

**“Is Your Jesus Too Small?”**  
**Colossians 1:15-20**  
**September 18, 2016**

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**INTRODUCTION:**

It is clear that one of Paul’s reasons for writing this letter was to correct some false teaching that had begun to take root in the Colossian church. What is curious is the way he goes about doing so. He doesn’t seek to correct the false teachers by overtly challenging their teaching and pointing out its errors, but by talking about Jesus and the wonders of who he is and what he has done for us. There is a lesson we can learn from this. The most effective way to combat destructive beliefs and behavior is not to become an expert on false teaching, but to become an expert on Jesus.

I’ve been reading a book recently about the Chicago World’s Fair in 1893, referred to as the World’s Columbian Exposition in honor of the 400 year anniversary of the voyage of Christopher Columbus to America. All the nation’s leading architects participated in the design of the buildings, and Frederick Law Olmstead, the famous landscape architect and designer of Central Park in Manhattan, designed the grounds at the exposition. An engineer by the name of George Washington Ferris designed a giant wheel, known to us as the first Ferris wheel. This original wheel was 264 feet tall, with 36 cars on the wheel, each with a capacity of 60 people. Another feature of the Exposition was something that Christians were not so pleased with. There was a “World Parliament of Religions” in which religious leaders met to share their best points with the goal at arriving at a kind of new all-star religion. D. L. Moody was a famous Chicago evangelist of that era, and he responded to this by recruiting an army of evangelists to preach the truth of Jesus. Moody’s friends wanted him to attack the Parliament of Religions, but he refused to do so. Instead, he said, he wanted “to make Jesus Christ so attractive that men will turn to him.” Moody turned out to be right. His “Chicago Campaign” of 1893 turned out to be the greatest evangelistic work of this great evangelist’s life, with the result that thousands came to faith in Christ.

Moody was only doing what Paul had done centuries earlier, responding to error by focusing on the truth about Jesus. Let’s explore what Paul says here of Jesus by exploring his relationship to four different things.

**I. Jesus and God**

Paul begins by telling us that Jesus is the **“image of the invisible God.”** He is a picture to us of what God is like. Do you remember that time when Philip said to Jesus, **“Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us”?**

(John 14:8). Jesus responded, **“Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.”** When you look at someone, where do you look to really know them and connect with them? You look at their face, don’t you? Do we know anything about the face of Jesus? We know that it was the face of a sufferer. Jesus was born into poverty, and he grew up poor and underprivileged. He was on the low end of the socio-economic scale of an oppressed people. While many artists depict Jesus as physically attractive, the only biblical reference we have to his appearance is just the opposite. The prophet Isaiah says of the Messiah to come, **“He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not”** (53:2-3). The second century church father, Justin Martyr, concluded from these verses that Jesus was frail in body, small in stature and deprived of countenance. Jesus lived a life of suffering, and when people suffer it leaves its mark upon them. We see in the suffering face of Jesus what our heavenly Father is like. He is a God who is so passionate about his people that he suffers for them and with them.

Jesus also had a determined face. Luke tells us that when the days drew near for Jesus to return to heaven, **“He set his face to go to Jerusalem”** (9:51). He was determined to go to Jerusalem, even though he knew he would die there. But his would be an atoning death, giving life and freedom to his people, and he was determined to do so. Jesus is the perfect image of the Father, and he shows us that God too is determined. He doesn’t merely respond passively to events as they unfurl, but is intentional in what he does to bring about his purposes.

Thirdly, we know that the face of Jesus was a joyful face. Hebrews 12:2 says that it was for the joy that was set before him that Jesus endured the cross. Though the dreadful cross loomed over him for his entire life, he had a knowing smile of hope that could not be extinguished. There was no panic and no despair in that face, only hope and joy because he knows how it will all end. Our heavenly Father is marked by that same joy and hope. It is the joy of the person excited about a delightful gift being given to a loved one. In our case, it is the delightful gift of eternal joy and fellowship with the God of the universe and also with others of our loved ones who know Jesus.

Why does Paul refer to Jesus as **“the firstborn of all creation”**? Some have wrongly concluded that he does so because Jesus is a created being. Such an idea would clearly contradict the very next verse which says that Jesus created all things. In this case, “firstborn” doesn’t mean the first one to be born, but the one of highest rank. Jesus is foremost and preeminent.

## **II. Jesus and Creation**

Jesus is the creator and sustainer of all things in the universe. Note how Paul labors to show the scope of his work in creation. He repeats the words “all things” four times in verses 16-17 to name what Jesus creates and sustains. He spells out that it is not limited to the earth, but extends to the heavens. It is not limited to the things we can see, but also includes things invisible to us. He then names four categories in the angelic realm—thrones, dominions, rules and authorities—and says that all these were created by Jesus too. There was an unhealthy fascination in the Colossian church with all things angelic, and Paul no doubt mentions that Jesus created them all to turn their attention back to a healthy focus on Jesus.

Creation itself speaks loudly of the glory of its Creator. I mentioned at our Bible study this week that there are 800,000 different species of insects in the world, when someone corrected me. He said that there are 800,000 *known* species of insects. He’s right. For all we know, there could that many or more unknown insects in the world. As much as science has been able to discover about this material world, there is still a great deal we don’t know. We don’t know, for example, how big the universe is for the simple reason that we’ve never been able to see the end of it. We also don’t even know what the smallest thing in the universe is. No matter how much scientists are able to learn about the smallest parts of our material world, they continue to discover evidence about parts that are even smaller. Jesus not only knows about the largest and smallest parts of our universe, he created it all.

