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Christ Exalted and Ascended (Part 1)

May 28, 2017

Sermon Text: Colossians 1

Scripture Reading: Psalm 2

The Gospels present to us Christ in His humiliation. He humbled Himself, emptying Himself, to take on the form of a servant. To become one of us, to be hated and scorned, and ultimately to go to the cross for us. When people today think of Christ, most of them typically imagine Him in His state of humiliation.

But Christ is no longer in that condition. Christ is risen, and Christ is ascended. Christ is glorious and it will be in that glory that He comes again.

Today and for the next few weeks, I would like us to consider Christ as He is presented to us by the Apostle Paul

in his letter to the church at Colossae. I want to do this because it is important for Christians to understand the glory of our risen and ascended King, and more – here in Colossians we have a clear and powerful presentation of Christ which we can use in telling people about Him, and about their need to come to faith in Him. Paul answers questions such as:

- Who am I as a human being?
- Where did I come from?
- Who is God?
- Who is the Creator?
- What in the world is God doing about evil?
- What does God think of me?
- What is the condition of a person who does not know Christ?

And more.

Follow along then as I read the first chapter of Paul's letter to the Colossians as inerrantly inspired by the Holy Spirit:

Colossians 1:1-29 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, (2) To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father.

(3) We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, when we pray for you, (4) since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, (5) because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, (6) which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, (7) just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf (8) and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

(9) And so, from the day we heard, we have not ceased to pray for you, asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding, (10) so as to walk in a manner worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him, bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. (11) May you be strengthened with all power, according to his glorious might, for all endurance and patience with

joy, (12) giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. (13) He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, (14) in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

(15) He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. (16) For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.

(17) And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

(18) And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.

(19) For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, (20) and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

(21) And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, (22) he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and

blameless and above reproach before him, (23) if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

(24) Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, (25) of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, (26) the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. (27) To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. (28) Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. (29) For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me.

Some Introductory Basics

Alright then, here we have Paul the Apostle writing to people who are Christians and who live in a city called Colossae. Paul opens by identifying himself *as an apostle of Christ Jesus*

by the will of God. This is the badge of his authority. An apostle, as you know, is a kind of ambassador sent by someone as their official spokesman.

Paul is making a stupendous claim (and very evil one if it is not true) here. He is saying that *God* has appointed him to speak for Him. That Jesus Christ commissioned him to this office and that the words that he is now writing in this letter *are in fact the words of Christ, the Word of God.*

[Note: You can read all about how Paul was called by Christ to this role as an apostle in the book of the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 9. Paul makes this very same claim at the beginning of all the letters he wrote in the New Testament – that Christ, after His resurrection from the dead – personally appointed Paul as His apostle]

This is vital to understand. The Bible is God's Word. God is the real author. And therefore, the Bible has authority and it is true truth. If these kinds of claims are not true, then the Bible is a very evil book and all of Christianity is a lie. But it is true. Christ's resurrection from the dead nails it as such.

We approach this letter to the Colossians then as the Word of God, absolutely true, possessing God's authority.

Now, that is who the letter is *from*. It is written *to Christian people in the ancient city of Colossae*. Once again, you can read the book of Acts in the New Testament and learn the history of how Christ sent apostles and evangelists throughout the ancient world to tell them the good news that God has provided a way for man the sinner to be put into a right standing with Him. And it is all done through Christ's work on the cross.

Now, inevitably wherever this good news about Christ (the gospel) is announced and people believe it and are forgiven their sins, along come wicked religious frauds looking to make a buck or gather a crowd to follow them. If you read on into chapter two of Colossians you will see that Paul is specifically exposing the false teachings of certain charlatans who had blown into Colossae and claimed themselves to be servants of Christ. They were not.

Colossians 2:4-8 I say this in order that no one may delude you with plausible arguments. (5) For though I am absent in body, yet I am with you in spirit, rejoicing to see your good order and the firmness of your faith in Christ. (6) Therefore, as you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him, (7) rooted and built up in him and established in the faith, just as you were taught, abounding in

thanksgiving. (8) See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.

You get a glimpse into the nonsense they were teaching as they claimed to speak for God:

Colossians 2:20-23 If with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world, why, as if you were still alive in the world, do you submit to regulations— (21) "Do not handle, Do not taste, Do not touch" (22) (referring to things that all perish as they are used)—according to human precepts and teachings? (23) These have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity to the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh.

These Colossians then are Christians. They had heard the good news about Christ from a young man named Epaphras –

Colossians 1:1-8 Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, (2) To the saints and faithful brothers in Christ at Colossae: Grace to you and peace from God our Father. (3) We always thank God, the Father of our Lord Jesus

Christ, when we pray for you, (4) since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and of the love that you have for all the saints, (5) because of the hope laid up for you in heaven. Of this you have heard before in the word of the truth, the gospel, (6) which has come to you, as indeed in the whole world it is bearing fruit and increasing—as it also does among you, since the day you heard it and understood the grace of God in truth, (7) just as you learned it from Epaphras our beloved fellow servant. He is a faithful minister of Christ on your behalf (8) and has made known to us your love in the Spirit.

These are people then who, through faith in Christ as God's only way of a sinner being set right with God (the term for this is "justified"), are now transformed in heart and they are telling others about Christ as well.

