

**Series: Colossians - A Big Jesus for Life's Big Problems**

**Sermon: A Big Jesus**

**Date: September 23, 2018**

**Key Scriptures: Colossians 1:15-23; Acts 9:1-19; Genesis 1:26**

**Key Tags: Jesus, God, Image of God, Preeminence, Reconciliation, Head of the Church, Saul, Paul**

**Summary: Jesus needs to be first in our lives because Colossians 1:15-23 is going to show that Jesus is supreme in everything and sufficient for everything that you need in life.**

Some circumstances and events change you. Some of you have fought in a war; war changes you. Some of you have battled with life. You have gone through a divorce or experienced the death of someone you loved; life changes you.

At the end of August, I spent a week in New York City getting a certification. Rebecca went with me and at night we would wonder around the city. We got good at taking the subway, so we could go virtually anywhere we wanted. The training ended on Thursday, so we stayed over till Friday and we went to the 9/11 Memorial Park at the World Trade Center.

Some of you may not remember because you weren't old enough to know what happened, but terrorists flew 2 planes into the World Trade Center buildings. That day brought everyone to a screeching halt. Many of you remember September 11, 2001. You remember where you were. I was working at Southland Church and the entire staff was moving chairs into their current worship center. We all stopped and stood next to a TV for most of that day.

At the memorial, there are 2 enormous waterfalls and reflecting pools that are set within the actual footprints of the original twin towers. Around the reflecting pools are the names of almost 3,000 people. It is sobering to see all the names that surround the north and south pools. That event changed life for 3,000 families. That event devastated the south end of New York City for several years. That event shaped Wall Street and the Financial District. That event shaped our nation. Just get on a plane...9/11 is a dividing line of how we used to travel to how we travel now.

We are going through a letter written by a guy named Paul to a group of Jesus' followers in a little town called Colossae. I believe Paul had an event in his life that

changed him forever. I think that event shaped what he wrote in today's passage. Let me tell you what happened to him.

First, his name wasn't Paul at the time. It was Saul. His name caused Jesus' followers to tremble because he was always out to get them. He put them in prison. He had them killed. One day, he was on the road to Damascus and he was blinded by a light from heaven that flashed all around him. He fell to the ground. He couldn't see a thing, but he could hear. He heard a voice say, "Saul, why are you persecuting me?" Saul doesn't even know who this is. So, Saul says, "Who are you, lord?" He doesn't know who it is, but he is smart enough to give them a title because whoever it is, they are big enough to blind him.

And the voice replied, "I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting! Now get up and go into the city and you will be told what to do." Saul was blind for 3 days. His friends took him into the city and stayed there for 3 days and didn't eat or drink anything. Can you imagine what was going through Saul's mind? "Someone spoke, but I couldn't see them. My friends heard the voice, but didn't see anyone. This "Jesus" has caused me to be blind."

I wonder if Saul tried to talk to this "Jesus". I wonder if Jesus said anything else to Saul. I honestly believe there was silence. Silence can be big. It can make a huge impact.

I remember a time when our oldest daughter, Mackenzie, was a junior in high school. She told us that she was going to spend the night with a friend. Rebecca happened to be on social media and we noticed that the family and the person she was supposed to spend the night with was on a college visit out of town. We realized that she had lied to us. We called her and said, "What are you doing?" Kids, let me give you a tip. When parents ask, "What are you doing?" They know what you're doing.

We told her that she had 30 minutes to get home. When she arrived we all sat down. We told her we knew what was going on. We told her we were disappointed and then we told her she was going to be punished, but we didn't know what the punishment was going to be. We told her that we were going to think about and tell her the next day.

You would've thought we had given her a death sentence. She cried and she begged to know what was going to happen, but we held to our position of waiting. Parent tip: don't be so quick to assign the punishment, it will kill them. The silence, the

waiting that she had to do was better than the punishment we gave her. I don't even remember what the punishment was, but I do remember the silence.

Saul sits in silence for 3 days. Then, God sends a Jesus follower named Ananias to go talk to Saul. Ananias was scared to death. He had a reason to be scared. Saul was as dangerous as it got for a Christian. Ananias goes to Saul and said, "The Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on road, has sent me so that you might regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." We are told that something like scales fell from Saul's eyes as he regained his sight.

