

# The Unchanging Jesus is always supreme

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[ 0 : 00 ] So let us open in prayer. Our Father in heaven, though so many things right now seem out of control, but we know that you are still in control.

Thank you for gathering us in your name, despite our current limitations. Humble our hearts and open our eyes to see the greatness and the goodness, to see the glory and the grace of Jesus Christ this morning.

And may these truths we learn not only inform our minds, but may it ultimately transform our hearts. O Holy Spirit, work in us, work in our hearts.

Speak to us through your living word. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. The year 2020 is coming to an end, and it has been an eventful one, to say the least.

When I was young, I remember the year 2020 was viewed as a year of dreams and aspiration. I remember hearing songs of Wawasan Duaplo Duaplo on the TV.

[ 1 : 08 ] And even in this year, maybe some of us had plans to go travelling. Some of us may be entering into our first year of university or secondary school, or even some had plans to get married.

And instead, the year 2020 turned out to be very different. It turned out to be a year full of challenges, whether globally or personally.

Many have lost jobs, gotten pay cuts, lived in isolation because of COVID-19. Many also are separated from their loved ones or even may have even lost their loved ones.

And in addition to that, we are suddenly struck with political tension and instability. When we thought things could not have gotten worse, things seem to be going out of control and it's constantly changing.

The questions that are always in our minds is when will this pandemic come to an end? When will life get back to normal? So as what we've heard just now, that in less than one week, we will be celebrating Christmas, but in a very unique circumstance.

[ 2 : 18 ] Caroling, evangelistic gatherings, will feel very different from what we are used to. And so, a lot of times we feel that this year has been a lot more wearisome than normal.

And in our hearts, we are desperately looking for a cure, a hope for a brighter future, for a new and glorious morn. And I think that is what Christmas is about.

As a line in a beloved Christmas Carol writes, the hopes and fears of all the years are met in him tonight. He meets us in our fears and weaknesses and points us to this thrill of hope that Emmanuel, God, is with us.

We celebrate the birth of a child. He is born in a humble manger. In this messy and broken world. Yet, he is actually the king who rules over everything and everyone.

That's what we will see in this morning's passage. So I shall invite all of us to have our Bibles open to today's passage. Colossians chapter 1, verse 15 to 23.

[ 3 : 25 ] I believe everyone has a handout where there's a sermon outline and also I'll be showing some verses that I'm referring to on the slides.

So firstly, we see that Jesus reigns over all creation. To just give a bit of background to the book of Colossians, the Apostle Paul has not met the Colossian believers face to face.

It was a church planted by his co-worker, Epaphras. And Epaphras visited Paul in prison and told him how the Colossian Christians were growing in their faith and love that springs from the hope found in the gospel.

And yet, they were also facing pressures. Pressures from the community, pressures from false teachers to turn away from the very gospel that saved them and that caused them to grow.

So Paul is writing this letter while in prison. And he is writing to them to deal with the false teachings that are infiltrating the church as well as to encourage them to grow in devotion to Christ.

[ 4 : 34 ] So in the face of persecution and false teaching, what did Paul do for the Colossian believers? One, in the passage before, this morning's passage, he prayed earnestly that they would continue to grow deeper in the gospel and to live that gospel out with the strength and the endurance that comes from God, which is from verse 9 to 14.

Christian life, as we know, is not easy. Hence, Paul wants to anchor them on Christ and the gospel. And that's because, naturally, we tend to focus on the problems and we tend to feel so overwhelmed by how big they are.

And we oftentimes also allow ourselves to be tricked by the devil, to view our God as not that big and not that great. And Satan is happy to see us, always viewing Jesus as that baby in the manger forever, but to forget that he is the eternal, supreme king of all.

And therefore, Paul begins in verse 15 by saying, Jesus is the image of the invisible God. So in the slides, I have put up the words Hebrews chapter 1, verse 3, tells us that Jesus is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being.

And Jesus also said in John 14, 9, that if anyone has seen him, he has seen the Father. So being fully God, Jesus gave up his glory in heaven and walked on this earth.

