

I.N.I.

Fourteenth Sunday after Pentecost
August 30, 2015
Colossians 1:13-23

In Christ Jesus, the first-born over all creation, by Whom all things were made, Dear Fellow Redeemed,

How do you debate Christianity? Do you argue or shout louder to get your point across? Do you demean those who disagree with you and call them names? Or do you shrink back in fear not knowing what to say?

Well in our sermon text this morning, and in the entire letter to the Colossians, the Apostle Paul gives us a beautiful example of how to confront those who don't agree with the Bible or who teach false doctrine. He doesn't try to debate or argue with those false teachers that had infiltrated the Colossian church; he overwhelms them with the simple, true Gospel message of the crucified, risen and ascended Christ.

These false teachers told the Colossian Christians that the simple message of the Gospel that Paul taught was not enough, they needed to follow man's exalted reason and wisdom. Sounds a lot like today's "Historical-Critical Analysis" of the Bible that so many mainline churches preach and teach.

In these verses Paul launches into the main theme of his letter---

THE SUPREMACY AND UNIQUE GREATNESS OF JESUS CHRIST

These verses are another one of those literary gems of Paul's that jumps right off the page and into the heart. As one commentator wrote: **This is one of those sections of Scripture that must be read, digested and then read again; for here Paul describes in human terms the greatness of Christ which passes human understanding.**

I: He is TRUE God, with the Father from ETERNITY.

Paul describes Christ's unique greatness in His relationship with His Father, with the world, and with the Church. We read again vs. 15: **HE IS THE IMAGE OF THE INVISIBLE GOD**

The word "image" here means more than just likeness. Jesus is more than just like God, He is God! Jesus is the exact reflection of His Father to the world. Jesus Himself declared: **I AM IN THE FATHER AND THE FATHER IS IN ME...I AND THE FATHER ARE ONE.** The author to the Hebrews writes: **THE SON IS THE BRIGHTNESS OF GOD'S GLORY AND THE EXPRESS (EXACT) IMAGE OF HIS PERSON.**

What Paul is expressing here is what we profess in our Nicene Creed---that Jesus Christ is **"God of God, Light of Light, Very God of Very God, Begotten, not made, Being of one substance with the Father, By whom all things were made."**

Since God is an invisible spirit no one has seen Him, but in Jesus, His eternal Son, the invisible God has graciously made Himself known to the world. We read John 1:18: **NO ONE HAS SEEN GOD AT ANY TIME. THE ONLY BEGOTTEN SON, WHO IS IN THE BOSOM OF THE FATHER, HE HAS DECLARED HIM.** Jesus said, **ANYONE WHO HAS SEEN ME HAS SEEN THE FATHER.**

Anyone who wants to know who God is and what He is like, must come to know Him only through Jesus. For in Jesus and in His sacrifice for us we see the Father's eternal love, grace and mercy toward sinful mankind. Jesus is uniquely great because He is **TRUE GOD WITH THE FATHER FROM ETERNITY.**

Secondly Paul tells us that Jesus is uniquely great because

II: He is the CREATOR and SUSTAINER of all things.

We read vs. 15b-17: **THE FIRSTBORN OVER ALL CREATION. FOR BY HIM ALL THINGS WERE CREATED THAT ARE IN HEAVEN AND THAT ARE ON EARTH, VISIBLE AND INVISIBLE, WHETHER THRONES OR DOMINIONS OR PRINCIPALITIES OR POWERS. ALL THINGS WERE CREATED THROUGH HIM AND FOR HIM. AND HE IS BEFORE ALL THINGS, AND IN HIM ALL THINGS CONSIST.**

Wait, didn't we just profess in our Apostles' Creed that God the Father is Creator of all things---I believe in God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. Yes, we did. But how did God the Father create the world? By His Word! And Who is the Word? Let's let the Apostle John tell us: **IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD, AND THE WORD WAS WITH GOD, AND THE WORD WAS GOD....AND THE WORD BECAME FLESH AND DWELT AMONG US, AND WE BEHELD HIS GLORY, THE GLORY AS OF THE ONLY BEGOTTEN OF THE FATHER, FULL OF GRACE AND TRUTH.** Jesus Christ is the Word.

John also wrote these words about Jesus the Word: **HE WAS IN THE BEGINNING WITH GOD. ALL THINGS WERE MADE THROUGH HIM, AND WITHOUT HIM NOTHING WAS MADE THAT WAS MADE. HE WAS IN THE WORLD, AND THE WORLD WAS MADE THROUGH HIM.**

The term Paul uses for Jesus in verse 15 may sound strange: **FIRSTBORN.** Firstborn over all creation. This does not mean first-created, for the Son of God was not created. He is Creator. What firstborn means is that Jesus is superior to every created being. He is before all creatures in time, because He is eternal and He is above all creatures in rank, even angels, because He is the incarnate (in the flesh) Son of God.

Thirdly Paul tells us that Jesus is uniquely great because:

III: He ALONE is the Head of the Church.

