



Sermon – September 27, 2020
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Verses Covered This Week

Colossians 1:15 - 16

As you grab your seat, let's pick up our Bibles. We're going to be in Colossians chapter 1, verse 15 this morning. Colossians 1, verses 15 and 16. And if you're a guest with us for the first time, welcome home. Whether you're in the area or you're just in town for the weekend for the game, we're glad you're here; whether you're in person or online. And while you're turning to your Scripture, I want to encourage you to take just a minute and in the seat back in front of you, there's going to be a Connect Card there. I'd like to have everybody grab one of those right now. Not just our guests, as we mentioned earlier, but all of you. And there's a reason for that. It's because this Sunday is the conclusion of our 21 days of prayer. We've had an amazing time journeying together, seeking the Lord to meet us in our needs, to see Him work as we pray our plans and pray our problems. And what we want to do this morning as we finish up this 21 days of prayer is I want to give you an opportunity to respond to all that the Lord has done. We did this in the first service, was blown away by the way the Lord worked in this time. How it's going to work is basically throughout the time I'm giving the message this morning, what I'd love for you to do is fill out any information on the Connect Card you want to, but the main thing I want you to do is on the back of it, down at the bottom, there's a spot for you to fill out prayer requests. And I'd love for you to take a second, as we journey through this message together to write down two things. One is if you've seen the Lord answer a prayer over this season, we'd love to know about that. Just write it down so we can praise along with you God's work in your life. And then second, is if there's an unanswered prayer, one that you are seeking the Lord on, that you would love for the church to come alongside you and to pray about, we want you to write that down there as well. And so you can do those two things. A praise and a prayer request. And then, at the culmination of our time together, as we have our response time, I'm going to invite you to make your way to the baskets. There's some here on the tables in the front, a few others at the middle, basically the same spots where we normally do the Lord's Supper elements. And we want you to drop those off. And as you physically place these cards in the basket, it's a symbolic reality of the spiritual truth that we know is happening every time we pray. That we are giving these things over to God. That we are offering up our praise and our prayer to Him asking Him to meet us in our needs. And so I want to encourage you as we turn our attention to Colossians 1:15, to work your way through that as we go through the message today.

So here's Paul. He's writing to us. And if you remember last week, we saw him speak about the work of Christ in redemption. Now we're going to see him this week talk about the work of Christ in creation. So follow along with me beginning in verse 15 when Paul says this.

15He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16For 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.

They say a picture is worth a thousand words. And Kevin Systrom and Mike Krieger knew that to be true when they launched a new app back in 2010 that they named Bourbon. And it was designed to be a social media check-in site where you could like your friends know where you were. But also a place where you could capture photos of alcohol. And over the years that app has exploded in popularity to where there are now more than one billion users. You're saying, "Well wait a minute. I've never heard of that app before. How could that be the case?" Well it's because not long into their journey with this app, they rename it to Instagram. We've all heard of that one before. We know that at the heart of Instagram, image is everything. That pictures are at the center of it. That the whole idea is that moments in life are captured and curated and shared in pictures. And so the premise of it is you capture those moments, you enhance their appearance through filters, and you tag people, and you write about your experience, and you put it out there for the world to admire and to praise. But at the heart of it, is the desire to be known and to be celebrated through image. But when we come to Colossians 1 this morning, we see Paul giving us a different picture of what God is doing for us in Christ. When he speaks here that Jesus is the image of God, he's not talking about some scenario where God is taking the way He's designed the world and seeking to curate it and enhance it in a way that humanity will enjoy. Instead what He is doing is in His Son, the second member of the Trinity, He is giving us His image; a perfect revelation of who God is and what He is about. And as we turn our attention to this text, I want you to think about what's happening. We've seen at the beginning of Colossians; Paul has given his greeting. He has now prayed for them. And in these next few verses from verse 15 to verse 23 is the high point of the entire letter and its focus on Jesus Christ.