I wonder how many of us are just like Saul. We haven't been persecuting Christians, but we have been religious. You have heard a lot about Jesus. You know a lot about Jesus, but somehow we really aren't any different. Maybe our prayer has be...I need a different kind of sight...I need scales to fall from my eyes so I can see Jesus for who he really is.

There were some big changes that happened in Saul's life because of that event. His name changes from Saul to Paul. His purpose changes from persecuting Jesus' followers to becoming a Jesus' follower and trying to get the whole world to become one. This event took him from seeing Jesus as "who is this guy who can blind me" to "Jesus is God." When those scales fell off his eyes, he saw Jesus for who he really is...He is God.

I think there is a reason Saul didn't encounter Jesus during the 33 years he was on earth. Think about some of the encounters that Jesus had with different people. You have a broad spectrum of encounters from a rich young ruler, a guy who seemed to have it all together. He said he kept all the commandments, yet walked away from Jesus because Jesus asked him to sell everything. He walked away. Nothing seemed to happen to his eyes.

On the other end of the spectrum, you have a Roman soldier. This soldier was part of the execution squad, who beat Jesus and nailed him to a cross. Something happens to eyes because on that day he said, "Surely, he was the Son of God.

But, I think a lot of people were somewhere in between like a blind man, who had been blind from birth. Jesus comes up and rubs some mud on his eyes and tells him to go wash his eyes in a certain pool. The man was healed and when he was asked by friends as to who healed you, he says, "The man they call Jesus." He didn't really know Jesus, but later, he is questioned and strong armed by the religious leaders, which pushes him to the conclusion, "Ever since the world began, no one has been

able to open the eyes of someone born blind. If this man were not from God, he couldn't have done it." Most of the encounters with Jesus led to a greater faith.

Paul's encounter was different. He didn't walk away saying, "I met the man called Jesus." He walked away from his encounter and his eyes were wide open to the fact that this Jesus...He's big and He is God.

When I was in middle school, I began having trouble seeing the chalk board at school. My parents took me to the eye doctor. How many of you have been to the eye doctor? Now, I know they are trying to help, but there are a couple of things that I hate. That puff of air when they test the pressure in your eye. You just can't prepare for it, no matter what you do. It makes me jump every time. And then, when the optometrist tells you, "Tell me which is better...Here is number one...How about number two?" Sometimes you cannot tell a difference.

When I first got glasses, it was amazing the things I saw that I hadn't seen before. It was amazing how clearly I could see the chalk board. I have to tell you. I have been praying that God is going to work on your eyes today. Some of you are squinting when it comes to Jesus. I hope you are going to see Jesus more clearly because of what Paul is going to tell you about Jesus.

Listen to what Paul writes in Colossians 1:15, "The Son is the image of the invisible God..." Notice the first couple words...the Son is. That is what Paul is going to do in our time together today. He is going to tell you about Jesus and who *He is*. The first thing he says is that **He is God**. "He is the image of the invisible God."

The Greek word for image is the word icon. An icon is an object that has been shaped to resemble the form or appearance of something. Most of you are probably thinking of an app you have on your phone or tablet. That app or icon is representative of a computer program.

When I hear the image of God, my mind goes back to Genesis 1:26. We read that God created man in his image. God created us to resemble and reflect God's goodness, holiness and love. Due to the fall, the image of God has been marred in us. We no longer naturally resemble and reflect God's character.

Notice the difference between what Paul writes and what is in Genesis 1:26. Genesis said we have been created in God's image. Paul says, "The Son *is the image* of God." He doesn't just resemble or appear to be like God. He is God. He possesses the same nature of God. Therefore to see Jesus, you have seen the invisible God.

Paul is going to do everything he can to help you see clearly that Jesus is God, because if you understand that Jesus is God, look what happens. Jump down to the last part of Colossians 1:18. Paul says that I am telling you that Jesus is God “...so that in everything he might have the supremacy.” If you really understand that Jesus, who lived on this earth for 33 years, really is God, the only response is to make him first in your life.

Some versions of the Bible use the word supreme, some use the word first, but the American Standard Version of the Bible says, “that in all things he might have the preeminence.” That word just sounds like a word that would be ascribed to a king, a lord...a God. Listen to some of the definitions of preeminence: foremost, unrivaled, superior, unsurpassed and unequalled. Verse 18 is the goal of your life. Jesus is God; therefore, the only response is to make him first. He is first in your marriage. He is first in your dating relationships. He is first in your job. He is first in your decisions.

