

# The Message of Colossians

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[ 0 : 00 ] Morning everyone. If you've got your Bibles, keep them open at Colossians because that's where we are in our series. We're going to look at the book of Colossians. As you remember, we are starting, we're finishing our series, on the foundations of the church.

The birth of the church. We had a fantastic series in Acts and then we looked at some of the letters. And we're ending the series today in Colossians, a great place to end.

Now, I wonder, who can remember from school days, trappe van vergeleking? Hey? Yeah. So, okay, let's try this. Follow on with me.

Goed, beter, beste. Okay, there's a few of you who remember. What about dier? Expensive. Dier, dierder, dierste. Is it just the masks that are? Yeah. Okay.

I've got this one as well. Kwaai, kwaie, kwaiste. Lekker. Now, each step of the trap, there's a trap, there's a step of vergeleking, there's a comparison.

[ 1 : 08 ] The beginning step is called the stellende trap. You stell, you make a proposition. Then there's the verkroetende trap. It's a long time since I did this right there. And it gets bigger.

And then the last trap, the oertreffende trap, the hitting over step. Degrees of comparison in English.

Big, bigger, biggest. High, higher, strong. Stronger, strongest. Easy to remember, of course.

Today, we're going to learn that we need one more degree of comparison. I'm going to call it the Jesus degree. And it's way bigger than the oertreffende trap, or the superlative degree in English. And we need that vision in order to deal with the seemingly small and everyday problems that we have in our lives. So let's try the Jesus comparison step with big, bigger, biggest, Jesus.

[ 2 : 18 ] That's what we're going to learn about today. High, higher, highest, Jesus, or Christ. Strong, stronger, strongest, Jesus.

Now, as we dive into the book of Colossians, we see immediately that there's a problem, and that's why Paul wrote the letter. And the question of who Jesus really is and what his place is in the lives of the believers had come up in the church.

The church was beginning to be pulled in different directions because of some bad teaching they'd been receiving. A teaching that didn't come from Paul. Paul, funny enough, didn't establish the church at Colossae.

He established a church in Ephesus. The town of Colossae was about two weeks or 10 days to 12, 14 days travel east of Ephesus.

And it's likely that when Paul established a church at Ephesus that some of the believers went to Colossae, which was their hometown, and they shared the gospel, and the church was born there.

[ 3 : 19 ] And then later on, when Paul was in prison, about four or five years later, they came to visit him probably in Rome and said, listen, we need your help. We've started strong, but there's some issues. We need your help. And what seems to be happening is that there's a mix of mysticism and spiritualism, as well as the old Judaism that had been dogging Paul since his days in Galatians.

Now, we've looked at the Judaism and the legalism thing in our letter to the Galatians, and so today we're going to look at this mystical spiritualism that was bothering the peace of the church in Colossae.

When you read the book, you'll notice there's lots of talk of fullness, as well as finding wisdom and knowledge. So have a look at chapter 1, verse 19.

Chapter 1, verse 19. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him. That's in Jesus. And then from our reading today, from chapter 2, just a bit earlier, chapter 2, verse 10.

In Christ, all the fullness, verse 9, all the fullness of the deity lives in bodily form, and you've also been given fullness in him. And then there's talk of wisdom and knowledge.

[ 4 : 29 ] Back in chapter 1, verse 9. For this reason, Paul says, Since the day we heard about you, the church at Colossae, we have not stopped praying for you and asking God to fill you, there's that filling word again, with the knowledge of his will through all spiritual wisdom and understanding.

And in chapter 2, verse 2, Paul says, My purpose, this is to the church at Laodicea, just down the road from Colossae, my purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely Christ.

And so, when you look at the book of Colossians, there's lots of talk on fullness and wisdom and knowledge. What seems to be happening is that Paul is countering the claims that had come in from outside the church for people that were offering a sort of fullness apart from Christ.

They were saying things like, Look, you've got Jesus, but we can offer you real fullness in your life. We have the real secrets of knowledge. You need to go deeper and have a deeper spiritual experience.