[ 6 : 12 ] So effectively, Paul is saying that in Christ, the invisible God is made visible. And going on, Jesus is also described by Paul as the firstborn over all creation, which is seen in the NIV translation.

In the KJB and the ESV, the phrase used is firstborn of all creation. And so there are cult groups like the Jehovah Witnesses who would use these words to say that Jesus is actually part of creation and therefore he is not truly God.

Firstly, notice how Paul begins the verse after, which is verse 16, with the word for. And he's used to explain or to support the previous verse.

He says, for by him all things were created. So if Paul was trying to say that Jesus is just part of creation, then he would not have used this explanation to say that Jesus created all things.

And furthermore, Paul emphasized actually later on in chapter 2, verse 9, that in Christ, all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form. So the word overused in the NIV helps to deal with this issue.

[ 7 : 32 ] And so what does the word firstborn means? Firstborn is a term of preeminence, of supremacy. To be the firstborn in the ancient world means to be the primary inheritor in the family.

Therefore, Jesus has the right over all creation because he, of his identity, he is the begotten son of God, not made.

And Paul proceeds to elaborate in verse 16, for by him all things were created, things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, all things were created by him and for him.

So how did everything come into existence? Jesus. And in John 1, verse 3, which is on the slide as well, through him all things were made. Without him, nothing was made that has been made.

So from the smallest atom to the largest star in the galaxy, from the bottoms of the ocean to the top of the mountains, all things were created by him.

[ 8 : 40 ] But not only that, Jesus is the source of creation. He is also the reason for all creation. Nothing in the universe exists by accident or for its own sake.

Even from the ugliest insect that you don't like to the most beautiful human, everything exists for God's glory, for Christ's glory. And so that Christ's greatness and goodness will be made known throughout all creation.

And this actually includes you and me. And it even includes the person we find hard to love, that difficult person that God seemed to have placed in our lives.

And interestingly, of all the things that Paul could say, he said, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, yes, even these things were created by him and for him.

It can refer to human governments or human leaders and kings. But more than that, Paul repeatedly used these words, as you can see in Colossians 2.15 and even in Ephesians 6.12 which is on the slide, to refer to evil spiritual powers or spiritual forces of darkness.

[ 9 : 58 ] In other words, even Satan and his demons were created by him and for him. But you notice, Paul did not say that Jesus created them evil.

They were created good, but they rebelled against God. And Christ already knew that they would fall even before they fell. He knew all the evil that they would do, but none of it can be done apart from God's sovereign permission.

So we see in God's wonderful plan of salvation, Jesus will ultimately triumph over all this by the cross. They are a defeated foe with a sure end.

And I think this is a great comfort in the midst of all the political instability, in the midst of this global pandemic that is hitting all of us and even especially in the growing persecution towards Christians nowadays.

And going on with verse 17, Paul elaborates on the divine nature of Jesus. Verse 17, He is before all things and in Him all things hold together.

[ 11 : 11 ] That Jesus existed eternally, that He is the uncreated one. And I think most of us have maybe heard of this example to demonstrate how precious it is to know that Jesus sustains all things.

If our earth moves a little too near to the sun, what would happen? We will be roasted to death. If our earth was a little too far from the sun, we will be frozen to death.

But sometimes we take it for granted. We just assume that every day when we wake up, the earth will just keep on orbiting around the sun in its course. And within these nine verses that we are seeing this morning, the word all has been used seven times along with words like fullness, every.

So Paul is indeed stressing here that Jesus is supreme, that He is above all things, and that He is fully God. He is the creator and He is the sustainer of all things.

He reigns over all creation. And going on to verse 18, the second point is that Jesus reconciles sinful people to the Father.

[ 12 : 27 ] So it does not only please God the Father to bring into existence all of the old creation through the power of His Son, it also pleased Him to make a new creation through the death of His Son.

And if you see in verse 21, Paul actually described the condition of the old creation, that we were once annihilated from God and were enemies in our minds because of our evil behavior.