Many of the scholars believe that verses 15 through 20 were a hymn, or a poem, in the ancient church. Perhaps Paul wrote it, or someone else did. But he includes it here in this section to elevate the significance and the supremacy of Jesus Christ for you and for me. And as we wrap up this time in our 21 days of prayer, this passage is going to show us two dimensions of the supremacy of Christ that should shape our lives. And I want you to see the first one right back there in verse 15 where Paul speaks about the supremacy of Christ in the kingdom. So notice how he says it. He says, He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. Right here out of the gate, Paul is reminding us of His preeminence, His prominence, His significance in the kingdom. And he speaks about it first that He is the image of God. That word in the original language, image, would be to describe a representation, something in a form or likeness, a manifestation. So if you were to look back in the book of Daniel, the statue that Nebuchadnezzar constructed is described in this way. Or in the exact time period where Paul is writing in the Roman empire. You would have a coin. On the front of it would appear the image of Caesar reminding everybody as they exchanged money who was the lord of the Roman empire. That image, that icon, that picture is what Paul is getting at here. He speaks about Jesus

as the image of the invisible God. It goes hand in hand with the way the author of Hebrews speaks in Hebrews 1:3 about how Jesus is the exact imprint of God's nature. Now we all know what it's like when a new baby is born and they come home from the hospital. Whether it's that first picture you see or that first time you lay eyes on them, one of the questions you're asking is, "Who do they look like?" They look more like mom or they look more like dad. There's this desire to see the reflection of the father in this new son. There can be a temptation to think of Jesus this way. But we need to recognize. When Paul speaks here that Jesus is the image of God, He is not a resemblance, but a revelation. He is not a reflection but a representation. He doesn't just resemble God, He Himself is God. He is the image of the invisible God. And we know that language, the image of God, is from the very beginning of the Bible. All the way back in Genesis 1:27. Do you remember the way that God makes Adam and Eve? He says, let us make man in our image. In the image of God, He created them. Male and female He created them. And so Paul is setting up this fundamental distinction. You and I and all of humanity, we are made in the image of God. But Jesus Himself, He is the image of God. You see the difference? We are made in the image of God; He is the image of God. There's a sense in which He is the prototype for all of humanity. He is the design, the one that all of humanity made in God's image are intended to reflect. And as that reality, there's a sense in which He represents all of humanity in being made in the image of God. And then through His death and resurrection, He restores all of humanity that looks to Him in salvation to fulfil God's design for the image of God. Now think about what this means for us. If Jesus is the prototype, then He is the measuring stick and the standard for what is normal in the human life.

Now rewind the clock with me for a minute. Just imagine that a year ago, right now, in September 2019, I showed you a picture of what Kyle Field looked like last night. 25% seating. Everybody in masks. The band can't perform at halftime. The yell leaders and Reveille aren't on the field. There's not even a real yell practice. It's only virtual. If you saw that a year ago, you wouldn't believe it. It would seem so strange, unusual. It would defy explanation. How could this be? It wouldn't seem normal at all. But for those of us who have now lived through this COVID season for 6 months, we get it. We see and we begin to adapt and to adjust our expectation of what normal is. We get used to the fact that we are living in an unusual moment. Well that same danger is true for us as we live out our faith in a broken world. We see the brokenness of the creation around us. We see the frailty of our body. We see the difficulty with wrestling with sin in our lives. And we can begin over time to believe that our experience is what is normal for humanity. But when Paul speaks here that Jesus is the image of God, that we are made in the image of God, he is reminding us that what we are experiencing now in our brokenness is not normal. It's not God's design. That we are reminded that one day Christ will return and make all things new. And He will restore this image in the beauty of its design. Notice how he speaks there though. He doesn't just talk about Jesus as the image of God. He speaks of Him as the image of the invisible God. Do you see that in verse 15? No eye has seen. No ear has heard. No one can comprehend the God of the universe. We can see His attributes in creation. We can learn about Him in our word. But until Jesus took on flesh and came to this world, no one had seen the invisible God. But in the incarnation, God makes Himself known. He reveals Himself to us just like He did for Paul himself. He was travelling on that Damascus road, ready to persecute the church. And Jesus meets him in that moment. And the invisible God now becomes visible to him. Jesus is the one that's making God known to us. He is that image of the invisible God. And if that's true, that ought to reframe the way that we think about all of humanity who are made in the image of God. Everyone in this room, everyone in this

community, everyone around the globe is made in this image of God. And as a result of that, they are worthy of dignity and respect.