Bob Buford, tells the story of speaking at his son’s graduation. You know it was a long time ago, because he says he was wearing a 3 piece suit with a vest. After he finished speaking, he walked to the back of the auditorium so he could shake all the hands of the graduates as they exited. The first student came through the door and Buford thought the young might say, “Good job” or “Thanks for being here.” The young man pointed to Buford’s vest and said, “You buttoned your vest wrong.” Buford looked down and he had taken the first button and put in the second button hole. He said, “It is not hard to button your vest, but when you get the first button wrong, everything looks bad.”

Some of your dating relationships are a wreck because you haven’t made him first in that relationship. Some of your finances are struggling because He is not first. Some of your marriages are in trouble because He is not first in your marriage. Your family is a mess because you haven’t made him first in your family. Paul is telling you today that Jesus is God so that he will be first and foremost, unrivaled and unequalled in your life.

You may be wondering, why is Paul making such a big deal over Jesus being supreme. First, because he is. Let that resonate for a moment. He is. Paul believed it and he experienced it. There is an additional reason. Something dangerous was going on in the church at Colossae. This church had heard the Gospel and they were growing in their faith, but now a threat was occurring. The threat was that some were saying that Jesus was less than God. The deity of Jesus was under attack in the church.

They said he was a pretty good guy. He might be equal to an angel, but he is definitely not equal to God.

They were willing to give God prominence, but they were not willing to make him preeminent. Please don't write this letter off as something that happened a long time ago. You need to be careful that someone doesn't come into your story and try to threaten your faith in Jesus. See, I know you have made him prominent in your life. You showed up for church today, but is he going to be first in your time and relationships this week. Is he going to be unequaled in what gets your attention this week? Is he going to be unrivaled in how you make decisions?

Paul continues this theme of Jesus being first by saying, "He is the firstborn over all creation." I think Paul uses this term firstborn to get the attention of those who were saying that Jesus was less than. They saw him as a created being rather than God. They probably read this and said, "See we told you." It can refer being born first, but here it refers to rank or stature. Firstborn simply means "of first importance, of first rank".

All throughout scripture, this term refers to rank, not birth order. Israel is called first-born. It is not because they were the first nation ever formed, but because they have a special place in God's sight among all the nations. In Psalms 89:27, God says, "I will appoint David to be my firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth." God is giving David a title and giving him a position of rank. In fact, David wasn't born first.

Let me take you back to that story. God tells a prophet named, Samuel, to go to Jesse's house and anoint the next king of Israel. When Samuel sees all of Jesse's sons, he naturally thinks the oldest, the one who was born first, but God says no. He actually goes through every son and God kept saying, "It is not this one." David was the youngest. He was chosen by God and given the rank and position of first born.

Now, that we understand firstborn..."**Jesus is**" the firstborn...having the highest rank in all creation. Who has the highest rank on a team? The coach. Who has the highest rank at the office? The owner. Who has the highest rank in a country? The President. Who has the highest rank in creation? The Creator. So, he is going to tell us about Jesus --- the Creator. He is God and He is Creator.

Look at verse 16 "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 by him and for him. He is before all things and in him all things

hold together.” Notice all the prepositional phrases: in, by and for. It is like he has put He is Creator and he is doing everything to get you to zero in on “He is” the Creator.

When you hear, “In the beginning, God created...” Who do you picture? I have to be honest. I pictured God looking older, white beard, creating, but Paul says Jesus is the one you should picture because he is the creator of all things. That is the paradox. The eternal one isn’t old. The Creator doesn’t age. He just is. Paul doesn’t leave any stone unturned: heaven, earth, visible, and even the unseen world of angels and demons.

Now that sounds like a big Jesus, but let me show you how personal the Creator is. The last half of 16 says, “...all things have been created by him and for him.” I think this phrase answers 2 questions we all have to answer: Who am I?, and Why am I here? We need to talk about the big picture of Jesus, but one of the things we love about Jesus is that he is willing to get up close and personal.