So although that Jesus is creator and sustainer, although that He is the one who deserves all glory and honor from you and me, from all creation, we know that in Romans 12:1, it says that we neither glorify Him as God, nor did we give thanks to Him.

we too were created good, but we rebelled against God as well. We are rebels by nature, just as much as the worst dictator that ever lived, or the worst serial killer.

We too, by nature, are objects of God's wrath and judgment, enemies of God. However, by the death of His Son on the cross, God is creating a new race of holy people, and Christ is the head of these people, namely the church.

[13:54] So you find that the scope in verse 15 to 17 is all creation, the whole universe, everything and everyone. However, when He goes to verse 18 to 21, the focus shifts from the whole universe and zooms into the new creation.

What do I mean by the new creation? In 2 Corinthians chapter 5 verse 17, therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. People who have been reconciled to God through His blood, people who have been made holy in His sight, we are a new creation.

So Paul continues to describe Jesus in verse 18. He says that He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything He might have the supremacy.

That through Jesus' resurrection from the dead, He is declared with power to be the supreme Son of God. He showed it, He proved it.

And Paul continues by explaining that this supreme and preeminent Christ is both divine and human. Verse 19, for God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him.

[15:23] That is a very clear declaration that Jesus is fully God. And verse 20, through Him to reconcile to Himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through His blood shed on the cross.

God as we can see on the verse that is on the slide, Hebrews 2, 14 and 15, that Jesus shed in our humanity.

He walked on this earth. He became man, so that by His death, He might destroy him who holds the power of death, that is the devil, and to free us for whom all our lives were held in slavery by our fear of death.

And this is the very reason why only Jesus can reconcile us to the Father, because He is both divine and He is both human.

But in verse 20, does this verse mean that one day God will reconcile to Himself even all unbelievers who ever lived, even the devil, because He says here all things.

[16:37] So they are universalists, those who believe that in these things, because these words seem to say that through Jesus, God will reconcile to Himself all things.

But firstly, that will contradict everything else that the Bible teaches about hell. And more over, looking at the context would help. As we have seen earlier, verse 18 onwards shift the focus from all creation to the church.

So in fact, Paul is saying that nothing in heaven and on earth that God has chosen to be part of His new creation in Christ will fail to be reconciled to Him.

That the God who calls is the God who reconciles. And He's also the same God that keeps His redeemed people to the end. And then comes verse 22.

But now He has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death. When He used the word physical, He is stressing that Jesus actually died on the cross.

[ 17 : 49 ] He did not appear to as some claim. He has made us right with God, brought peace with God, and we are no longer God's enemy.

We are no longer under His wrath. So Jesus, the perfect sinless man, the Son of God, dealt with our biggest problem, which is not COVID-19, which is not a lot of problems that we have in our life, but ultimately the problem of sin, by bearing it on Himself.

And that is why in verse 22, He goes on to say that Jesus is the one that can present us wholly in God's sight, without blemish, and free from accusation.

That the law of God that stood opposed to us, He perfectly obeyed and fulfilled it. The sin and death that helped us bondage, Jesus lovingly died in our place and defeated the enemy.

So now we stand forgiven and accepted by God because Jesus paid it all. through His finished work on the cross. So these are glorious truths and these are truths that we don't want to lose our wonder and to be captivated by it.

[ 19 : 11 ] But how then can we translate these truths into having the assurance of salvation in the face of persecution and false teaching, in the face of suffering and trials?

So God's redeemed people will demonstrate persevering faith to the end and that's where Paul goes into verse 23. That Jesus commissions reconciled people to the world.

When someone continues in their faith and does not turn away from the hope of the gospel, this is a clear evidence that they have been reconciled to God through Christ.

verse 23. If you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel.

So right before verse 23, Paul has explained that we are made righteous positionally before God through what Christ has done. We can contribute nothing to our salvation.

[ 20 : 18 ] We see God's sovereignty and we also see how God's sovereignly keeps us all the way to the end. Let's look at the verses on the slide. Philippians chapter 1 verse 6.

