

“All Things for All Time”

April 23, 2023

Recap

Paul wants them to be Jesus-centered in all things. The big temptation is syncretism - the blending of all these rival gods and stories and philosophies and ideas threatening to distort what it means to follow Jesus.

How does he do that? Before he gets into all the specifics about the cultural pressures and all that, he first starts off by telling them the story of Jesus, and it happens to be one of the densest bits of theology in the Bible.

So if you have a Bible, we'll be in **Colossians 1:15-23** this morning...

Colossians 1:15-23

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. [16] 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. [17] And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. [18] 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.

Alright, so let's pause right there. There's a lot to unpack. Paul just dropped a ton of stuff on us as to why Jesus is unique and worthy of our attention. Look back at v.15 again -

Colossians 1:15

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

So first thing to unpack - is what is meant when Paul says Jesus is **the image of the invisible God**? And simply put it means - if you wanna know who God is - look to Jesus. If you wanna know about who created everything, who made you, the meaning of your life, the meaning of reality itself - look to Jesus. He is God made flesh.

So already, Paul is recorrecting some notions some in the church have about Jesus - it's not like in the Old Testament God is mean and grumpy, and in the New Testament he's all love - no, Jesus is the image of the invisible God. Jesus is the visible and exact representation of God's very character. He's not just a symbol of God or an expression of God the way an artist paints a landscape - Jesus is fully it.

He is the tangible, physical representation of a spiritual reality that is beyond our human comprehension. The unknowable is now made known.

If you were around last year - we went through the book of Acts together, and we talked about how people in the Roman Empire had this category that God was ultimately unknowable - if an ultimate God existed, then He existed in a category completely outside of human comprehension. That's why you have Paul in **Acts 17** - seeing this statue that says "to the unknown God," and he's like, "Good news, squad. I know who the unknown God is - and His name is Jesus."

So all this to say, when Paul says Jesus is the image of the invisible God, this would not have been lost on the church.

Then there's that next bit in the verse that says **he's the firstborn of all creation**. So to be clear, back then, in a patriarchal society - if you were the firstborn son in a family, you were given authority and status over everything in

a way no one else in the family had. The firstborn son was an extension of the Father's authority. Everything the Father has, the Son has. Now connecting this to the text, this means...

- when Jesus speaks, the Father speaks
- When Jesus loves, the Father also loves
- When Jesus forgives, the Father also forgives

And to drive this idea even further, look what he says next:

Colossians 1:16-18

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. [17] And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. [18] 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.

So again, emphasizing how Jesus has **power and authority** over all things. He is fully human and fully God. He created everything in the universe - He controls everything in the universe - and no other god or belief system or idea on the planet can come close to rivaling Him. He is in a category all His own.

And notice how in **v.18**, Paul says how Jesus is the firstborn from the dead - connecting what he said earlier in **v.15** - how Jesus is the firstborn of creation. He's once again connecting, bringing back up this idea of authority and power. Jesus rules and reigns over all creation - everything the Father has, the Son has. He not only has power over life and everything living - He has power over death too. Life and death are in His hands and under His domain.

So before we go any further, let me just say...that's a lot. And to be honest, we could spend an entire sermon series going through everything I just said in the last three minutes. Like...Jesus is God and has power over all of existence, that's a biggie. And I could riff for a good bit on that. But we can't this morning for the sake of time, so let me just boil it down as simply as I can.

Here's the big thing I want us to see - is that Jesus is fully human and fully God. He is the image of the invisible God. The firstborn over the living and the dead. All of reality is created, controlled, and embodied by Jesus.

The point of what Paul is saying is Jesus is the place where both divinity and humanity meet. And the way the Bible often talks about it is - there are two realities, or planes of existence, you have the heavenly realm and the earthly realm. And when you look to Jesus, you see the overlapping of these two realities fusing together as one.

In fact - I've got a series of graphics to communicate this. So if you're a big note-taker, today is your week.

So bear with me...like **this graphic** represents: Jesus' body is the fusing of Heaven and Earth, the overlap of divinity and humanity. This means

- If you want to know what God is fully like, look to Jesus
- AND if you want to know what it means to be fully human, look to Jesus.
- All that existence is supposed to be AND everything that I am supposed to be...is found in this overlap personified in Jesus.