Who are you? You were created by Jesus. Why are you here? You are created for Jesus. That is who you are and why you are here. You are the unique, special, precious, miraculous, supernatural creation of Jesus. Your value is inherent in your creation by Jesus. No job, no accomplishment, no pleasure, no boy, no girl, no success, no fame, no money can ever trump what is already true about you right now. You are valuable because you are created by Jesus.

Sometimes we struggle and get lost in life. Maybe you are at a difficult place. Please know he planned you, he produced you and he did it because it brings him great joy. And don’t forget the little phrase at the end... he holds all things together. This may be a difficult time for you, but now you know that he planned you, you know that he produced you and for some strange reason, you bring him lots of joy, so make sure you tell him that you are going to trust him to hold it all together.

Paul tells us one more thing about Jesus. He is the Head of the Church. He tells us more reasons why Jesus should be supreme in our lives. In verse 18, he tells us Jesus is, “firstborn from among the dead.” You already know that firstborn doesn’t refer to being born first, because others like Lazarus was brought back from the dead before Jesus. The difference....Lazarus died again. Jesus may not have been the first, but he was the most important.

Jesus was the first one out of the tomb to stay out of the tomb. When he told Lazarus’ sister, Martha, “I am the resurrection and the life”, he backed it up. He is

the first one out of death and darkness. He is the first one out of the grave. He owns death. He stands over death, because he ranks over death and death is subservient to him. And the great news. Because of his rank, he has the power to bring us with him. That is why he should have the supremacy in your life.

There is something else that Paul highlights about Jesus being the Head of the Church. In verse 19 Paul writes, “For God was pleased to have all the *fullness* dwell in him.” Remember those that were trying to make Jesus less than...Paul uses one of their words to describe fullness. It was their language and it meant “the sum total of all divine power and attributes.” I want you to keep that word fullness in mind because it is going to give great meaning to something here in a moment. So God was pleased to have all of the fullness of God in Jesus and there is a second reason God was pleased...Jesus was a reconciler.

“...and through him he reconciled to himself all things by making peace through his blood shed on the cross.” He goes on in verse 22, “he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.” He uses the word reconcile twice. When reconciliation is needed, there has been break in a relationship.

Paul tells us what happened right in between the two verses...why reconciliation is needed. “Once you were alienated from God and were enemies.” Do you see the problem? He says, “You were.” That is a real contrast from what Paul has been talking about. He has been telling us “He is.” The relationship between God and man has been broken. The “He is” and the “You Were” are not in the same galaxy. How do you solve that problem? Here are some options as to how you solve that problem. God could lower his standards, but God can’t stop being God. It is just not possible. Another option is man could find a way to please God, but it seems we’ve tried that since the dawn of time and our “best efforts” can never satisfy. This is a God-sized problem that only God can solve.

The people trying to make Jesus less than didn’t believe it had anything to do with his humanity, and Paul is telling us it has everything to do with his humanity—peace and reconciliation are brought about because in the full human body of Jesus was the fullness—the sum total of all divine power and attributes. In the human body of Jesus is God. In the human body of Jesus is the Creator of the world and in the human body of Jesus is the Head of the Church. Jesus is the God-man and he deserves to be first.

Earlier in our service, Steve read John: 3:30. It says “he must become greater and greater and I must become less and less.” John the Baptist is the one who said this. John had the privilege of introducing Jesus to the world.

I remember when Mackenzie was four years old. One day she came into the room where Rebecca and I were; she was so excited. She said you got to come here. So we walked into her room and she showed us that she had made her bed for the very first time. Oh, she was so proud. Now to be honest, the comforter is kind a cockeyed. The pillows were a little crooked, not only was she proud, but so are we. I have told her that that was one of the biggest mistake she ever made. From that day forward, I knew she could make her bed. So there would be no excuse when she was 13 or 14. She has her own house now. Guess what she does. She makes her bed and I don't have to go over do it for her.

When John says, “He must become greater and greater.” Jesus is great whether we make him great, but deep down Jesus has this hope that you will find a way in your life to make him great because he is God, he is Creator and he is Head of the church. As you try to elevate him in your life it will be less and less about you. But don't think you will be nothing. Elevating him doesn't shrink you; elevating yourself will do that. When you elevate him, he becomes big because he is and he changes the “you were” to “you are”.

Because He is, we are going to worship the one who is God, Creator and Head of the Church.