And if you follow our program, these guys were saying, our rules, it will unlock for you the doors of wisdom beyond your deepest desires. And you'll find a new and deeper way to the divine.

[ 5 : 49 ] You know that kind of mystical language? You may have heard it before. I'm not sure I'm the world's best salesman for that, but you kind of get the idea. What they would do is go into great detail about being able to see into the spiritual world.

And for some reason, that always sounds enticing to us. It just sounds so mysterious and interesting. Now this kind of spiritualism that they had in their day is still around in ours.

You find it in the self-help sections in the bookstores, or at the palm reader at the local fair, or maybe in the horoscope in your daily newspaper. A recent book, Eat, Pray, and Love, is a recent version of it.

It's turned into a movie by Julia Roberts, if I haven't read the book. And the blurb goes like this. Newly divorced and at a crossroads, Elizabeth embarks on a journey around the world that becomes a quest for self-discovery.

There's a key word. In her travels, she discovers the true pleasures of nourishment by eating in Italy. The power, another key word, of prayer in India. And finally, and unexpectedly, the inner peace and balance of true love in Indonesia.

[ 6 : 58 ] Of course, who wouldn't find it in Indonesia? And then another book, which you may not be familiar with, but that kind of highlights this problem, I think, that they're finding themselves in Colossae. This book is called Sacred Woman.

Sacred Woman gives us a program of spiritual rejuvenation and creativity and consciousness.

Queen Afua, is the author, summons us to enter the gateways of initiation.

Hmm. This is a new book. Where she blesses us with the exact tools we need to bring our beings into true harmony with the earth and the cosmos. Now, so these are modern versions of what was happening at the time when Paul was writing to the letter of Colossae.

Now, what the people were saying, these guys were talking about to the church, they weren't in direct opposition to Jesus. Rather, they were saying that you could have Jesus, that's fine. Now, as long as you realize that just, you know, he was one of the ways, one of the powers, one of the gods, one of the spirits that could lead you into a deeper version of spirituality.

And the problem with this, of course, is that it undermines two very important things about Jesus.

His uniqueness. What Paul will argue for in this letter is the total supremacy of Christ in all things.

[ 8 : 19 ] And then it undermines Jesus' sufficiency in the lives of believers to bring about change.

And so, as we look at the letter this morning, I want to highlight the supremacy of Christ in all things.

It's a key, key, key part of the letter. And we're going to work our way through a key section in chapter one. So, it's a very important bit. And it just exalts Christ to the highest level.

And we've got to get that vision of Jesus right in our minds. So now, starting at verse 15, Paul is talking about Christ and how far superior he is to any other way of spiritual guide that you can think of.

Just read with me. This is what Paul says about Christ. From verse 15, chapter 1. He is the image of the invisible God. The firstborn. Now, just notice all the alls, if you can.

The firstborn over all creation. For by him, all things were created. Things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities, all things were created by him and for him.

[ 9 : 27 ] He is before all things. And in him, all things hold together. And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead.

So that in your version, you might say everything, the Greek is all things, he might have supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, for making peace through his blood shed on the cross.

Now, let's just work through a few things there. Verse 15. Here's the image of the invisible God. Jesus perfectly reflects who God is, his attributes, like Adam was supposed to do in the Garden of Eden.

So that's where that little verse comes from. It's a spin on Genesis chapter 1. But here now, in Christ, he's actually able to fully and perfectly reflect who God is. Jesus was perfectly holy, yet perfectly merciful.

Jesus was totally obedient to God, yet he was full of compassion for people struggling in sin. So basically, what Paul is saying is, if you want to know who God is, you need to get to know Jesus.

[ 10 : 35 ] This cuts through all the pseudo-spiritual self-help books who try to get you to God or some divine spirit by bypassing Jesus or by making him one of just the many ways of getting to where you want to be.

Still in verse 15, he's the firstborn of all creation. He's the inheritor of every bit of creation. The inheritor of every bit of the real state in the entire universe belongs to Jesus.

