Paul leaves us here. Finally, he brings all of this down to ground level for us as he calls us to hold on to the Christ of the gospel for all his worth.

[20 : 05] Will you read with me from verse 21? Paul writes and you, you 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.

Often we can be long-sighted when it comes to God. We can go through life with very vague thoughts of him. He's invisible, he's in control, he's right, but he doesn't seem close to us.

But we can also be very short-sighted when it comes to ourselves. We can go through life thinking that we must be too weak or too wrong or too small for God to really care about us.

We can't really see anything beyond our own lives. But the cross corrects both errors in our vision. Because the cross says God is for you.

You can sometimes imagine that behind the cross is hiding an angry God who secretly can't wait to get rid of us or heap guilt on us or show us the small print where it says it's not as simple as you thought.

[21 : 28] But Paul says here that all the fullness of God went to the cross in the person of Jesus. the cross. There is nothing in God that thought the cross was a bad idea.

There is nothing in God that had to be convinced or won over by Christ's death. There is nothing in God that regrets the blood that brought you to him.

The wonder of our rescue is that on the cross there is no God hiding behind the back of Christ. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased as well and through him to reconcile all things to himself. God does not secretly regret saving us. He doesn't just barely put up with us or tolerate us. No, he is the one who welcomes us fully and freely through the cross of Christ.

God is for you. How do we know? Because the whole Christ bled and died on the cross. And he did not do it in spite of who you are, but because of who you were.

[22 : 46] Paul writes in verse 21, Christ died for you who were once alienated and hostile in mind doing evil deeds. That's not a pretty picture, is it?

We once were far away from God. We rebelled against God in our thoughts. We pushed against him with our lives. Paul is reminding us here that God was never the problem.

We ourselves were the problem. Usually, you know, when two people fall out, it's the one who's caused the problem who has to come and make things right, to say sorry, to patch things up.

But God did not wait for us to do that. So deep was our sin that we could never have done it. We could never put our wrongs right. But that is why Christ died, not despite your sin, but because of your sin.

Imagine for a moment a list of all the sins of all God's people put together. It would run for pages and pages. It would fill books.

[23 : 55] It would fill libraries. And at the bottom, on a dotted line, the signature of Christ signed with his own blood.

That is what happened at the cross. Christ took responsibility for all our sins and the whole punishment for our every wrong fell on him instead of us.

Not so that God could tolerate us, but in verse 22, Paul says, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, this is the peace that we have with God.

We are clothed in the perfection of Jesus and welcomed in by the God who brought us back, the God who rescued us, the God who went to the cross to save us.

We could not add anything to that rescue if we tried. And God doesn't ask us to. It's his peace. And he gives it to us freely through the death of his son.

[25 : 08] And it is for anyone who comes to God with their hope and their trust fixed on Jesus. Perhaps the day you feel you couldn't come to God, your past is too bad, your life is too messy.

But the cross says come, peace is here, forgiveness is here, welcome is here, God is for you. So Paul says take hold of this Christ and don't shift from this gospel, don't take your eyes off the sun. So how do we stop ourselves shifting away then from this gospel? or simply by doing this, by not trying to add anything onto Christ to get to God.

The church in Colossae was being told to add on angels and spirits to come to God. Many of us know that's not the answer.

The temptation for us now I think comes less from out here and more from in here. So often we dig through our thoughts and feelings in search of something to rest on or to offer to God.

[26 : 23] A stray thought or careless word or just a tough day and our sense of peace with God can dry up and vanish in a moment. If our peace with God depended on anything in here then we would never have peace.

But God calls us here not to look inside ourselves for the peace that comes only through the cross of Christ. Our peace with God isn't broken and fixed with every sin.

No, our peace came fully, finally, and freely in the death of his son. Trying to add our feelings or our thoughts into the equation simply clutters our vision of this preeminent and glorious Christ.

Instead, holding on to the gospel means filling our vision with the whole Christ. Here he is, our creator, our redeemer, and our friend.

In Christ, we have all of God, all for us. So let us come to him and gaze on him and fill our vision with the whole Christ for all of life.

[27 : 44] Let's worship him together as we pray. Let's pray together. Lord Jesus, we worship you, our creator and our redeemer.

You are the one who knew us before we were born, and you are the one who rescued us in your death on the cross. We thank you that you saw us, you knew our sins, yet our names were written on your heart and graven on your hands.

Our names are written in your book of life, if our hope is in you. So help us, we pray, not to set our eyes on any other things, things that you have created, whether they be outside of us or inside of us.

Help us, Father, to come to you only through your Son and by your Spirit. Father, we pray for those who don't know you, that they too would come to know peace with you through the cross of Christ, and that we together would know the freedom that comes in knowing you.

So help us, we pray, to fill our vision with the whole Christ. We ask in his name. Amen.