And if you grew up in church - you may have heard that a million times over - but I don't want that to get lost on us just how insane that is. The God of the Universe - who created all of existence and who sustains and oversees everything for all of time - from the stars in the sky a trillion miles away, down to the very breath you're breathing right now - decided to come down in human form.

Why? Why would he decide to become human? Paul predicts this question and says in v.19...

Colossians 1:19-20

[19] For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, [20] and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

In a nutshell, Paul is saying the reason why Jesus came down to Earth - embodying full Godness and full humanity - the reason why He came as this overlap of Heaven and Earth was so that He could reconcile - or bring together - Heaven and Earth once and for all.

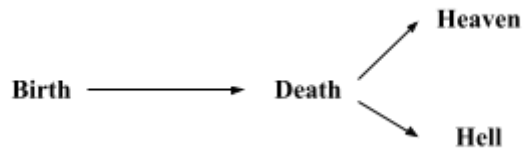
[Legos illustration]

And, **this is the story of the Bible**. This is the aim of what the Bible is trying to tell us. The merging together of Heaven and Earth. This is the story.

So think about it like this, I grew up in church. And my perception of the story of the Bible went something like this. For most people who are not Christians, their life looks something like this: **you're born, you die**, and what happens after that? Well, who knows. Maybe something happens, but probably not. So make the most of this life. Have fun. Sleep with who you want to sleep with. Try to maximize your enjoyment, minimize pain. And good luck with all of that.



But the story of the Bible, again, this is my perception of it - looked like something very similar: you're born, and one day, you'll die. AND good news, we actually know what's going to happen to you after you die: Heaven or Hell. Now Heaven is really awesome - you'll love it. No more sickness or pain. And Hell is, well, the exact opposite. So which one do you want?



And it's like, oh, that's an easy decision. I don't want Hell, I want Heaven. I choose that option. And then it's like, "Okay, great, you chose Heaven, good choice. I would have picked that one too. So now that you're a Christian, here's a bunch of rules you gotta follow now, and it's like, 'ah man. Okay, you didn't lead with that, but I guess I don't wanna go to Hell, so...okay, fine.'"

Now to reiterate, I'm sure the church I grew up in taught the Bible faithfully and painted a better picture. I'm just saying this was my perception. It's me. I'm the problem; it's me.

And Paul is saying, and the story of the Bible, that the aim of it all is this reconciling of all things. Heaven and Earth overlapping together.

Here's the story the Bible actually paints...

For Jesus, the Kingdom of God - or the Kingdom of Heaven, eternal life - is not just somewhere you go when you die, but something that has finally arrived in Jesus.

And from page one of the Bible, God had created this place for us as human beings to live in. You had the Garden of Eden existing as these two realities - Heaven and Earth - merged together. With human beings living in the reality of what it means to be fully human. Seeing and experiencing the fullness of God. **Like this graphic represents:**



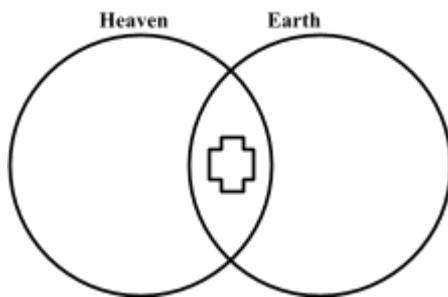
And this overlapping of Heaven and Earth lasts for only a couple of chapters of the Bible until sin enters the picture. This orientation of the heart to turn from God - and because of this decision - human beings are banished from the Garden. And so now this overlap of Heaven and Earth are **ripped apart from each other.**

And so much of the Old Testament poses this dilemma now. Human beings are only truly human when they experience who God is. We were made for this Heaven and Earth reality, but sin severs us from that reality. So now, as human beings, we experience this cosmic homelessness. This world we experience, with all its pain and suffering and death, is not our home. The fusing of Heaven and Earth is our home. So how can we get back there like it was in the Garden so long ago?