Being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus. And even in Jude 24, to him who is able to keep you from falling and present you before his glorious presence without fault and great joy, God's sovereignty and he is the perfecter of our faith.

However, we also know that the Bible oftentimes put God's sovereignty and man's responsibility in the same words of context. That God is sovereign but man is also responsible.

Both are true and if we let go of one, we are out of balance. So what does that mean? That God's sovereignty in salvation is a great comfort and a great assurance to us.

But it is never an excuse for us to live in sin or to live self-centered individualistic lives. That's why Paul starts verse 23 with the word if.

[ 21 : 39 ] It is a warning to the believers not to turn away from Christ to false teachings. He is not setting the requirement for salvation. He is actually laying down the evidence and the result of salvation.

That it is a test for our faith if it is genuine. Because true saving faith will demonstrate itself by persevering faithfully in the gospel.

In short, a genuine faith is a persevering faith. Then the question comes how do we then practically establish ourselves in the hope of the gospel?

And I listed two that is in your handout which is the first one. Continuing in the faith means to be steadfast in the gospel. The picture that Paul is painting here is that a true Christian would be established and firm in the gospel.

Actually, later on in chapter 2, he does elaborate on this when he says in Colossians chapter 2 verse 6 and 7 which is on the slide as well. So then, just as you receive Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were thought, and overflowing with thankfulness.

[ 23 : 02 ] So a Christian who is established and firm is one who is rooted and built up in Jesus. Like a tree roots that grow deep into the gospel will enable it to withstand the storms that come.

Like a building that is built on the right foundation, on the strong foundation of Jesus Christ. So how well do we understand the gospel? A good question to ask ourselves this morning is can I share the gospel, can I explain the gospel to a non-Christian?

Can I give the reason for the hope that I have in Christ? And besides that, we need to grow to have a strong foundation in the basic understanding of the Bible and its core truths.

Truths like about God, sin, salvation by grace, through faith alone, the person and the work of Jesus Christ, his return, holy living, and etc.

Because if we are not grounded in these truths, we will be like a tree that is not deeply rooted. and a house that is not firmly built on the right foundations.

[ 24 : 12 ] And so when the storms of false teachings come, when the storm of persecution come, we will be very easy targets to be blown away and to fall away. Secondly, continuing in the faith means to be servants of the gospel.

Actually, right from the beginning of his letter to the Colossians, Paul has shown how the one true gospel is growing and is bearing fruit everywhere.

It is the same gospel that Epaphros preached to the Colossians, and this is the same gospel that Paul is preaching everywhere else. And so, likewise, this is the same gospel that we are to preach to people around us, to all people.

And it's not just the proclamation of the good news. It is the power of God to save. It does not only come in words, but it comes in power and in the Holy Spirit.

And we do know that for most part of this year, the world is dominated with fear and helplessness. And if we as Christians respond like that as well, living in fear, living in helplessness, then the world cannot see the hope that we have in the gospel.

[ 25 : 30 ] And we know because of the COVID-19 pandemic, many today have great financial and practical needs out there. Can people around us see the gospel being lived out in us through our good works, which will open up opportunities for us to share the hope of the gospel?

As I remember Ravi Zacharias, the late Ravi Zacharias once said, it is scary to know that there are some in this world who believe that God is dead, and live as though God is dead.

But what is even scarier is that we who believe that God is alive, but live as though God is dead. So in such a time like this, the world needs to not only hear the gospel from us, they need to see the gospel lived out in us.

and so at the last part of verse 23, it is said, this is the gospel that you heard, and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

And Paul described himself as a servant of the gospel. But it's not just for Paul. It is not just the job of the pastor, of the evangelist, of the elders, to be a servant of the gospel.

[ 26 : 54 ] As we can see, 2 Corinthians chapter 5, verse 18 to 20, that all this is from God who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation, that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting man's sin against them.

And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God.

What Paul is saying is, Jesus has reconciled us to God, and he has commissioned us out into the world to be his ambassadors, to call the lost to be reconciled to him.