There's a man that passed away this week by the name of Robert Graetz. It's amazing that he lived to 92 years old because he was a white minister of an all-black church in Montgomery, Alabama in the 1950's when the Montgomery bus boycott took off. And he was the only white minister in that whole city who would stand with his African American brothers and sisters against this injustice. You can imagine the way that people responded to that. On multiple occasions his tires were slashed, his home was damaged. In fact, in three different periods, there were attempts to bomb his home and to kill him. And as I came across his story, I was gripped by this particular line from his memoir when he encapsulated this reality that all of us are made in the image of God and that calls us to love others. Notice what he says here.

We feel God has given us the unique privilege of standing with one foot in the black community and one foot in the white. It may not be comfortable, but that is where we are. And until God tells us it is time to slow down, we intend to keep pressing ahead with our witness.

You see, what he knew is that each one of those men and women in Montgomery were made in the image of God. They were worthy of dignity respect. And that caused him to be committed to the cause of racial unity even if it cost him his own life. That's what the image of God in every person calls us to do. But that doesn't just shape the way that we pursue racial unity; it also shapes the way that we stand for the unborn. The reason that we are prolife, the reason that we stand against abortion, the reason that we believe every life in the womb is precious is because each of those babies is made in the image of God. They are worthy of dignity, respect, and protection. When Paul speaks here that Jesus is the image of God, that we are made in the image of God, it's calling us to live in a way that reflects that reality. And that's especially true right now during this election season. Where things are increasingly polarized and divided. There can be this tendency, especially on social media to see those who are your political opponents as enemies to be vaporized. As those who are to be put in their place, to be rejected. But instead as Christians, we're called to embody the fruit of the Spirit and to embrace this Colossians 1:15 reality that everyone of us is made in the image of Jesus and worthy of dignity and respect. Paul speaks here about Jesus as the image of the invisible God. But if you look back at verse 15, he also talks about Christ's supremacy in the kingdom by speaking of the way that He is the firstborn of all creation. Do you see that? So if you look at the contrast here, first when he speaks about Him being the image of God, it seems to affirm the deity of Christ. But then right after that he speaks about Him being the firstborn of all creation and it seems to reject the idea that He is God. So how do we make sense of that? What does Paul mean when he says that He is the firstborn? Does that mean that Jesus is a created being? Well even from the early years of the church, in the 4th century, a heresy arose from a man name Arius that taught that Jesus was a created being. He was the first created being. He was the most preeminent. But he was not fully equal with the Father. And the early church rejected that reality. But even down through the ages, even until right now, there are people today that believe that amongst us. Jehovah's Witnesses. Who when they knock on the door of your house and you begin to converse, this will be one of the points of disagreement that you will have with them. And they'll point to this verse to say, "See, it says He's the firstborn of all creation. It's right there in the text." But is Jesus really the first created being? Is He not equal with the Father? Well by no means, I mean think about it, right before this in verse 15 it tells us He is the image of the

invisible God. He is equal with God. And then right after this in verse 16, it talks about how by Him all things were created. He can't be both created Himself and creator of all things. The Scripture is clear that Jesus is fully God. So what does Paul have in mind here when he says that He is the firstborn? Well the image is not about sequence of time. It's about supremacy. That He is the firstborn, the One worthy of the inheritance, the preeminent one. The One to whom all authority in this universe has been given. Jesus is the firstborn. He's picking up on language. If you were to go back to the Old Testament, the Scripture of God describes Israel as His firstborn son in the book of Exodus. And Psalm 89 he speaks about a coming son of David. A coming Messiah who will become his firstborn. And now you have Paul speaking of Jesus who comes as a new Israel. Who comes as a son of David. That is the conquering Messiah and He is the firstborn. The one who has received the inheritance of the kingdom. And if that's true, it should change the way that we live. Is Christ firstborn in your life? Does He have priority? Does He have preeminence? Does He have supremacy in your heart? See, Paul speaks here first about the supremacy of Christ in the kingdom. But I want you to notice the way that this text goes on. Because in verse 16, we also see the supremacy of Christ in the creation. So look back at how he says it there.