So when you arrive at the New Testament - the way Jesus talks about Himself and His teaching addresses this human dilemma. He talks about how the Kingdom of Heaven is existing right now. This is how Jesus opens up his ministry in the book of Matthew:

Matthew 4:17

Jesus began to preach, saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”



Notice Jesus does not say, “Repent for the kingdom of heaven is ready for you after you die.” Jesus is saying the Kingdom of Heaven is right here, standing in front of you and is available to you now. And if you’re tracking with the drawings, **Jesus coming down to Earth looks something like this.** He embodies the overlap.

- His ministry - healing disease, forgiving sin, casting out demons - is creating these little pockets of heaven on earth... he’s spreading this overlap. He’s reconciling these two realities together.
- Jesus, wherever he goes, is living in this overlap of Heaven and Earth. He’s hanging out with sinners, he’s living in a broken world, he makes friends with people who are so far gone from God - Jesus approaches them as a way of saying, “The kingdom of heaven, Eden, fellowship with God is not too far from anyone.”
- He even teaches his people to pray “your kingdom come and will be done on earth as it is in heaven” - essentially, “pray that this overlap would occur, more and more... that earth (human space) would become more and more of heaven (God’s space).

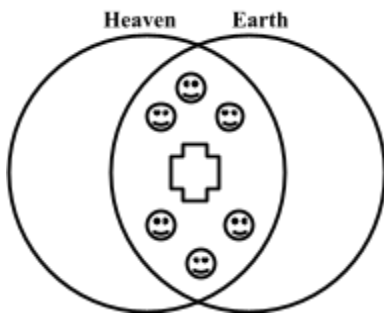
And that’s what **v.20 of Colossians 1** is getting at. The Cross is more than just your sins are forgiven and now you know where you’re going when you die - the cross becomes the place where sin is absorbed and you and I are cosmically reconciled back to God. What sin had fractured, through the Cross, Jesus reconciles these two realities back together.

So do we go to Heaven when we die? For sure, but that’s not the emphasis of the Bible’s story.

Rather, the emphasis of the Bible's story is how heaven and earth are being reconciled in Jesus.

This means through faith in Jesus and following after Jesus, you now get to experience this overlap between Heaven and Earth with Him. The Kingdom of Heaven is not just a place set out for you in the future when you die one day. Heaven is a reality that you can experience now.

It's a way of life that He invites you into. And **He is in the process of not only remaking the world; He's in the process of remaking you** to look more and more like His image. Through faith and following Jesus, you are now in the process of becoming more fully human.



This means, when you find a church that is centered on Jesus, that means you've found home. You no longer have this cosmic homelessness. Church and church family, with all its shortcomings and failings, our aim is to be the closest thing to what Heaven is like on planet Earth. We get to live in this space together. Where people can experience and encounter Jesus in our community. Where this overlapping of realities is present. Our role as the church now becomes this little meeting place of heaven and earth.

And our role now, as little images of Jesus, by the power of the Spirit, is to bring in heaven wherever we go.

NT Wright

Jesus's resurrection is the beginning of God's new project, not to snatch people away from Earth to Heaven but to colonize Earth with the life of Heaven.



And the story of the Bible concludes with Heaven and Earth coming together once and for all. Where God's people, being Jesus-centered as a family on a mission to bring Heaven down to Earth, is finally realized. All of us - God and humans - living in this overlapping space. Fully human, experiencing the fullness of God.

That's the story of the Bible. And it's a beautiful one that you and I are invited into now.

Now that being said, and I'm thinking about the story I was told as a kid, what about Hell? How does Hell fit into this story?

- What's interesting is when you look at how Jesus talks about it, the word he uses for **Hell is the Greek word Gehenna**. And Gehenna was an actual geographical place in their time. It was this location that existed outside of the city of Jerusalem that was essentially a place where garbage was taken and burned. Anything that was unwanted or unwelcome or anything that defiled the city, so to speak, was brought to this space outside.
- So it wasn't this - equal and opposite space of Heaven and Earth - but the way Jesus talks about it is this place outside of the overlap.
- That's how Revelation talks about it - Heaven and Hell reconciling together, and Hell is seen as this place, this garbage dump outside of this space, where the things that are unwanted and unwelcomed by God and humans in the overlap are fully removed.

