

Colossians 1 vs 15-20 (esp vs 15)

Image is a hot topic in this day and age of selfies and profiles. It seems that what you project is more important than who you really are! There is the person you think you are, the person others think you are and the person you really are! It's no wonder mental health problems arise when people try to act out a person that they'd like to be rather than relax in the person they are!

An image can be something we project but is that what Paul means when he says Jesus is the image of the invisible God? Is Jesus just an idea of what God is like but not the real thing?

Hebrews chapter 1 vs 3 tells us that Jesus is the exact representation of God! He is not different from God but God in human form. An image in which we can see God (who no one can see and live!) Jesus displays all of God's attributes in a way that us mere mortals can understand them. Jesus isn't someone who can introduce us to God - he is God with a human face and body!

There is a phrase, "like father like son". Not a day goes by when I don't give my earthly father a thought and I still miss him so much. I have his DNA and he nurtured me till his death in 2015. I'm proud to bear his image in me and no greater compliment can be paid to me than when someone says to me, "You are just like your Dad". However, I am a flawed representation of a flawed Dad. Jesus is the perfect representation of the perfect father. Not "like father like son" but, "like Son like Father"

Read John 1 vs 18

Jesus is called Immanuel. God with us. The words "with us" are so important when, for many at this time, he may feel very distant. Jesus came that we may know that God is with us. With us in health, with us in sickness, with us in life, with us in death. With us always!

Be encouraged in his presence and give thanks for it.

Daily Devotions Tuesday 31st March 2020

Colossians 15-20 (esp 15-17)

Last year I was invited to Packington Junior School to be questioned by a class about my Christianity. Questioned??!! It was more, "Grilled"!! The very first question was "Who made God?". It didn't get any easier and you can imagine how my answer, "He's always been there", opened up another barrage of questions!

We could easily get the impression from the word 'firstborn' that Jesus was created. We need to look at how the term is used in the Old Testament to understand it properly. In Exodus 4 vs 22 Israel was called God's firstborn though it was not the first created nation. In Psalm 89 v 27, God calls David the firstborn! Firstborn in the Old Testament was to do with status and priority. It signifies being and heir! Jesus was not only the creator but also the heir of all he created.

Verse 16 reminds us that we can justifiably imagine the word Jesus where the word God is used in the very first sentence of the Bible. Not only did Jesus create all of heaven and earth but he did it for himself. We often use the term "mankind, the pinnacle of creation" as if it was all done for our benefit!! Here we are told it was created for him!

The Colossians needed reminding of this. They were being threatened by principalities, powers, superstitions and occult practices. Here they are reminded that all those things are his. This is still true. Christ is Lord of every power whether visible or invisible! In this age of corporate power and international politics we are reminded that nothing is outside the supreme reign of Christ.

There is an idea in science called entropy. It is to do with the natural tendency of things to lose order. Left to its own devices life will always become less structured. Weeds overtake gardens, buildings crumble, cars rust and people age! This law applies to the whole universe but we see something different happening. The reason the cosmos does not collapse into chaos is because Christ is holding all things together. (vs 17). Jesus isn't just for Christians!! Every living creature benefits from the fact that he is keeping the universe ticking!

Take comfort and strength in the knowledge that the loving Lord Jesus is Lord of all. Whatever we face today, be it political, financial, family, daily routine or even the unexpected remember that Jesus is Lord of all and is holding all things together in his perfect wisdom!

Daily Devotions 1st April 2020

Colossians 1 vs 15-20 (esp vs 18)

Paul continues to re-assure the church in Colossae who had become fearful that the surrounding culture was going to overwhelm them. Chapter 2 has many references to this pressure (vs 4,8,16). Paul reminds them who is in charge and in this one verse three things are apparent.

- Christ is the head of the church. There have been too many ministers of local churches who have considered themselves the head of their church. The Queen has the official title of the head of the church of England. Neither is right. Only Christ is the head of the church and this is a truth that myself, David and Ian have always tried to uphold. It is true that he raises up people to run his local churches and feed his sheep but ultimately it is Jesus who is in charge.
- Secondly we read that the church is considered as the body of Jesus! He is the head and all the parts of the body function according to the control of the head. Recently (and especially during our mission week) I have been thrilled to see all the parts of the body working in unison under the control of Jesus. No task considered too menial but gladly undertaken to serve the head.

Do you look after your body? Biblically it is right to do so physically and spiritually. Consider how much time you take over it. Do you read scripture and pray? Do you take your "no more than an hour" of regular exercise? (And without driving to any beauty spots that are spied on by Derbyshire police!!) We try to stay healthy and look after our bodies. Now think how much more the perfect Jesus Christ will look after his body! The Colossian church didn't need to worry because Jesus would look after it. MBC doesn't need to worry because Jesus will look after it. Jesus is greater than any cultural influences that seek to sway the church. If we are part of a church that is committed to the teachings of Jesus then he will fulfil his role as the head of that church.

- Christ is the firstborn from the dead. Paul is speaking about the resurrection. Christ was the first resurrected person. Lazarus came back from death but still had to die eventually. After his resurrection Jesus was never to die again. He was the forerunner of many. "Because I live, you also will live" John 14 vs 19.