The firstborn here is a place of preeminence, of privilege, but also of authority. In the Old Testament, both Israel and David were called God's firstborn, meaning they were important to God, but they were to act as his rulers on planet Earth.

Here Jesus is the true firstborn, the original, that Israel and David were just basically bad copies of. And then in verse 16, if you don't still get it, all things were created by him.

Christ is literally the agent of creation. When God created by his word, and John tells us that word is Jesus, then we know that this statement by Paul is true.

[ 11 : 45 ] Jesus, in his pre-incarnated state, as the second person of the Trinity, has infinite power and infinite wisdom at his command. Jesus is God, our creator.

Now, you know, when you buy something these days, and you open up the package, nearly everything says, where is it made? In China. Well, if you could look under your skin, actually, if you look at your skin, but for my illustration, if you look under your skin, into the cells, and the molecules that make you up, and you look at the atoms that are floating around us where you can't see, they would all be stamped with, made by Jesus.

In verse 16, all things were created for him. Jesus is the goal of creation and time. Of creation and time.

The goal of the whole universe is Christ. Although Jesus was involved in creating everything we see, everything we see, we know that it is God the Father who will eventually kind of hand it over to him as a kind of gift or reward or inheritance because of his obedience on the cross and all that achieved.

And what that achieved was the total revolution of the curse of death and the salvation of God's people. And just in case you still don't get it, Paul in verse 17 says, all things hold together in Christ.

[ 13 : 16 ] Jesus sustains and upholds and keeps everything in existence. Jesus, every second, every atom, everywhere, obeys the laws of physics because Jesus is telling it to.

We cannot even begin to comprehend the power and the wisdom that that takes. From the vast sizes of the stars in the universe that radiate masses of energy to the tiny synapses in our brains that allow us to think and remember and to feel, Jesus is in complete control of all that exists.

Isn't that amazing? So if he were to stop thinking about us and upholding us, we would simply cease to exist. So the first thing that Paul wants his church to get at Colossae is, Christ is above and beyond anything that can replace him.

So if you've got Jesus, you don't need anything else, these other lesser things to bring you to God or to get you into the spiritual world. If you've got Jesus, you've got it all. You're with me. The second thing is that Christ is supreme over salvation.

He's not just supreme in creation. He's supreme in our salvation. And that's from verse 18 onwards. Christ is the head of the church, meaning he's our ruler.

[ 14 : 34 ] The head is the place from where orders to the body are delivered. He's our leader, our Lord, and has every right to tell us how to live. Our job is to obey. You know, bodies work best when they do what the brain tells them to do.

You know, when you've been lying down and you get pins and needles and your arm goes lame, and your brain is turning it to the end and it's not doing it. Your body works best when it obeys the signals coming from the brain, and just like that with the church.

We work best when we obey the messages that come from our head, Jesus Christ. Still in verse 18, he's the firstborn from the dead. Jesus' lordship over the church is linked to his resurrection.

We've seen that over and over in the book of Acts and in the letters. Jesus is the pioneer, the one who starts something new. He is the founder of a new order in creation.

In Christ, the age of death has ended. The age of new life has begun. And verse 19, God's fullness dwells in him.

[ 15 : 40 ] In case you hadn't realized it yet, this is another way of saying that Jesus is God, but that he is God in human form. The dwelling language here is taken from the Old Testament temple language, where God dwells in the temple.

Jesus is the place now where the fullness of God dwells. I stand under correction, but I don't think it talks about the fullness of God dwelling in the temple in the Old Testament.

I guess if he pitched up in his fullness, it would cease to exist. So every time God reveals himself in the Old Testament, there's amazing glory. Think of Mount Sinai. Think of when he eventually arrived in the temple.

If you were standing there, you would be totally amazed. But yet God is withholding and pulling himself back, because if he arrived in all his glory and power, I think it would just obliterate everything. I don't think it can handle that kind of power.

And yet, somehow, he's able to do that in Christ. Jesus is now the place where the fullness of God dwells. He's the contact point between humanity and God.

