



Colossians 1:15-23
Colossians: Mature In Christ
A New Look At Jesus

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As most of you probably know, we are excited to be participating in and celebrating this Back to Church Sunday. This is a great opportunity for us to join with other parts of the body of Christ across the country to reflect on and reclaim the true nature of the church as a place and expression of love, peace, and hope – not only for us, but for our friends, neighbors, communities, and world. As a church, we are the collective hands and feet of Christ, who reflect Him and do His work in the world as we grow in our relationships with Him and with each other. It's not just us as a group of friends and family within these four walls; it includes those gathering in the churches up the street, across Lake Washington, on the other side of the country, and around the world.

We've all helped the church be an expression of love, peace and hope better at some times than at other times. And sometimes we've simply done a lousy job of that calling to represent Jesus. I know that everyone here today has a personal story and experience with the church—some good and life giving, some bad and painful. For those of you whose experience with the Church may have been painful, I'm sorry. Unfortunately, we are poor representatives of Jesus sometimes, and I pray you have a more positive encounter today, and have other positive encounters with the church going forward. For all of you, no matter what path has brought you here today, let me say that we are honored to welcome you. We are excited to be here together.

“Together” is the theme of Back to Church Sunday, and as I thought about togetherness and what it means for us as followers of Jesus, I thought of...Legos. You know this favorite childhood toy, right? Who could imagine that these pieces of plastic are worth billions of dollars? Literally, a fortune. The Danish toy company that began in the 1930s has built a Lego empire around these plastic little bricks that they introduced in the 1950s. This was probably my favorite toy as a kid – especially the Space Legos. I used to play with these (not this princess castle set up here with me!) all the time, nearly every day for some stretches of my life, up until just a couple weeks ago. 😊 I still have all the Lego sets I grew up with, although a few pieces have gotten

lost over the years, of course. When I was younger, every year around Seafair my cousin Kyle and I would build fairly crude-looking hydroplanes out of Legos. Our favorite thing to do with them was then sit on the floor 10 or 12 feet apart from each other and zoom our hydroplanes at high speeds right at each other and watch the Legos fly when they collided...then rebuild them and do it all over again. I have so many good memories of playing with Legos.

Individually, Legos are just cheap pieces of plastic—and, I might add, the cause of great pain to parents who, in the darkness of night, step on the lone Lego left on the floor. Anyone ever experience that? I have on multiple occasions, and they can hurt! But despite their basic design, the magic is in the way they fit together. Legos are designed to be together, connected to other Legos. One Lego by itself isn't much fun! And together these plastic pieces can be made into fantastic creations. Full-scale models of castles, cars, airplanes, spaceships have all been built from Legos. Legos can be put together to create almost anything. They are just pieces of plastic, but together they create something much bigger and better than the sum of the individual parts.

The Church is kind of like Legos—a collection of individuals of various sizes, shapes, and colors. Individually, we may not be much to look at—or kind of a big jumble at a glance; **But when we come together, connected to Jesus the way God intended, we form the Church, which is a creation much greater than the individual members.** God takes our chaos and, by His design, makes something spectacular and gives us purpose.

As we celebrate Back to Church Sunday, I hope that what we experience today is just the beginning—a taste of the belonging we can experience here, and an invitation to come back for more. Whether you're a regular member, a first-time visitor, or on the fence about church, I invite you to commit to joining us for this journey through Colossians that we began last week, where we will learn much about Jesus and the Christian faith and its relevance to our lives today in the 21st Century.

One of the things we talked about last week was how the church in Colosse

was by and large a healthy church. There were a lot of good things going on: they loved people, there was growth in faith and growth in numbers of people connecting to Jesus, they grew in fellowship with one another, and so forth. But whenever Paul or one of the other NT authors wrote to a church, there usually was a reason why they were doing so. There was usually something going on that wasn't so great that they heard about, usually because the church sent word to one of them, and the people of the church wanted to know how to handle their situation. Now, we don't have the correspondence from any of these churches *to* Paul or Peter or James or anyone else, but we *do* have what they wrote *back* to these churches. That's what a good chunk of the New Testament is: letters from these guys to these churches, responding to their questions and their concerns, giving them God-inspired wisdom and advice.

What Paul seems to be responding to here in this letter is a concern about the theology of this church with regards to Jesus Christ. These verses, in particular (1:15-23), are Paul's effort to straighten out their theology of Jesus. For Paul and the other writers of what we now call the letters of the New Testament, right theology about Jesus Christ mattered. In fact, not only did it matter to them, it mattered to Jesus. In the Gospels, the biographies of Jesus, He frequently talks about who He is and stresses the importance of understanding who He is and the importance of being connected to Him.

So when Paul gets wind of some things going on at the church in Colosse that are based on a wrong understanding of Jesus, he writes to straighten them out. And: **The theme throughout this passage about Jesus is that He is supreme over everything seen and unseen because of who he is and what he has done.** From Creation to the cross, Jesus has done it all.

In verses 15-17, we see that Jesus Christ is supreme over all of creation, and in verses 18-23 we see that he is supreme over the Church. He is Lord of the cosmos and he is Lord of the Church. He is Lord over everything that he has made, and he is Lord over everyone he has saved. First, let's look at verses 15-17.

Paul doesn't beat around the bush in articulating the supremacy of Jesus over all of creation. He writes, beginning in verse 15, **“The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”** That's a strong statement on the supremacy of Jesus Christ over all of creation.

Now for me, a couple questions come to mind here that I want to address: First, if God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have always existed together, what does Paul mean that Jesus is the “image” of the invisible God and that he is the “firstborn” over all creation? When we think of the word “image” we think of something that simply represents something else. My wedding ring is an “image” or a representation of my marriage. A ring, in and of itself, does not make a person married. There are lots of people who wear rings who aren't married. But a wedding ring represents the marriage. A photograph, or the stained glass windows in our sanctuary, is an image, or a picture, of something, but isn't the thing itself: it's just a representation of it. These are symbols or representations of deeper realities, of real objects.

