Image of the Invisible

Colossians 1 verses 15 to 20

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This week we take a break from Genesis 1 to 3. At the 9:00 service we looked at a great chapter in Colossians where Paul focusses on the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. Colossae is one of the places Paul never visited on his extensive travels and this section can be thought of as Paul giving this fledgling church a clear picture of who Jesus is. Remember this was new to them – these people weren’t Jews with all the history of the Old Testament leading them towards the Messiah. They lived in Asia Minor (what we now call Turkey) so following Christ was way out of their comfort zone.

1. Read the verses

Make a list of all the characteristics of Christ that Paul lists.

Which ones do you find difficult to understand and why?

Paul’s statement starts with the very beginning of everything. The idea of image has a modern meaning which has much to do with replica or representation. But here Paul is talking about an exact, as well as visible, representation of God – when we see Jesus, we see God.

The ‘firstborn’ may seem like Jesus was the first person to be born. In a Jewish context it is a term about status. He outranks all things in creation – this is Paul saying Christ is above all creation

1. If we make too much of Christmas, do we tend to think that the story of Jesus starts there? Does this make us likely to think of Jesus as a good human being rather than understanding he is God’s son and has been that from the beginning?

Does this make Jesus too remote and too big for us to relate to?

The next statement explains why Christ is preeminent over all creation. ‘By Him all things were created’ and the list of what he created is comprehensive. The list is balanced

Heaven and Earth

Visible and invisible.

1. The powers on earth can be seen – think about all the powerful things that God created on earth.

The invisible powers are identified as ‘powers, rulers and authorities’ and perhaps refer to the hosts of heaven.

To be sure you get it, Paul then talks about the controlling principles of creation –‘He is before all things and in him all things hold together’.

How do you know that God not only started things off but continues to sustain the whole universe?

Where do you see the evidence of this?

In verses 18 to 20 Paul brings things right down to earth. He anchors Christ’s supremacy in his authority over the church. The ‘image of the invisible God’ identified in the first section enters into human experience in order to deal with the fundamental problem of our sinful nature. His love is poured out on the cross as he is sacrificed and as he takes the sin of the world upon himself.

1. When all those people who have acknowledge Jesus as Saviour and Lord come together, they form the true church. Because he is the Lord of creation and the head of the church it means that the destiny of both are bound together.

What are the practical outcomes arising from Christ’s headship of the church?

What does it mean that Christ holds authority in the church?

Does this change how we see our earthly leaders?

Does it change how we see church?

Any attempt to diminish the power or authority of Christ is crushed by the next phrase. This echoes the statement in the creation section of this passage. He is a full, not a partial, embodiment of God. ‘All the fulness of the Deity lives in bodily form’. All the activities and attributes – ‘his Spirit, word, wisdom and glory are disclosed in him’. If we want to see God, we need look no further than Jesus.

1. Does this huge definition of Jesus Christ make him unapproachable?

Does the enormity of his power make me think he will never be bothered with me and my problems?

What convinces us that this ‘image of God’ wants intimacy with each of us?

Paul concludes this passage with words that should gladden our hearts. It reminds us that he does care about us and our sinful plight. God created all things and one day he will reconcile all things. The consequences of the entry of sin in the world at the fall caused catastrophic consequences. The groaning creation and the depths of human pain and suffering will be brought to an end.

1. Think about the wonder of Christ’s sacrifice and how it ultimately brings about peace and reconciliation – the plan of the garden of Eden will be restored with an upgrade (a garden becomes a city). We will once again be God’s people, living in God’s place, experiencing the fulness of his blessing as we live under his rule.

You can discuss this if you like but it seems like a good prompt to go into praise and worship.

As you do why not take each of the phrases in this passage and thank God that his Son is all of those things – we need him to be all of them.