[ 16 : 35 ] That's why it's so important to know that Jesus is both God and man. Not just God. Not just God. And looking like a man. And not just a man and not God.

In order for God to have full fellowship with his creation, we need an intermediary that can fully represent God to us, and fully represent us to God.

Can you see how important it is that Christ has the fullness of God dwelling in bodily form? You get the two together. And then he reconciles all things to himself as our Savior.

I guess this is the most important thing about Jesus for us. He brings about our reconciliation. He brings peace and forgiveness and fellowship back into existence.

That's what a reconciler does. He takes two parties that are at loggerheads who are fighting, and he says, guys, let's be friends. I don't know about you, but I'm not about to step in between an angry God and the person he's angry at.

[ 17 : 37 ] Can you imagine what would happen to you if you did that? I mean, I don't know if you've ever tried to get into where two people are fighting, and you've tried to stop that. You normally get taken out yourself. You really want to get to each other.

You're the one that gets collateral damage. I'm trying to do that between God and the people that he's angry with. It takes a very strong and special person to be able to do that. Jesus is able to make friends between us and God.

Notice, though, that he doesn't just save humans. He brings all things, the whole of the created order, into reconciliation with himself. And all of that is done by the cross.

Can you see how powerful Jesus is and how powerful the cross is? Can you see what it achieves? It changes time and space. Right, now that we've got a glimpse into who Jesus is, and it's so important for us as Christians to have this big-picture idea of Jesus.

He's the... He's beyond our ability. And this is just a small glimpse. This is scratching the surface. And when you fully understand it, you've only still scratched the surface, because he's so much bigger and so much more than we can comprehend.

[ 18 : 49 ] So what Paul does next, though, is he gives this big picture of Jesus. Jesus is supreme in all things. So in him, you've got everything you need to connect to God, to the divine that God wants you to connect to.

What does Paul want us to do with that knowledge? Well, he wants you to be nice. He wants us to live ordinary, everyday lives as people in Christ.

We need an all-surpassing vision of Christ, just to get on with ordinary, everyday living. If you turn over in chapter 3, if you have to turn over, it depends on the Bible you've got, my heading says, rules for holy living.

It's an NIV. We need an all-surpassing vision of Christ, just to get on with ordinary, everyday life. The rules of holy living, as the NIV has it in chapter 3, can be summed up quite easily. Don't be naughty.

Don't be ugly. Play nice with each other. Now, I'm overplaying the ordinary sense slightly. My English teacher says, never use the word nice. Use proper words.

[ 19 : 52 ] It's such an all-encompassing, and it feels like a little bit blare, doesn't it? But sometimes people get too carried away with this big vision of Christ, and they want to go and live in that heavenly, spatial realm without realizing that it's there to help you with ordinary, everyday life.

The supremacy of Christ in all things means He's sufficient for us in all things, including the small things. The small, everyday things is where we need the help the most, if we're honest.

It's important to connect to ordinary, everyday living with this amazing vision of Jesus for two reasons. Firstly, because so many people want an amazing vision of Jesus in order to live amazing lives for Him.

Now, there's nothing wrong with that, but it's often unrealistic and unhealthy. All that happens is that they take off like a rocket, but crash and burn out in days, weeks or months, because it's kind of unsustainable.

Yes, Paul wants you to have this vision of Christ, but he doesn't want you to live there without being real. Because, and the second point is, most of our problems that we face are ordinary, everyday problems.

[ 21 : 03 ] And the reason Paul wants us to have an all-surpassing vision of Christ, the all-supremacy of Christ in all things, is that so Christ can be sufficient for us in the small things.

It's one thing having a cosmic Jesus that brings victory and power in the heavenly realms, but if you keep on losing your temper easily, or you drink too much, or you keep dropping rude words, or if you're too rough with your speech with your wife, then there's no point in having this amazing vision of Jesus.

Don't get all spiritual about Jesus if you're not going to get practical about the sin in your life, is what Paul is saying. Are you with me? Just to make the point, chapter 1, verse 11.

