

Colossians Series: Christ is Supreme Col. 1:15-23 7/11/21

As we began our series in Colossians last week, the Apostle Paul wrote that he was thankful for the spiritual growth of the Colossian Christians and prayed that they would both know God's will and do it. He takes things a step further this week.

In the 1977 movie, "Oh, God," God, played by George Burns, appears to a grocery store clerk in Tarzana, California played by John Denver, and calls him to be his witness in the world. Denver tries to do it, although it is extremely difficult because no one believes him! At one point he invites people to submit their questions to God, and he receives lots of responses. One of the questions was this, "Was Jesus Christ the Son of God?" Here's how God answers, "Yes, Jesus was my son. Buddha was my son. Mohammed was my son. Moses, you, and the man who said 'There's no room in the inn' was my son..." He basically put Jesus on the same level as other great religious leaders and all the rest of us! And it sounded very modern and very inclusive. But, how would Paul respond to that? Listen, as I read from Colossians, chapter one, verses 15-20.

*<sup>15</sup>He (Jesus) is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; <sup>16</sup>for in him 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. <sup>17</sup>He himself is before*

*all things, and in him all things hold together.* <sup>18</sup>*He is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything.* <sup>19</sup>*For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,* <sup>20</sup>*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.* (Col. 1:15-20)

Here, Paul is quoting from an early Christian hymn. We'll break it down a little bit, but keep in mind that the power of poetry gets somewhat diminished when we do that. In these verses Jesus is clearly seen as unique, having ultimate power and authority. In fact, Paul says that Jesus is the image of the invisible God- that all the fullness of God dwells in Jesus! That's huge, because people throughout history have longed to know what God is like! They have subjected themselves to all kind of rituals, rules, sacrifices, and even physical pain in order to know and please God. But Paul says we don't need to try so hard anymore. If you want to see what God is like, just look at Jesus, for God has been fully revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. That's a stunning statement with tremendous implications.

First, it means that Jesus has power over all creation! Why? Because he is the Creator! *"...in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible...all things have been created*

*through him and for him.*” (Col. 1:16) Now, sometimes we forget the absolutely mind-boggling nature of creation. For example, our Milky Way galaxy has 250-300 billion stars. 250-300 billion! (I know this is true because I asked my son-in-law, Charles Kuehn, who is an astro-physicist!) So, how many is 250 billion? If you made a stack of just one billion dimes, one on top of the other, it would reach 839 miles, about the driving distance from here to St. Augustine, Florida! Or, if you had to wait one billion seconds for something, you would be waiting 31 years, 8 months and change! A stack of a billion sheets of paper would be over 300,000 feet high, or higher than a 30,000-story building. One billion is simply an incomprehensible number, but there are 250-300 billion stars in just our galaxy, and astronomers estimate that there are trillions (trillions!) of galaxies in the universe.

And, according to Paul, Jesus made them all, and holds them all together! And, he is also head of the church, which seems like small potatoes after contemplating all those whirling galaxies, but it’s very important to those of us in the church! And, incredibly, very important to Jesus, too! Finally, through Jesus God reconciled all things to himself through his death on the cross. The world has fallen from God’s grace into sin, chaos, fear, violence, self-centeredness and just plain old meanness. But God has chosen to intervene in order to bring everything back into a

right relationship with him, a process that began with the life, death, and resurrection of this same Jesus.

I find all of this to be a bit mind-blowing! And, I think the best response to such a revelation is to simply praise and thank God. So, we're going to sing an ancient hymn at this point, which was clearly inspired by passages like this one. It's called "Of the Father's Love Begotten," and it can be found on page 309 of your hymnal.

Let's finish the passage now. Paul takes the breath-taking, cosmic truth that he has just revealed about Jesus and makes it personal for the Colossians. <sup>21</sup>*And you who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds,* <sup>22</sup>*he has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present you holy and blameless and irreproachable before him—* <sup>23</sup>*provided that you continue securely established and steadfast in the faith, without shifting from the hope promised by the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven. I, Paul, became a servant of this gospel.* (Col. 1:21-23)

Paul points out that the Colossian Christians, who had formerly worshipped pagan idols and lived lives in opposition to how God intended them to live, have now been reconciled to God through Jesus! But what exactly does reconciliation mean? A Nigerian woman moved to America

and began using an English name, because her African name is too difficult for Americans to pronounce. One day in a conversation, someone asked her the meaning of her African name. She said that it means, “Child who takes the anger away.” She went on to explain that her mother had been forbidden by her parents to marry the man she loved, but that she had married him anyway. Her parents and his parents then shunned them both in the early years of their marriage. But then her mother became pregnant with her! And when their parents held that baby in their arms, the walls of hostility between them came crashing down. The child became the one who swept all the anger and division away. That’s how she got her name!

That would also be a good name for Jesus! He was the child, the Son of God, who took away the anger and division between God and humanity, restoring faith and trust between them. And we are all the beneficiaries of that. But, as Paul reminds us, we need to remain steadfast in that faith, in that relationship with God, even when it is costly. You see, being made right with God because of the work of Jesus means that Jesus can rightfully ask anything of us! For we owe our very lives to him, as the Lord of all Creation. And sometimes we forget that.

Arthur Burns, a well-known Jewish economist in Washington, D.C. was asked to pray at a gathering of evangelical politicians. He stunned his hosts when he prayed, “Lord, I pray that Jews would come to know Jesus

Christ. And I pray that Buddhists would come to know Jesus Christ. And I pray that Muslims would come to know Jesus Christ.” And then the kicker, “And I pray that Christians would come to know Jesus Christ.” Paul says that everything we need to know about God, everything we need to know about right living is centered in Jesus Christ. Do you know him? Maybe it’s time to get started.