

Peace through Death

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[0 : 00] Good afternoon everyone. Thanks to the musicians and singers and to the readers this afternoon.! We're going to think about the words from that last reading that we had read for us from Colossians! chapter 1. And we're going to think last Sunday, this Sunday and next Sunday on the cosmic Christ.

So taking Christmas from a different angle, looking at who Jesus is in all his glory, and not just the Jesus of the manger on the first Christmas. So let me ask you a question, what is the most common image of Jesus at Christmas time? For many, I guess it probably is the image of the baby, you know, the classic Christmas nativity scene where if you look for long enough in the shops, you'll probably find a few Christmas cards that still have this scene on them besides the robins and Santa and whoever else they put on Christmas cards these days. But it's a scene where there is an antiseptically clean stable, there are some highly attentive animals, there is some atmospheric lighting, and you'll see all kinds of animals crowding around the baby in the manger. Mary and Joseph are there, of course, and the baby has this really warm glow all around about him. And that is one of the most common images that we have of Christmas. But I think there can be a danger if we are just simply stuck in the manger at Christmas time. What I mean is, if the only image we have of Jesus is the Jesus in the manger, then we can seriously underestimate him, who he is, and what he came to do. And that's why we read these amazing verses from the book of Colossians in our Bible, because they speak about Jesus and they say of him that the sun is the image of the invisible God. So yes, Jesus was a baby. He was and is fully human. But we're told he was and is fully God. Now these words from Colossians were written by Paul in the first century, roughly about 30 years after Jesus had walked on this earth. And Paul, when he was writing to the Colossians, was writing to a bunch of people who were in danger of misunderstanding the real Jesus, of underestimating him, of having a Jesus that is too small, too little, too insignificant. And I guess for many people today, that is the image of Jesus that they have. And so Paul, in what is basically like an early Christian hymn, highlights the supremacy of Jesus over all things. And that's why the incarnation, God in human flesh, means that Jesus simply cannot be ignored. Why? Well, because this Bible reading, the last one, tells us that Jesus is essential for everything. And here we see why he is essential for creation, and why he's essential for reconciliation. Well, what does that mean?

Essentially, it means he's essential for you and for me. So let's just ponder and see why. First of all, Jesus is the creator. So Jesus didn't just show up in a little place called Bethlehem, a little town of Bethlehem that we've been singing about. He didn't just show up there just over 2,000 years ago. Jesus has always existed, is what our reading tells us.

The sun is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. Okay, so Jesus is the eternal son of God who makes God visible to us, which means we don't really need to guess what God is like.

[4 : 15] We often think, well, if only God would just make himself clearer, then we'd all be able to understand who he is and what his purpose and plan is for our lives. Well, we're told that Jesus is the image of the invisible God. And we're also told that Jesus is the firstborn over all creation. It doesn't mean that Jesus was born first or even that Jesus was created because it's got this idea of supremacy or priority. And so in the biblical culture, the firstborn had a higher status and received a greater share of the inheritance than all the other children. And so it's saying to us that Jesus is supreme over everything. And we're told why in our reading, 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. So all creation, we're told, was made by Jesus, which is everything we can see as well as everything that we can't see. So we're talking about the macro level with the universe and the stars and planets and the galaxies. And

we're also talking about the micro level with the subatomic particles and the atoms and the DNA. All of it owes its existence to Jesus. But he's not just the creator. He's also the goal of creation, not just the source, but also the goal because everything we read was created for him. And so we're not here in this universe because of random chance, which is what many people tend to think. Our origin and our purpose is explained by Jesus. You know those name labels that you get for school uniforms, which parents at the start of every year after the summer holidays, sew on every piece of their child's item of clothing before they go off to school. And of course, they helped me find my jumper, which was in a pile of other jumpers at the end of break time at school, uses goal posts for when we were playing football. Well, it's like everything in creation is labeled, this belongs to Jesus because he made it. It's his. Abraham Kuyper, former prime minister of the

Netherlands, once said, there is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry mine. So that means there is nothing in this universe, including you and me, that doesn't belong to Jesus. But as well as Jesus being the creator, what we read here is that Jesus is also the sustainer of his creation. Because we read, he is before all things and in him all things hold together. Which is telling us that Jesus keeps the cosmos functioning moment by moment. And so the way the planet Earth remains the exact distance from the sun and the way that there's enough oxygen in the air for us to breathe and the fact that there's this thing called gravity that some people pretend to understand but don't fully, it all depends on Jesus.