Praise God that no matter what tactics the devil might use against us, Jesus is still the head of his church. Like a body is to the head we must stay connected to it and respond to it,

Praise God that Jesus' resurrection guarantees ours. No need to fear the future in this life. Better is to come in the next!

Colossians 1 vs 15-20 (esp vs 19,20)

When our children were little I started to run their evening bath then went downstairs and got completely sidetracked doing some other of my many household chores! I came out of the lounge, duster in hand, to see water falling through the ceiling into the kitchen and on rushing to turn off the taps had to wade through a waterfall that used to be our stairs! We laugh now but you can imagine the “unhappiness” in the house after the event. The water stopped spilling over (no overflow outlet on our bath) but it was completely full. It could not contain any more. This is the kind of fulness Paul is trying to describe. He even adds the word “all” to make the picture complete. All that filled God was also made to fill Christ. Everything, every attribute, every characteristic that filled God was made to dwell in Christ. His Spirit, his Word, his wisdom, his grace and his glory all made to dwell in the earthly representation of God, Jesus.

Paul has been leading up to this. Previous statements about Jesus have included image of God, firstborn, creator, head of the church and before all things. Now Paul hammers home the point. Jesus and God are one because both possess all the fulness of God. How re-assuring this would be to a church who were given to placing some importance on pagan supernatural powers.

Next we read of Christ, the reconciler of all things. Not all men or all people but all things both heavenly and earthly. We have already synth Christ was the creator of all things (vs 16) but the perfection of his original creation was spoilt in Genesis 3 when all things fell under a curse.

Only Christ can reverse that curse and only by his sacrifice on the cross. Only through his death can there be reconciliation. All things will one day come before Christ and all will acknowledge him as Lord. Willingly or unwillingly, all will one day bow before him. We can only know peace with God if we recognise now that Jesus died in our place because of our sin. (More on this tomorrow)

As recipients of reconciliation from Christ we become his ambassadors and have a duty to pass on the availability of that reconciliation to others! Pray for opportunities (even in lockdown) to be able to minister in some way.

Praise God for his fulness. See Psalm 103 vs 8-19 for a list of his attributes.

Daily devotions Friday 3rd April 2020

Colossians 1 21-29 (esp 21-22)

What an amazing transformation between 'alienated from God' to 'free from accusation'. Paul points out that there was time when we were enemies of God in our minds. Nothing can eat into the conscience of an unbeliever more than the knowledge of being an enemy of the most powerful force ever known. The great and sovereign God who holds the eternal fate of every person in his hands. Sadly, most unbelievers don't have this conscience! Most would say, "My behaviour is not evil" but Jesus tells us that no one is good, only God (Mark 10 v 18).

Then we find we are 'holy in God's sight, without blemish and free from accusation'. Since becoming a Christian this verse has always amazed me. That God now sees me as holy and perfect. I am far from holy and far from perfect but God sees me this way. How is this possible? Through Christ's physical body put to death. God sees us through the saving grace of Jesus' death!

Revelation 12 vs 10 tells us that the devil is the accuser of the brothers and sisters. This is the source of all those thoughts that make us think we are not good enough, that our sin was too great to be forgiven, that I've not done anything to deserve God's forgiveness. Paul reminds us that because of Calvary we are free from accusation. We need to see ourselves as God sees us. Holy without blemish and free from accusation!

No condemnation now I dread
Jesus and all in Him is mine
Alive in Him my living head
And clothed in righteousness divine
Bold I approach the eternal throne
And claim the crown, through Christ my own. (Charles Wesley 1738)

Praise God that all of our sin has been cast into the deepest sea (Micah 7 v 9). Look again at the cross and understand afresh what Christ did for us. Hallelujah, what a Saviour!

Colossians 1 vs 24-27

Up to the time of writing this we have been thinking and praying for Sarah's daughter, Grace, in the very late stages of her pregnancy. Jesus mentions the suffering of pain during childbirth being replaced by the joy of the new child in John 16 v 21. Paul talks here of rejoicing in his suffering because he knows it is beneficial for the sake of the gospel. Christ had many afflictions on the way to the cross but is still afflicted in heaven when he sees his servants suffering! Some have paid the ultimate sacrifice for the sake of the gospel but we are all called to pay something for following Christ. We suffer gladly now, knowing that suffering will turn to joy when we reign with Christ in the future.

What a great example Paul is to us! He, like us, has been called to be a servant of the church and his role is to present the word of God in its fulness. We are all called to be servants of the gospel wherever we are. All of us are in full time ministry, not just those who have office in the church! In fact, the humble gospel conversation over the garden fence is definitely better than how the Bishop of York missed a God given opportunity when he appeared as part of the panel on Question Time last night for an hour and failed to mention Jesus once!! It angered me and saddened me. I wonder if he's read vs 28-29?? "He is the one we proclaim!"

We as followers of Christ keep on suffering, keep on serving and keep on investing in the work of the kingdom. We do it because Christ is in us. (vs 27). We are empowered by him and his sovereignty is our sufficiency.

Praise God today for this truth. Jesus is for us, with us and in us!