So think about it like this - as human beings, Christian or non-Christian - there are some things we all are on the same page about that we can't stand. Things like cancer and death. There are some things we downright hate. Things like sex trafficking and abuse. Most of us can collectively agree, we can't stand that stuff and we long for all of that to get removed from the world. We see the problem and we want it fixed.

And because Jesus is in the business of reconciling all of existence - that means He hates that stuff. And he wants it gone more than you do.

But it goes deeper than that. Because Jesus doesn't just want to do away with sex trafficking, he wants to do away with all forms of lust. Jesus doesn't just hate abuse; he wants to get rid of all forms of anger in the human heart.

And God, out of His love for the world, to reconcile Heaven and Earth together, He will make sure that sin and its effects will not get the last word. He will remove all sin and all of its consequences away once and for all.

And this is what Hell is - for those who choose not to live in the overlap - where God reigns as King - God gives humans the freedom to choose. Do you want to live life on your terms, or do you want to live life on mine where Heaven and Earth exist?

C.S. Lewis

Hell is the greatest monument to human freedom.

Now I hear all of that, and I don't know how your brain works or what that makes you think or feel, but here's what this makes me think, and I wonder if you can relate...when I think about how Hell is this space for those who choose not to live in that overlap, where we choose sin over Jesus...I look at my life...and to be honest, I see a little bit of Hell in me. Now, I don't know if you wanna be that honest with yourself, but that's the truth. So what do we do with that?

Like, I can think of times when I've been angry and snapped at my kids. And not in the righteous anger type of way, but I just lose my temper and I have to ask my kids to forgive me. I'll be honest, that's a lot less like Heaven and Earth and looks more like Hell on Earth.

So what does God do with that when at times I can be a little co-conspirator of Hell and Earth?

Paul actually predicts that...so let's read this last piece...

Colossians 1:21-23

And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, [22] 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, [23] 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.

What does Jesus do with the Hell in us? He reconciled that in Himself through His death on the Cross. And the good news is, through His resurrection, Jesus demonstrates He has power even over death.

Conclusion:

This is what's happening in the world, and this is what's happening in your life. By looking like and following Jesus, you can live in the overlap now. You can live in that reality, and a day is coming when that reality will be fully realized in you and in the world.

- This means we hate cancer. The good news is cancer will not win. And even if you get that diagnosis, you have peace because you can live in the overlap now. You can experience the foretaste of Heaven and Earth right now.
- This means miscarriages and infertility do not get the final word. Jesus gets the final word of your life and all of creation. So that even when you get the news, you can live in the overlap knowing that more is coming and will come.
- This means your sin, and all forms of anger, and lust, and bitterness - do not win. Jesus wins. And He is in the process of getting the Hell out of this world and the Hell out of you...

Because He is before all things. He controls all things. In Him all things together. And He is in the business of reconciling all things, and nothing and no one is going to stop Him. He is King, and He is a good King - He loves you and conquered Hell itself so that you can get brought in and experience the Kingdom life now.

Pray

At this time, I invite you to respond through different acts of worship. If you are new, you may notice some movement around this room as we each respond.

So, the band will play, and we will continue to worship together through song. But maybe the Holy Spirit is talking to you right now, convicting you towards repentance. Perhaps you have something going on that you need to take to Christ, and the burden is too much to carry alone. Maybe today is the day you decided to follow Jesus Christ. If so, we would love to pray with you. We have members of our prayer team located at the front of the stage and in the back of the room who are in blue lanyards and prepared to pray with you. So we'd love for you to step out of your comfort zone and receive prayer. You may also gather with your LifeGroup or spouse.

And as we continue through prayer and song, we will also respond by taking communion. Communion is when we remember that God joyfully sent His son Jesus into the world, where His body was broken for us, and His blood was shed for us, and by placing our faith in Jesus, we get to remember and celebrate that. So if you are a follower of Jesus, you are invited to take communion. Communion stations are open, and you can partake in this expression of worship when you are ready.

And finally, during this time, we want to continue worshiping together through giving. Jesus commands us to honor and glorify God in this way. We have a giving station in the auditorium and the lobby.

So now, let's respond with these expressions of worship.