Now, who were these people BEFORE they heard of Christ? Well, they were people just like everyone else who is born into this world. Listen to this description of who they used to be:

Colossians 1:13-14 He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, (14) in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

Colossians 1:21-23 And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, (22) he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him, (23) if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

Let's summarize it a bit. This is the condition of every single person in this world who does not know Christ and therefore has not been made new by Him –

- They are in the "domain of darkness"
- They are not in the kingdom of Christ, the beloved Son of God
- They do not have "redemption"
- They do not have "forgiveness of sins"
- They are alienated from God and their attitude toward Him is that of *hostility*
- They do evil deeds

This was MY condition the moment I was born into this world. No one had to teach me how to sin, no one had to teach me to go my own way, unconcerned about God or His will for me. My sins were not forgiven by God,

rather I was in a state of condemnation. I was guilty in God's sight. I did not seek God because frankly, I hated Him. I was hostile to Him because I wanted to do my own thing and He insisted that I bow to Him.

Isaiah 53:3-6 He [Christ] 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. (4) Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. (5) But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. (6) All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

There it is. That is who these Colossian Christians *once were*. But no longer. They heard the good news of salvation in Christ, they believed it, and Christ radically changed them. The result? This is who they became:

- People with a certain hope laid up for them in heaven (they used to fear the day they would have to stand before God in judgment)

- They used to be blind, living in darkness, unable to see the glory and necessity of Christ. But now they are increasing in their ability to know God's will, and to understand His purposes in Christ.
- They now give *thanks* to God, the same God they used to withhold thanksgiving from
- They now have an inheritance because God is now their Father – the new heavens and earth are theirs.
- They are citizens of Christ's kingdom, free from Satan's dominion where they used to be held captive
- They have been *redeemed* – that is, their freedom from sin and Satan and judgment has been paid for by Christ on the cross
- Their sins have been forgiven
- They are now holy and blameless and above reproach in God's sight.

Romans 8:1-4 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. (2) For the law of the Spirit of life has set you free in Christ Jesus from the law of sin and death. (3) For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, (4) in

order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.

Christ – the Center of it All

Now, as we all learned in the Sunday School class last week, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, is at the center of all of these things. Listen carefully again to what Paul says here about Him –

Colossians 1:15-20 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. (16) For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. (17) And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. (18) And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. (19) For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, (20) and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

Have you ever asked or wondered about questions like these? –

- What is the meaning of life?

- What is the purpose of my existence?
- Where did the universe come from?
- If there is a God, then what is He doing? What is His “big plan”?
- Who is Jesus Christ and why did He come into this world?

Well, let me show you that these verses right in front of us answer every single one of these questions. These are the verses Craig was emphasizing last week and they are vitally important.

1. Who is Jesus Christ?

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. That is to say, Christ, the Son of God, fully God Himself, came into this world by taking on human flesh, becoming one of us (yet without sin), in order to, among other things, *show us God*. God is invisible. Christ shows us who God is, what He is like, and what He has said.

John 10:30 I and the Father are one."

John 14:8-9 Philip said to him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." (9) Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"

John 1:14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Jesus Christ is God. God become visible as the God-man. Do you want to know what God is like? Do you want to know who God is and what He has to say about Himself, about you, and about this universe? Then look no further than Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 1:1-3 Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, (2) but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. (3) He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high,

And there is more. *Jesus Christ is the firstborn of all creation, and in fact ALL THINGS were created:*

- *Through Him*
- *For Him*

Christ is the Person of the Trinity through whom God the Father created the universe and in fact EVERYTHING, every created thing

including Me and YOU, exist “for Him.”

And this, then, begins to bleed over into our other question – *just what is the purpose of my life? Why am I here?* And this is the answer:

Man exists “for” Jesus Christ. Every human being was created to be in a vital, intimate relationship with Christ. He is our Creator and He created us so that we would know Him and He know us. You are here on this planet, created in the image of God, so that you can worship Him, give thanks to Him, and enjoy Him forever.

Therefore, when a man or woman refuses to give thanks to God, to acknowledge Him as their Creator, to focus their life’s goals in coming to know Christ, *they are totally missing the very purpose of their existence and are in fact embracing empty meaninglessness, a life of futility lived for nothing that ends in an eternity of futility apart from God.*

Look here at Christ’s desire to seek you out:

Luke 15:1-7 Now the tax collectors and sinners were all drawing near to hear him. (2) And the Pharisees and the scribes grumbled, saying, "This man receives sinners and eats with

them." (3) So he told them this parable: (4) "What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he has lost one of them, does not leave the ninety-nine in the open country, and go after the one that is lost, until he finds it? (5) And when he has found it, he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing. (6) And when he comes home, he calls together his friends and his neighbors, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.' (7) Just so, I tell you, there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance.

A life lived simply in pursuit of the junk that this world has to offer is a life totally wasted and worse, a life lived alienated from Christ, the very One whom you were made for:

Luke 12:15-21 And he said to them, "Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." (16) And he told them a parable, saying, "The land of a rich man produced plentifully, (17) and he thought to himself, 'What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops?' (18) And he said, 'I will do this: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. (19) And I will say to my soul, "Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years;

relax, eat, drink, be merry.'" (20) But God said to him, 'Fool! This night your soul is required of you, and the things you have prepared, whose will they be?' (21) So is the one who lays up treasure for himself and is not rich toward God."

There are many more crucial things for us to give careful consideration to in verses 15-20 and we are going to look at them in more detail next time. For now we leave off with this most important question to put to ourselves:

Am I living my earthly life according to the purpose for which I was created? Or am I like so many, many people just going my own way, trying to ignore Christ, telling myself that I can be the captain of my own fate, only to find out one day when I stand before Christ that I was a fool?