

Theme: - Christ is the key

Today I'm preaching on St Paul's letter to the Colossians, but before we continue just a few words about Paul's purpose for writing the letter. Paul speaks positively and encouragingly of the Colossian Christian's faith in God, he speaks of their love, and hope and acknowledges that the good news is bearing fruit and growing in them. However, Epaphras has brought Paul news of serious problems at Colossae, problems of false teachings that some scholars have labelled the 'Colossian heresy.' Paul is writing this letter to help the Colossians to deal with these problems, which can be found in chapter 2 and 3.

For example, in chapter 2 verse 8 Paul was told that some of them are being led astray by false teaching and philosophies, in 2, 18 Paul was told that some worshipped angels, and in chapter 3 verse 8 they are being accused of ill-treating their families and their slaves. Paul was asking them to stay loyal to Christ, Paul writes, 'that if with Christ you died through baptism, then through faith you were raised to new life in Christ.' 'Therefore, if you died to Christ why do you live as if you belong to the world; why do you submit to the old regulations. If you have been raised with Christ then seek things from above not things of the earth.'

In verses 15 to 20 Paul lists 12 ways that Christ is superior to all things, and is to be our only guide in the way we live out our lives, and you were given the list when you came in. For those at home the list will be on the screen in a moment, they are:

1. Christ is in the image of the invisible God. Verse 15a
2. Christ the first born of all creation. 15b
3. Through Christ all things in heaven and earth were created. 16
4. Christ is before all things. 17a
5. Christ holds all things together. 17b
6. Christ is the head of the church. 18a
7. Christ is the beginning. 18b
8. Christ is the first born of the dead. 18c
9. Christ the one who has first place in everything. 18d
10. In Christ God was pleased to dwell. 19a
11. Through Christ God was pleased to reconcile all things. 20a
12. Christ the one who has made peace through the blood of the cross. 20b

Those are the twelve characteristics or attributes of Christ listed in verses 15 to 20 and I am now going to go through each one in turn: -

Number 1, Christ is in the image of the invisible God.

Our invisible God is a mystery because he is God, and because he is invisible, but as Christians we all want to know what God is like; and the only way to do that is to get to

now Jesus, because Jesus said as recorded in John 14 verse 9, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father." Jesus represents the Father in every respect.

Number 2, Christ the first born of all creation.

In this country Titled people pass down their possessions to the first born male. In Jewish custom the law bestowed great privileges on the first born and in the book of Numbers 3:13 God said, "All the first born are mine" and God referred to Jesus as the first born of all creation the king of all kings, Psalm 89:27. "This is also reflected in John's gospel, "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God, and the word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being."

Number 3, Through Christ all things in heaven and earth were created.

Again, at the beginning of John's gospel, we have "All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being." Everything was created through him and for him, which includes the physical and the spiritual. One of the heresies of the Colossian Christians was that they were worshipping angels and St Paul was explaining that if angels were created through Jesus then clearly it is Jesus who is the superior who they should be worshipping.

Number 4. Christ is before all things.

Once again we hear the echo of John's gospel. This means that through Christ the creation story we read about in Genesis was created through Christ, therefore Christ is superior to the created order, because if it were not for Christ there would be no creation. In the 3rd and 4th centuries there was a heresy that Jesus was created by the Father, but John clearly wrote, "In the beginning was the word." Not sometime in the future, but in the beginning and there is nothing before the beginning.

Number 5. Christ holds all things together.

St Paul is saying that not only was Christ present at the creation for which he had a leading role, but that he has held creation together ever since. This can be difficult to get one's mind around now that we know something of the extent of creation through such people as Professor Brian Cox, but we have to remember that for God all things are possible.

Number 6. Christ is the head of the church.

Of course, he is the head of the church, if Jesus had never come to earth there would be no church today. The word church can be confusing, because the church of Christ is us the people of Christ, who happen to worship together in a building we call a church.

Number 7. Christ is the beginning.

Christ is the beginning in that he was before all things verse seventeen, However, Christ is also the beginning in the fact of his incarnation, death, and resurrection which began a new covenant, a new chapter in God's salvation history.

Number 8. Christ the first born from the dead.

This phrase for me gives me hope and confidence for the future because if Christ is the first born from the dead, then that means that Christ's resurrection will be the first of thousands upon thousands more rising from death, of which my hope is that Jill and I shall be two of them. And in Corinthians 15:21 we read, since death came through a human being, (Adam), the resurrection of the dead has also come through a human being (Christ). In Revelation chapter 1 verse 5 we read, "And from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the first born of the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth.

Number 9. Christ the one who has first place in everything.

St. Paul wrote to the Philippians in chapter 2 verses 6 to 11 these words about Christ. "Who though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death; even death on a cross." "Therefore, God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

Number 10. In Christ God was pleased to dwell.

In other words, Christ was God incarnate, when Jesus spoke he spoke the words of God, and the Spirit of God lived in him. At his baptism in Matthew chapter 3 verse sixteen we read, "And when Jesus had been baptised, just as he came up from the water, suddenly the heavens were open to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, 'this is my Son, the beloved, with whom I am well pleased.'

Number 11. Through Christ God was pleased to reconcile all things.

Matthew chapter 5 verse nine is one of the beatitudes and reads, "Blessed are the peace makers, for they will be called children of God." Before we can have peace we need to have reconciliation and reconciliation is strongly related to Forgiveness. It is forgiveness that shuts the door on the past and opens up for us a creative future. It is also through our faith, repentance, and God's grace that we are forgiven and reconciled to God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Number 12. Christ the one who has made peace through the blood of the cross.

Peace has its roots in the Hebrew word shalom; shalom can refer to an inner kind of peace, the kind of wellbeing that comes from a deep relationship with God. This peace is shattered by sin but can be restored through repentance and God's forgiveness. Peace or shalom can also refer to an external kind of peace, the absence of hatred or violence among individuals or nations. We have no peace at present because of war in Ukraine,

Ethiopia, Yemen, and by hunger and poverty in many developing countries. In these verses 15 to 20 are listed twelve good reasons why we should place our faith and trust in Christ.

Moving on to verse 21, verse 21 reads, “And you who were once estranged, and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds.” It is very likely that many of the Colossian Christians were Gentiles; so, St Paul is reminding them that they were once estranged, or alienated, from Jewish society and were not covenants of the promise given to Abraham. Therefore, like atheists, ultimately having no hope for the future, but now in Christ Jesus, and through Christ’s death and resurrection they have hope of eternal life with Christ.

Verse 23 asks the Colossian Christians to stay securely established and steadfast in the faith, without shifting from the hope promised in the gospel, and that is still a vital requirement today for all of us, we are to stay faithful to Christ to the end of our days. In Hebrews chapter 12 verse 1 we read, “Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight and sin that clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance the race that is set before us.”

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