Jesus holds all things together in the universe. Scientists know that protons and electrons revolve around the nucleus of an atom, but they have been unable to discover what holds the atom together. A first grader who can read Colossians 1 could tell them. It is the word of Jesus that holds the atom together. Without his active involvement to hold all things together, the universe would immediately disintegrate. A God who can create and sustain the universe is certainly capable of directing my life. I can trust him and need nothing more than him.

### **III. Jesus and the Church**

Jesus is also head of the church. Paul is using the familiar body metaphor. The role of the head is to direct the whole body, and that is Jesus’ rightful role in the church. Salesmen sometimes call our church office and ask to speak to the owner. I’ve usually just politely corrected them, but I’ve been tempted to say something else. “He’s not available by phone, but you can still talk to him anytime you would like. If you would just humble yourself, admit your need of him and ask him, he would draw near to you and hear your prayer anytime you want to come to him.” Jesus is the owner and the head. As a church, we

are not free to decide what this church should be and do and who it should reach. That's Jesus' job as the head of the church.

We began this series in Colossians with a sermon I titled "Disappearing Church," because we have seen the church disappear already in many places where it was once strong. And we don't want AVPC under our watch to become a museum or relic. In spite of the fact that there are powerful forces at work in our day that are resulting in the decline of churches in many places, Paul's letter to the Colossians, and particularly this body metaphor, gives us the key to survival. The key for survival is to avoid decapitation. If the church loses its head, Jesus, then there will be no hope of survival. But if we continue to lift up Jesus and give him his rightful place as head, the church will not only survive, but flourish. That is actually the point of Paul's letter.

Part of his headship is that Jesus is the firstborn from the dead. He is the pioneer, going before us in all things. He will lead us even through death. Paul calls him the beginning because Jesus is the first of a new race, one that is immortal. Because of Jesus, death is not the end for us, but the beginning. Death is an end in a way. It is the end of suffering and sorrow, the end of all fear and anxiety, the end of death and disease. It is the beginning of everlasting joy. This is true for all who belong to his body.

#### **IV. Jesus and Nothing**

What I mean by this point is that Jesus is sufficient. Jesus and nothing else is necessary for the Colossians and for us. Though we don't know all the specifics about the Colossian heresy, it seems that one component of this theology that Paul counters is a type of second blessing teaching. What I mean by a second blessing teaching is the idea that coming to faith in Jesus is a first blessing from God, to be followed by something else that gets the Christian to some kind of turbo-charged Christian experience. Paul says that there is no second blessing for the Christian for the simple reason that the first blessing of Jesus is all you will ever need. If you have Jesus, you have everything you could ever want or need.

There have been various forms of second blessing teachings throughout the history of the church. A current one is the call made by some for the baptism of the Holy Spirit, marked by speaking in tongues. There was clearly tongues-speaking in Paul's day, but Paul would be dead set against thinking of that experience as something of a second blessing for Christians. Another second blessing error is the separation between calling on Jesus as your Savior and calling upon him as your Lord. Some have taught that while a person becomes a Christian by calling upon Jesus as Savior, if he wants to continue making progress in the Christian life, he needs the second blessing of calling upon Jesus as Lord. But you can't carve Jesus up like that. You can't have him be

your Savior without also being your Lord. There is only one blessing, and that is the blessing of getting Jesus. When you get him, you have everything.

Have you ever had the experience of desperately looking for something you already had? Several years ago, I was about to enter the sanctuary to officiate at a wedding. I was all wired up with the wireless mic, had my robe that I often wear for weddings and my worship guide and notes. Only one more thing to confirm and that was my reading glasses. I usually keep them in my front pocket, but they weren't there when I felt for them. By now, it was just a matter of seconds before I was supposed to lead the groom and best man out to our positions on the stage. In a panic, I was frantically searching every possible place for my glasses. Just before we were to walk out, I found them, perched on top of my head. I had all along what I was desperately seeking. That is Paul's message to the Colossians and to us. If you have Jesus, you have all you will ever need. Do you seek peace? Jesus has made **"peace by the blood of his cross"** (v. 20). He will even reconcile all things to himself, bringing peace to all of creation.

### **CONCLUSION:**

Paul is going to get to the application of this in 2:6 when he says, **"as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him."** Let me say the same thing by telling you the story of Zacchaeus, the diminutive tax collector who climbed up a tree in order to see Jesus. Every child who's been to Sunday School knows the story well. Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus but couldn't do so because of the crowds surrounding Jesus and because he was short. So he climbed up a tree to see Jesus pass by. And then Jesus came to him and said, **"Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today"** (Luke 19:5). Zacchaeus was like the children the disciples were preventing from coming to Jesus. Jesus made sure the children were given access, and he does the same for Zacchaeus. Zacchaeus couldn't get to Jesus, but Jesus could get to Zacchaeus. And when Jesus was received into Zacchaeus' house, Jesus said, **"Today salvation has come to this house."** This is a play on words because the name "Jesus" means "God saves." When Jesus came to his house, salvation came to his house.

When Jesus comes to your house, full salvation comes to you. So receive him, maybe for the first time today or maybe for the one-thousandth time. When Jesus is in the house, all things become new. He reconciles all things to himself by the blood of the cross.