So Jesus is not like human creators who design and make something and develop it and then are no longer needed. Take the late Steve Jobs, the creator of Apple technology, for example. He doesn't need to be around for Apple products to work. iPhones, iPads, Macs, AirPods and Apple watches will still work without Steve jobs. Unless of course you break them and then they don't work and you need a new one. But nothing in this universe works without Jesus. That's what we're being told. And that's how dependent our very existence is on him. Now I reckon many people reject Christianity because they've got the wrong image of Jesus Christ.

They imagine a Jesus who is small, who is insignificant, who is incidental and who is irrelevant, rather than the real Jesus who we're told here is the supreme Lord of all. And on whom our lives depend. We depend on Jesus for our every breath.

And that's why Jesus is so often dangerously underestimated and he's disastrously overlooked.

And so we shouldn't let the humble circumstances of his birth eclipse his true identity.

[9 : 32] The incarnation tells us that the baby who was held in his mother's arms is actually the one who holds the whole universe together. So Jesus is the creator. But why did Jesus come into this world that he made?

Well the answer is here in our passage to reconcile us to God. So Jesus is the reconciler. What does that mean?

Well that's what the second half of this reading in Colossians chapter 1 is all about. So Jesus, the creator of all things, came to reconcile to himself all things. Now underlying Paul's words here in the Bible is the storyline of the whole Bible, which is creation, which is creation, and then the fall, and then redemption, and then new creation.

So all things were created good by God, but then came the fall. And the fall tells us how we've all turned away from God.

So we were made in God's image to reflect God's glory, and yet despite being created to worship and love and obey God, instead we have not lived under God's loving rule for us. We've lived instead for ourselves. And so we have this broken relationship with our creator, which then has this knock-on effect and results in a breakdown in every other relationship too. So our relationship with the created order, our relationships with one another on a human level, even our relationship with ourself, all broken, all fractured, everything is fallen. And we know it, we feel it, we experience it. That's why we've got disharmony, and dislocation, and disaster, and disease, and death. The good creation has been fractured, and it's falling apart. That's the world we live in. It is in a fallen state. It's a fallen creation because of sin, and we know it too well. Our world is broken, and everything is corrupted to some degree or another, even ourselves, even our hearts. And so it might be the ongoing wars in Ukraine, or in the Middle East, or it might be the recent flooding in Spain. But we recognize the effects of this brokenness are everywhere. And we see them in our nation, in the UK, through our communities, in our schools. And we're aware of them in our families, aren't we, as well as our own personal lives.

[12 : 29] And we see them in our families. But the good news is that God won't allow all of this pain, and evil, and sin, and suffering, and injustice to go on forever. Because the Bible says to us that Jesus will judge all wrong, and he will put everything right. He'll reconcile to himself all things.

Which is great news, because it tells us that this world that God loves is another world that he has given up on. He loves the world and everybody in it. And that's where Christmas comes in. Verse 18, in a reading, tells us, and he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. So Jesus is supreme over the entire cosmos, and yet we're told he was dead. How can the source of life and the goal of life be dead? He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead. It's talking about the resurrection of Jesus, because it's through the death and resurrection of Jesus that he has defeated our greatest enemies of sin and death. And so the resurrection of Jesus Christ guarantees the resurrection of every single person who is united to him. And his resurrection was basically the dawning of a new age, where Jesus is the supreme ruler and was told, 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, by making peace through his blood shed on the cross. This is Christmas, isn't it? The fullness of God the Father dwells in Jesus Christ.

Jesus was and is fully God. Jesus was and is fully man. Whether as a cuddly baby in a crib, which he was, or as a dying man on a cross. Jesus came to reconcile to himself all things by making peace through his death on the cross. So these verses here point towards the coming together of a world that is falling apart, a restoration of everything that is ruined, a harmony to replace all the disharmony, a new creation from the fallen creation, a cosmic peace where there is so much sin and evil and pain and suffering and injustice.