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.

So just a couple weeks ago I had a church member come up to me and say, "Hey, I've been having a discussion with a friend. We've been discussing, was Jesus involved in creation? Did He play any role at all?" And I said, "Well, it's interesting you raise that. Because in just a couple weeks, we're going to be working our way through Colossians 1:16 which is going to answer that question for you and for us." Because what we find here is that in Colossians 1:16, Paul is crystal clear. He speaks about the supremacy of Christ in creation. That by Him all things were created. Now remember what that looks like. Back in Genesis 1 there is nothing that exists. And God speaks the world into existence through His word. Through His Son He brings everything into reality. All things, as Paul puts it here. From the most distant stars in the galaxy to the noxious fumes that have been festering in the bowels of the earth for thousands of years that are released when a volcano erupts. All things have been created by Jesus. And what did He create? When Paul speaks there of all things, notice what he does. He speaks about it in its totality. Things in heaven and on earth. Visible and invisible. Both the seen and the unseen realm. There is nothing that exists in this universe that is not there because it was created by Christ. All things. But notice what he does. After he speaks about all things, he narrows his focus there to that invisible realm; those spiritual forces. Do you see how he talks about them there in the middle of verse 16?

Whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities.

When Paul speaks of these, he's talking about spiritual beings. Primarily those spiritual forces of evil that set themselves up against the kingdom of God. In fact, this word authorities that's there towards the end of verse 16 is the exact word he used back in verse 13 to talk about the domain of darkness. All things, including those spiritual forces in the world around us that are now in opposition to Christ, have been created by Jesus.

Now why would he share that? What difference does that make? Well for one, in the time period of the Colossians, as we'll learn later on, there was false teaching that was arising in the church that seems to escalate these spiritual beings in their significance and importance to religious practice in a way that deescalates the supremacy of Jesus. And Paul already is speaking against that reality. But I think there's something else going on here. When Paul reminds us that Jesus created all things, including those spiritual forces that now war against them, do you know what he's reminding us of? That if Jesus designed them, he can still defeat them. If He created them, He can still crush them. Which has everything to do with the way that you and I fight against sin in our lives. When that temptation from the evil one comes. When that deception that leads us astray pierces our heart. When that accusation is brought against us in condemnation for our sin, we can find deliverance. We can find a freedom. We can find victory as we remember that Christ is the creator of all things who can still crush His enemies. That's the way that Paul is speaking of here when he talks about these unseen spiritual forces. But I don't want you to miss how this text ends. Because when Jesus is being praised here for His supremacy in creation, I want you to notice that Paul doesn't just talk about what Jesus does, he talks about why He does it. Notice the way that verse 16 ends. He says,

All things were created through Him and for Him.

You see that? Everything in creation was made for a reason. And what was that reason? Paul is telling us right there. The purpose of all creation is to magnify, is to glorify, is to honor our Savior, Jesus Christ. He created all things. And He created them for Himself. He is the agent of creation. He is the avenue of creation. He is the aim of creation. All of it is finding its culmination in Him. And we can only understand the significance of creation if we see it in light of its connection to Jesus. As we gathered here last week, we were walking through the passage just before this and before I began the message, I showed a picture there on the screen of some success we had when we were out alligator hunting last week. And I was feeling pretty good about myself when I went home from church. I went over to my parents' place and I was helping my dad fix a broken attic ladder. And as I was working away, we had tools all around us, I was up there doing it. And one of my boys walked in, he looks at me and he says, "Dad, I didn't know you were a handyman." And I thought, "Alright, God. You have a great way of humbling me after I feel good about proving my prowess as a man when my son is confronting me with the fact that I'm not all that good with creating things of my own." But I know in a church like this, it is filled with builders. In fact, that are home builders in our midst. And I imagine some of you have been in a situation where you built a home for yourself. You're the architect who designs it. You're the general contractor who oversees. You're the subcontractor that has to do all the tough work. You're the interior designer that has to determine the feel and the flow of it. And then ultimately, you're the resident. The one who it was made for. From beginning to end, that entire construction project is centered on you and your family. Isn't that a sense of what Paul is speaking about here when he talks about the nature of Christ in creation? That by Him all things were created. Through Him all things were created. And for Him all things were created. He is the beginning and the end of creation. He's the aim of every atom. He's the mission of every molecule. He is the end of every element. He is the purpose of every particle. And when we recognize that to be true, it changes the way that we see the creation around us. We care about creation not because of a shared belief about the nature of climate change or the goodness or dangers of fossil fuels. The reason that we care about the creation is it was made by Christ and for Christ. We want to learn how to engage with the created world