Paul is helping the Colossians, praying for the church there. And this is his prayer. I'll just start at verse 10. And we pray this, in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord, and may please Him in every way, bearing fruit in every good thing, in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, being strengthened with all power according to His glorious might.

Now imagine that prayer was answered in your life. That you got all the power you could get from God with His amazing might. A paraphrase would be, strengthened by God with the greatest strength imaginable.

[ 22 : 33 ] Now, if you wish for that, what do you think I'm going to say next? If God gave you all that power so that you can change the world, right? Paul says, so that you can stay a Christian.

All this amazing power so that you may have, verse 11, great or all endurance and patience, joyfully giving thanks to the Father.

Paul wants us to make sure that you stay normal. That is to stay a Christian. endurance is the ability to keep on keeping on. It's what you need when you go on a hike.

You don't need speed. It's not a race. You just need to be able to keep going. Paul is wanting the Colossians to have their heads in the clouds when it comes to understanding who Jesus is, but he wants them to keep their feet on the ground when it comes to living in the light of that amazing reality.

Can you see that? Are you with me on that? Now, if Jesus is this powerful, he's got all this power and he's directing it all at me, what does this mean for me?

[ 23 : 45 ] What must I do with all this power and this life and this victory flowing through my veins? Well, Paul wants us to change. In Paul's terms, he wants us to live new lives powered by the resurrected Christ.

And in chapter 3 and 4, he spells that out for us in four areas. We'll look at them very briefly. But just notice at the end of, at the beginning, sorry, of chapter 3, at the end of our reading.

This is Paul's conclusion for the church. Chapter 3, verse 1. Since then, you have been raised with Christ. Set your hearts on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. You have been raised with Christ. The same power that pulled Jesus out of the grave is the same power that's working in our lives as Christians. Now, what does Paul want you to do with all that power?

[ 24 : 53 ] First of all, he wants you to look after your body. Verse 5, put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature. That's our body stuff. Sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed, which is idolatry.

So you've got to get rid of all the bad stuff that your body does. We all know what he's talking about there. He also wants us to get rid of bad feelings and thoughts and words, things that come out of our body.

Have a look at verse 8. In fact, from verse 7, he says to them, to the church, you used to walk in these ways in the life you once lived, but now, you must rid yourselves of all such things as these. Anger. It's not okay to be angry. Rage, which is like really serious anger. Road rage, but rage at any other time. Malice.

Being horrible towards other people and having bad feelings towards them. Slander. just talking badly about people behind their backs and filthy language from your lips.

[ 26 : 03 ] So with all this power available to us, God wants you to be good. Your bodies must work properly. Don't use your bodies to be abusive or bad or horrible. And there's this putting off and putting on language that we need to look at.

Have a look at verse 9 and verse 10. Paul says, Do not lie to each other since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its creator.

It's an important concept in Paul that helps us understand how we are to achieve this new way of living. Now think of it when you learn to tie your shoelaces. It's kind of, it's complicated, wasn't it? You get it right the first time? Way back when? You had to stop everything else, you had to screw up your concentration and do it step by step and you got it wrong and then eventually you got it right. But when you do it enough you do it automatically.

No one, you know, if you're a grown adult and you're still taking 15 minutes to tie your shoelaces you're doing it wrong. When you do it enough you do it automatically.

[ 27 : 14 ] It gets easier with practice just like anything. And so the taking off of our old nature must be something that we're consciously aware of and do, follow the things that Paul says you mustn't do here and just check in your life.

How am I doing with them? Okay, now there's a little bit of anger in me. There's a little bit of malice. I've been slandering. Okay, I need to stop doing that and kind of take that yucky, take it off.

It's like when you've got clothes that are full of something you've spilt on or smelly. You don't want it and just take it off. But you've got to put something else on. Verse 10, you've put on the new self which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its creator.

And Paul mentioned specific things we must take off. And when you do the same you've got to be specific. I need to stop drinking more than three glasses of alcohol per night.