You see, Christianity gives us a far better story for explaining everything. Because it gives us a realistic perspective on the world, which both acknowledges the world is broken because of sin, and yet gives us great hope because it promises that all things will be reconciled through Jesus Christ. When our children were small, they would often have friends over for play dates, and very quickly the house would descend into absolute chaos. Very quickly toys would be broken, there'd be mess everywhere, and what was harmonious would be a mess.

And harmony could only be restored when things were put back in their right places again. Now that's just restoration on a domestic level, and it doesn't really matter. But can you imagine restoration on a cosmic level? Because that does matter. And that is the outworking of Christmas, with all things coming under the supremacy of Jesus Christ. And that's why the implications of Christmas are staggering for everyone and for everything. Because if Christmas is the fullness of God dwelling in Jesus to reconcile all things to himself, it means that you and I need to be reconciled too.

[17 : 03] Why? Because our sin makes us enemies of God. And yet the fantastic news of Christmas is that through Jesus we can become God's friends.

Peace with God is possible through the blood of Jesus shed on the cross. All because Jesus lived the life that you and I should have lived but didn't. And he died the death that we deserve to die death for our sin in our place.

And so when we turn from our sin and trust in Jesus, Jesus takes our punishment and we get peace with God. Which means God accepts us because of Jesus. And we receive eternal life to live with God forever, in the new creation.

You've probably heard before of the Christmas truce. It took place around Christmas in 1914 during the First World War, where there were a series of unofficial ceasefires along the Western Front. As the Allied armies and German soldiers put down their rifles and they climbed out of their trenches and then they began to exchange Christmas greetings.

And at Christmas, men from both sides ventured into no man's land. And they sang together, they exchanged souvenirs, food and cigarettes. And apparently they even had a game of football on Christmas Day.

[18 : 37] But of course it was only a truce. It wasn't peace because they soon went back to killing each other again in war. And so no matter how noble our human desire is for peace, all our attempts at trying to bring it actually will fail.

But more importantly, all our attempts at trying to make peace with God, they will also fail. We can't do it.

And yet Christmas is the fantastic news that God has come at great cost to himself to make peace with us. Jesus is the one who ventured into no man's land as he came and gave his life and died on a cross.

He was directly in the firing line of God's just wrath against sin. He was sacrificed for us.

And so at the cross is where our sin is forgiven and salvation is given to us. And so can you see why Jesus is essential? He's essential not just for Christmas, but he is essential for life itself.

[19 : 58] And not just for life in this world, but for eternal life. For your life and for my life. But also for the entire cosmos.

Can you see how the supremacy of Jesus Christ smashes through the sentimentality of Christmas? It takes away the wishy-washy, the well-meaning, the good wishes that we have for hope and for joy and for peace, which are all great aspirations, aren't they?

We're not denying it. But Christmas tells us there is a real reason for tangible hope, joy and peace.

Not because we can create it ourselves, but because of the blood of Jesus shed on the cross. It brings about that peace. That's why we can sing in one of our Christmas carols, Peace on earth and mercy mild, God and sinners reconciled.

Which means the crucial question to ask this Christmas time is, Have you found peace with God? If not, you can.

[21 : 19] We all can if we turn away from our sin and trust in Jesus Christ as our Savior. We will then be reconciled to God. Christmas is a wonderful story because it is the true and better story that gives meaning and purpose and hope to our lives and also to our world.

And so even if you're here this afternoon and you wouldn't call yourself a Christian, maybe you're just curious, wanting to find out more about what this Christianity thing is all about.

Who is Jesus and what does it mean that he came into this world? Well, don't you want all of this to be true? Don't you want to know that peace that comes from Jesus and putting you right with God?

Don't you want a world where everything is put right? Where there is reconciliation in all things, in every way? Surely, we all want that, don't we?

Christianity tells us it comes to us in Jesus because of who he is and because of all that he has done. Which means that in Jesus Christ alone, do we truly discover what it means to have a happy Christmas.

[22 : 44] Let's pray. Let's pray.