around us in a way that is pleasing to Jesus. That's one of the reasons why we invest so heavily in equipping you to understand what it looks like to walk with the Lord in every aspect of your life. It's one of the reasons I particularly love Trail Life that our boys have been doing. This outdoor discipleship program that where through outdoor education, we also ingrain Christian discipleship in order to help these boys as they grow understand God's intent for creation, His purpose in creating it, and how it all centers on Jesus Himself.

Now I haven't flown in about 6 months since COVID hit. I haven't been on a plane since back in March. And I imagine that's true for many of you. But in the role I had prior to coming here to serve as your pastor, I was on planes a lot. And one of the biggest frustrations you can have when you're seeking to fly from one place to another is when you get on that plane and then you have to get back off. Even worse, if you moved back from the gate or perhaps even taken off and you have to circle back and return to where you began because the flight can't go where it was intended. That's a problem. It's a frustration. And yet, one of the things that I came across this past week is that COVID has changed the way some people see flying. There are now international opportunities to take what this article called, Flights to Nowhere. So here's how it works. It's situation where you get on the plane at one airport and you fly around in order to come right back to the same place you took off. So you can hop on a flight in Sydney with Qantas Airlines, the flight sold out faster than any flight in the history of this airline, to take a flight to nowhere in Sydney. And you take off on a seven-hour journey. You go up on that plane, they're going to fly you over the Great Barrier Reef, they're going to bring you back around to sightsee in the Australian outback, and then just a few hours later, you're going to land right where you began at the beginning. Who would want to do that? But in this situation, what was previously seen as a problem now becomes the purpose. It would have frustrated you to no end to take off in one place and to come back to it. To have your starting line be your finish line. But now when you see things in a different light, and for a different end, it changes that perspective. That's the way that Paul is speaking about the nature of creation in Christ. That He is the beginning and the end. He is the first and the last. He is the starting line and the finish line. He is the Alpha and Omega. Jesus created all things. Just think about this. When he spoke the universe into existence, He created the raw materials that would one day be fashioned into the tree that He'd be nailed upon. That will be shaped into the crown of thorns that would crush His head. That would be made into the iron ore that would be plunged into His hands and to His feet. That would be fashioned into the stone that would be rolled in front of His tomb to hold Him there after He was dead. From the very beginning, creation had the cross in mind. And that's true for you and me this morning. That car that you got in was made from raw materials that Jesus spoke into existence before the foundation of the world. The seat that you're sitting in is held together in that way. The clothes you're wearing. The blood that is pumping through you. All of those things were made by Christ and they were made for Christ. And the call of the gospel to each one of us this morning is, who will we say that Jesus is? Will we see Him as our creator our redeemer and give our lives to Him? Seeing Him as the supreme ruler of the universe that He actually is.

Let's pray together this morning.

Father, in this moment, we are reminded that apart from Christ we can do nothing. He's our Alpha and Omega. He's our first and last. Lord, I pray that we would sense it. That His power in creation, His supremacy over the kingdom would fix our hearts on You. That His Spirit

would be at work in our lives to help us live in a way that is pleasing to You. And I pray in this moment, Lord, if there are people that have not yet experienced Christ in a saving way, would You awaken their hearts now? Would You prompt us to live lives for Your glory that seeks to engage the creation around us in a way that is pleasing to Christ in whose name we pray. Amen.