Maybe I'll just drink on the weekends but not more than three or four however your limit is. I must stop talking badly about so and so. Don't be general. Oh yeah, I really should stop saying things like that.

[ 28 : 22 ] Who did you say it to? Okay, I mustn't say it to that person. I must not let what so and so said to me fest inside. I need to stop it. You know, but that will only get you so far.

You need to dig a little bit deeper to the underlying desires and fears. What do you want? What do you want when these things happen? What are you trying to achieve with it? What are your desires? others? Maybe you're trying to escape from an unhappy partner or an escape from the past or maybe you do it because you enjoy the feelings.

It makes you feel better. It makes you more interesting. Maybe you can achieve escape of bad things in life or maybe you can achieve success and you're looking out for yourself. You hear what biblical counselors call functional salvation.

Yes, you've put your trust in Christ for your forgiveness of sins, but we don't realize that Jesus can help us in our everyday battle with the small little sins that's going on here and I guess I'm calling them small.

Some of them are not that small, but it's the stuff that we all struggle with on a daily basis. We've got to know that the Christ of the universe can help us fight these sins in our daily lives. You need to crucify those desires with Jesus, taking them to him in prayer and laying them at the foot of the cross.

[ 29 : 31 ] Now this takes time. It's not just a one-off prayer. You sometimes have to do some real struggle work in this. Maybe you've got to pray three times a day. Sometimes in biblical counselors, they call it giving homework to people who are really struggling.

They say, okay, you're going to pray about this three times a day and I've done this as an exercise and you think, oh yeah, that's fine, I can do that. By the third day, you're like, oh no, I've got to pray again. Okay. But it really makes a difference.

It can really help. So all supremacy of Christ helps us. Christ is sufficient in all the things that we need him to be sufficient in into making us holy and being good.

That was just being holy in the body, being good in the body from the things that come out of our body. God wants us to be patient with each other in the church and have a look at verse 12.

Paul says, therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, so he's talking about the church now, clothe yourselves with compassion to each other now, to people in the church, obviously to people outside, but let's try and do this with people in the church, with kindness and humility, gentleness and patience.

[ 30 : 44 ] Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievance you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you, and have all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Do you see what I mean by being nice?

I mean, Paul explains it a bit better, but it's basically being nice, being good towards each other. It's a good place to practice that in the church. What words are coming out of your mouth when you're speaking about people in church?

Is it this kind of words? Or is it the malice kind of words? Where's the balance? Then Paul wants us to put on being good in the family from verse 18.

Wives. Submit to your husbands as it's right in the Lord. He just lays it down there. Bam. You've got to listen to your husband. You've got to honor him and respect him. Men, verse 19, husbands, love your wives and don't be harsh with them.

Be nice. Be gentle. Don't throw horrible little words out all the time or belittle them and make them feel like they don't know what they're doing. You've got to make them feel amazing and special and then it obviously becomes easier to submit.

[ 31 : 48 ] Children, you've got a role to play. Are there kids here? They're a good job. Just obey your parents and listen to them. And fathers, don't embitter your children.

Don't get nasty with them. Just be nice to them, okay? Be patient and kind like you are with your wife. And then, Paul wants him to change in the workplace.

Can you see how easy and practical every day this is? But you need the power of Christ to get you to do these things. From verse 22, Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything.

How's that? In everything. And do it not only when their eyes are on you to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart as working for the Lord, not for men.

Here's a good reason to do this, by the way. Since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. That's a good reason to do work for your boss.

[ 32 : 49 ] Now, we're not slaves, but we've got bosses and for us who are employees, you've got to work like your boss is watching. Because Jesus is going to give you a reward when you do that well and without grumbling, especially against him behind his back.

What about the bosses, though? What must they do? Bosses, you must be nice. Masters, chapter 4, provide your slaves with what is right and fair because you know that you also have a master in heaven.

In other words, pay them their fair due. Don't try and undercut them. Be good to them. So you get an all-supreme idea.