But Jesus is God come down to earth. That's what Scripture affirms for us. And as God came to us, he came to us in a form, in an image, that we could understand: as a human being. **Jesus himself said in John 14:9: “Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.”** So in Jesus we see God. He's an *image* of God, showing us God's character, etc., but He came in a form that we could comprehend, and that doesn't diminish the reality of his divinity.

Then when Paul says that Jesus is the “firstborn” over all creation, it sounds like Jesus hasn't existed for all time. Does God really exist as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in eternity, or was there a beginning for the Son? Some people use this verse to say that Jesus was not in fact God, but rather another created being like you or me. But that's not what Paul means by this word “firstborn.” In Jewish and in Greek culture, “firstborn” was not just a way of speaking of the chronology, or the order, of a birth. It didn't only mean that someone was born before their siblings. **“Firstborn” was a title.**

For example, if you go all the way back to Exodus 4:22, we read that the nation of Israel is God's "firstborn." It's a title bestowed upon the Israelites, and with it comes great responsibility. Psalm 89:27 says, "I [God] will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth." Obviously, "firstborn" is a title, a designation of supremacy and honor and favor. That's the usage Paul intends here. We might say that Jesus Christ is the "chosen one of all creation." Jesus Christ has a place and an honor that are unique in everything seen and unseen. He is supreme over all creation.

In fact, we see in verses 16 and 17 that all things have been created "through him" and "for him," and that in him "all things hold together." This is what made me think of Legos. Jesus Christ is the reason why anything was created – because all things have been created through him and are sustained by Him. They are held together by Him...all things are connected to Him.

So: Jesus, who is supreme over all creation, who holds all things together, cannot be ignored. We can't simply brush Jesus aside without looking into his life, his death, and his resurrection. His life is too significant to just ignore and not at least consider our connection to Him. There's not a very good earthly metaphor of Jesus' significance to creation. Any illustration/metaphor on the importance of His role in the Universe is bound to trivialize his role. Maybe you could say that Jesus is to creation what Jeff Bezos is to Amazon. Maybe you could say that Jesus is to creation what Bach is to classical music, or what the Beatles are to pop music. The point is: the uniqueness, the importance, the supremacy of Jesus Christ in creation cannot be overstated.

And those who recognize that and believe that Jesus was who he said he was and is who he said he would be make up the body of Christ, the Church. We are connected together to Him as the foundational piece, and then we're connected to each other, like Lego pieces stuck together to make something such as this castle. Jesus Christ, as verses 18-23 tell us, is the head of the Church because of who he is and what he's done. And so Jesus Christ gives the Church it's direction, vision, and purpose.

And one specific thing mentioned here in verse 20 that he has done is to

reconcile to God all things. This is a further explanation of what we read last week in verse 12 where it says that God has “qualified us” to share in the inheritance of the saints. God has done the qualifying; we don't have to qualify ourselves.

But that's exactly how God sees us (qualified/reconciled). And here in verse 20 and then into 21 and 22, we see that it is God who has done the reconciling. God, in his great love for creation, died on the cross in the person of Jesus Christ, as the once for all sacrifice to make up for our sins. **The very things that come between us and this holy God of the universe – the black marks on our spiritual résumé – are deleted by the death of Jesus Christ.** We are “without blemish” as he writes in verse 21. We can't make ourselves blemish-free. Have you ever tried? It's impossible. But not with God. God has taken care of it – he sees us as blemish free thanks to Jesus. We don't make peace with God; God makes peace with us. And it has happened through Jesus' death on the cross – which is ironic because crucifixion is anything but a peaceful way to die. Most people would prefer to die peacefully – you know: go to bed at a ripe old age, and just not wake up here on earth. Simply wake up in eternity. No one says, “I'd like to die by being crucified.” That's not peaceful; they're incongruous and incompatible with one another. It was a violent, terrible way to die. And yet, the paradox is that Jesus' crucifixion brings us peace.

The role we play is to believe and trust that. To trust that Jesus is who he says he is, who the New Testament writers say he is...to put our faith in him. Our role is to believe that he is supreme over all the universe, and that he is *also* supreme in our *own* lives, and desire to be connected together to Him like Legos stuck together. Our role is to be the body, of which Jesus is the head; to be the church connected together to him and to each other.

The question is: Do we choose to believe that the Good News of Jesus is true, or do we choose to believe it's false? Do we allow the theology of Jesus that is laid out for us in His own teaching and in what we read from the early Christians like this passage from Paul...do we take that seriously and absorb it and come to a place of faith and connection to Jesus? Do we get connected to the Lego piece of Jesus, joining with the other pieces that are

connected to Him, to be made into something beautiful and purposeful and bigger than ourselves...or do we stay disconnected, jumbled together with other pieces that aren't connected? The early Christians believed the good news of Jesus was true – including people who knew Jesus and walked with him and learned from him and witnessed his death and said they saw him alive again. Like Legos stuck together, they continued to be connected to him and implored others to be connected to him as well, with their theology of Jesus at the core of their message. And now it's come down all these centuries to us, and the theology hasn't changed. The foundational Lego piece of Jesus is still the same. And so it's our turn to be another Lego piece connected to Jesus and connected together with Lego pieces of the Church.

My prayer, therefore, is that you and I would have a deep theological understanding of Jesus, and recognize the supremacy of Jesus over all creation and over our lives, and that we would be deeply connected to him and to the Church, even as Jesus holds all things together. Let's pray...Amen.