So it's the gospel of Jesus Christ. Are we all-consuming passion and priority? Or is it pushed to the sidelines of our lives?

Are we just satisfied that we are Christians and we are safe and we are going to heaven, but we do not have the burden for those out there, our loved ones, our colleagues, our friends who do not know Jesus?

[ 28 : 10 ] If that is the case, then that means we do not truly understand the gospel of God's grace and its implication to us. Because Paul himself, he understood what it means to believe and to preach the gospel of God's grace.

Because if you actually see the words right after verse 23, which is not in our passage today, but it gives a context. In verse 24, it says, now I rejoice in what was suffered for you.

That Paul was rejoicing to suffer for the sake of God's people and for the gospel. And even in 1 Corinthians chapter 15, verse 10, which is on the slide as well, but by the grace of God, I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect.

No, I worked harder than all of them, yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me. So if you notice that God's grace does not make passive Christians, God's grace makes passionate servants of the gospel.

And that's why in such difficult times, it's our human tendency to turn inward. But what God is trying to tell us is that we need to focus upward and outward. So friends, even as we come to a conclusion, how has the year 2020 impacted you personally?

[ 29 : 38 ] COVID-19 has impacted the whole world one way or another, from the biggest country to the smallest country. And although this virus is smaller than what our naked eyes can see, it has actually made all mankind realise that we are just mere men.

We have no control over our lives or our future. So what hope do we have as we face an uncertain and unknown future ahead of us?

are we putting our hope in that vaccine that seems to be coming up very soon? We hope in a few months' time to bring our lives back to normal. Yes, maybe by God's grace, this vaccine may help solve this global pandemic.

But what can solve the root of all the suffering, of all the broken relationships, of all the sickness and even death that we see around us and in us, which is the root is sin.

And I think this is what makes celebrating Christmas this year particularly more meaningful because Christmas is not just a celebration of what Christ has done in the past to rescue us from the penalty and the power of sin.

[ 30 : 56 ] It is also an anticipation that this very same Jesus will come back and will rescue us ultimately from the presence and from the effects of sin that we see in this world.

And so may I suggest this morning if all that we look forward to is just that we can go back to life as normal, that one day we don't need to follow all these SOPs anymore, and that we can go on living our lives the way we want, chasing after our selfish dreams and desires, then we have missed what God is actually showing to us through this pandemic, that we were created for him, that we are saved from sin for him, for his purpose.

And because of that, let us live for what really matters, to ask ourselves, are we trusting in the money that we have earned, in the houses that we have, in the cars that we drive, in the achievements that we have attained, are we chasing, are we chasing after all these things?

Because all these things will one day pass away, but God's word and the souls of men will last forever. Let us trust in Jesus, that he is unchanging, that he is supreme, he is the reason why we have hope.

Whenever the vaccine comes out, or whatever happens in the future, we know our hope is in the gospel of Jesus Christ. us. So for those of us who are weary and feeling hopeless, let us be comforted with these truths.

[ 32 : 37 ] And as a line in O Holy Night sings, a thrill of hope, a weary world rejoices, for yonder breaks a new and glorious morn.

So that is our glorious hope as Christians. That is what the world and people around us need to hear from us and to see in us. let us not just believe in it, let us go out and live it out and preach it.

Let us close in prayer. Our sovereign Lord and supreme king of all, thank you for these wonderful truths.

Anchor us in these truths so that whatever that comes along the way, we will have this hope, this unshakable, unmovable hope, that even as we see this task that is unfinished, as we see even in such times how your work is moving, how the gospel is being proclaimed in ways that we cannot even imagine.

Lord, may it drive us to our needs, may it drive us to the lost, that they need the gospel, and that we need to always remember and to be in awe and in wonder of the gospel.

[ 33 : 52 ] Let it change the way we live, let it change what we prioritize, what we chase after, what we trust, and that's why we surrender all of us into your loving hands, sustain us and keep us, Lord, for in you we put our trust.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.