We read vs. 18-19: **AND HE IS THE HEAD OF THE BODY, THE CHURCH, WHO IS THE BEGINNING, THE FIRSTBORN FROM THE DEAD, THAT IN ALL THINGS HE MAY HAVE THE PREMINENCE. FOR IT PLEASSED THE FATHER THAT IN HIM ALL THE FULLNESS SHOULD DWELL**

As a real body cannot live without a head, so the Church cannot exist without Christ. It is only through Jesus and His Word that the Church can continue to grow, to function and to live. Christ rules in the hearts of all believers. He directs and governs all things in this world for the eternal welfare of His Church. Therefore the Church depends upon Christ for everything.

Paul has been piling up superlatives to describe the unique greatness of Jesus. He is supreme over all the created world. He is supreme over His Church of believers. He is supreme over death as seen in His resurrection for in Him all the fullness of the Godhead dwells.

Fourthly Paul tells us that Jesus is uniquely great because:

IV: He has REDEEMED us with His BLOOD.

We read vs. 13-14: **HE HAS DELIVERED US FROM THE POWER OF DARKNESS AND CONVEYED US INTO THE KINGDOM OF THE SON OF HIS LOVE, IN WHOM WE HAVE REDEMPTION THROUGH HIS BLOOD, THE FORGIVENESS OF SINS.**

There is no other way to be saved, because there is no other Savior of all people. By conquering Satan, Jesus has transplanted us and all believers from the spiritual kingdom of darkness and slavery, death and damnation into His kingdom of light and freedom, life and salvation. And He did this by one mighty act of love with two parts to it! Sacrificing Himself on the cross as the full and eternal payment for the sins of the whole world and rising from the dead.

He has bought us back from Satan, sin, death and hell by having His blood shed for us and by His resurrection. God's perfect justice was met and His declaration of us being not guilty, innocent, in fact righteous in Christ assures us of that forgiveness.

And finally Paul tells us that Jesus Christ is uniquely great because

V: He has RECONCILED the world to the Father.

We read vs. 20-22: **AND BY HIM TO RECONCILE ALL THINGS TO HIMSELF, BY HIM, WHETHER THINGS ON EARTH OR THINGS IN HEAVEN, HAVING MADE PEACE THROUGH THE BLOOD OF HIS CROSS. AND YOU, WHO ONCE WERE ALIENATED AND ENEMIES IN YOUR MIND BY WICKED WORKS, YET NOW HE HAS RECONCILED IN THE BODY OF HIS FLESH THROUGH DEATH, TO PRESENT YOU HOLY, AND BLAMELESS, AND ABOVE REPROACH IN HIS SIGHT**

WOW! WOW! WOW! The greatest act of reconciliation ever, bringing about peace, harmony and oneness between damned sinners and the sinless, holy God. Paul tells us in II Cor. **GOD WAS IN CHRIST RECONCILING THE WORLD TO HIMSELF, NOT IMPUTING THEIR TRESPASSES TO THEM...FOR HE MADE HIM WHO KNEW NO SIN TO BE SIN FOR US, THAT WE MIGHT BECOME THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD IN HIM.**

Our reconciliation came about by the Great Exchange! God took our sins and placed them upon His sinless Son, Jesus; and He took His Son's righteousness and laid it upon our hearts. So now there is no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.

What we have heard so far this morning has been primarily doctrinal. We have proclaimed from God's Word objective truths concerning Christ and the Gospel. But they are also very practical truths. Think of what these great truths from God's Word means for your life and mine.

Jesus is Supreme in the world of creation., He created all things, for He is the Word. He governs all things and holds them together with His almighty powerful Word. This assures us that contrary to what it might sometimes look like; the world is in chaos and absolute confusion---terrorism, stock market fluctuations, wildfires raging, immorality and murder running rampant, storms and disasters all over the world, disobedience and rebellion...

No, the world is not in confusion and chaos to Jesus. He is in control and rules all things as our supreme Lord and Savior. There is a plan, a divine purpose in all that happens in our world, in our community and in our individual lives. A purpose, determined and brought to pass, by the Savior who loves us. God tells us in Jeremiah: **FOR I KNOW THE PLANS I HAVE FOR YOU," DECLARES THE LORD, "PLANS TO PROSPER YOU (OF PEACE) AND NOT TO HARM YOU, PLANS TO GIVE YOU HOPE AND A FUTURE.**

Nothing in this world, nothing in our lives, not even the worst imaginable tragedy or disaster can separate us from our Savior, from the One who holds us in His protective care, because He also holds the future in His hands. Our Savior is moving this world forward day after day to the end of this world, when He, by His almighty power will deliver us forever from the effects and consequences of sin, bring this present world to an end, and make all things new in the eternal glory prepared for us.

What timely words these were from the Apostle. From history we learn that a year after Paul wrote these words the city of Colossae was completely destroyed by an earthquake. The Lord through this letter prepared the believers for this impending disaster.

Paul closes our text with these words: **CONTINUE IN THE FAITH, GROUNDED AND STEADFAST, AND DO NOT MOVE AWAY FROM THE HOPE OF THE GOSPEL WHICH YOU HEARD, WHICH WAS PREACHED.** Those words sound like the words of our float which today will pass before the eyes and hearts of hundreds if not thousands of people proclaiming to them Paul's words from Colossians 2 that we at Peace Thru Christ are **ESTABLISHED IN THE FAITH, ABOUNDING IN THANKSGIVING, and ROOTED (Grounded and Steadfast) IN CHRIST.**

Indeed timely words for our world, for our nation, for our community, and for us. Amen.