

Christ the Revealer

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 11 December 2022

Preacher: Alistair Chalmers

[0:00] Thanks, Archie. Folks, please do keep that Bible passage open in front of you as we dive into it this morning together. Now, I think we can officially say, can't we, that the Christmas season has started.

I'm not sure what yesterday looked like for all of you, but it was an excuse for my wife and I to go out for a walk and to throw some snowballs at each other. Christmas has officially started. The shops are absolutely chaotic.

I'm getting tons of emails about Christmas deals and telling me where I can buy the Christmas, best Christmas gifts. You'd probably, you've maybe even started thinking about your Christmas meal. Where are you going to have it? Whose house is it going to be at? What are you going to cook? Who is going to be invited? Making sure that nobody feels left out. There is so much stress and chaos surrounding Christmas.

Christmas. And the funny thing is that we go through all of that chaos. We go through all of that stress, all the headache every single year so that we can have one day of peace.

[1:05] So that we can have one day where everything's calm. We run around like mad preparing everything so everyone's happy so that we can have a peaceful Christmas. But then what happens in the days that follow Christmas?

Well, we remember, don't we, that we're still in a cost of living crisis. We remember that we're still feeling the pain of poor mental health.

We remember that we're still feeling the effects of that broken marriage. We're still having the same struggles that we had in November. Nothing has changed except for the fact that we've enjoyed one day of escapism.

Or maybe you're here and you're a Christian and you know that Christmas is all about Jesus. And yet you still get sucked into all the other stuff about Christmas. And you lose sight of exactly who it is we are here to worship and celebrate.

It's so easy for us, whether we're Christians or not, to get sucked into the mindset of doing everything we possibly can to have one day of peace.

[2:15] Or maybe for you Christmas is a particularly hard time of year. I know that for some of you it is. Because of past experiences. Or because of loved ones who won't be there anymore.

Christmas isn't always the easiest time of year. And so we go to great lengths to have peace just for that one day. But it sounds a bit bleak.

It's not a nice happy way to start off a Christmas sermon series. But it's true. We work so hard to have that slither of peace at Christmas.

And that highlights a deep-seated desire in all of our lives. That we want peace. That we want harmony. That there's something wrong. This morning as we turn to Colossians chapter 1.

We hear about true and lasting peace. And where we can find it and how it's possible. Colossians is a glorious letter that I would highly recommend you read this afternoon.

[3:15] It was written by the Apostle Paul to a church that had lost their vision of who Jesus is. They were getting caught up in the things going on around them. And they were being distracted from Jesus.

It doesn't sound too dissimilar to our world, does it? This morning, I want to introduce you to Jesus. But not the Christmas add-on Jesus that we're used to at this time of year.

I want to introduce you to Jesus, God in the flesh. Jesus, God with us. Jesus, our Savior. And Jesus, the one who reveals all things to us.

Over the next two weeks, we're going to be studying these few verses in Colossians together. That get right to the heart of who Jesus is, what he came to do, and what that means for people today. Now, why on earth does that matter? Well, because if we really grasp who Jesus is, whether for the first time or for the hundredth time in our lives, we will get to Christmas, not with a desire for escapism, but with awe and reverence as we worship this baby in a manger who will change your life.

[4:29] Looking at who Jesus really is should create in us a reverence that impacts our day to day. Christmas will no longer be about the gifts that are sitting under the Christmas tree on Sunday morning, but it will be about the Savior of the world who took on flesh and dwelt among us.

Our focus will be how amazing he is. The wonderful gifts that he has given us and how we can come before him in adoration and worship him for who he really is, God.

So join me for the next few minutes as we dive into this passage that was read to us earlier. And we're going to ask two questions of the text. Who is Jesus and why did he come?

So who is this baby in a manger? Well, Paul, the writer of this letter presents us with a very different picture than the sanitized nativity scene we see of Jesus.

This passage is most likely a hymn that the early church would have sung together as they gathered to worship. It has wonderful depth in it and contains mind-blowing truths.

[5:44] And yet at the same time, it's simple enough to understand on the surface and it is easy to remember. But what glorious truths about Jesus are contained in these verses.

Now there's a lot in here and we're not going to get to all of it. You'll be thankful for that. So we're not here all afternoon. But I just want to highlight three things that this passage tells us. Firstly, Paul tells us in verse 15 that Jesus is the image of the invisible God.

And then in verse 19, as you'll see on the screen, it says that the fullness of God dwells in him. Now as a pastor, one of the questions I get asked a lot is, what is God like?

That's a great question. And the truth is that we can only understand a fraction of who he really is. We cannot expect that the finite human mind can understand the infinite, wonderful God that we serve.

But what this verse is saying is that if you want to know what God is like, look to Jesus. Because the fullness of God dwells in him. Now I've been a Christian for a while.

[6:55] I've studied theology for eight years. I am a Bible geek, as many of you will know, who loves to read theology books that others would find boring. And I still cannot wrap my head around this wonderful truth.

That God took on flesh. That God, the eternal one, the one who made all things, the all-powerful one, the almighty one, the gracious God, humbles himself, takes on flesh, and becomes a defenseless baby.

Think about that for a second. The Bible gives us some wonderful descriptions of God as the very definition of holiness. So holy that people can't approach him.

In Exodus, the goodness of God passes before Moses and he needs to be hidden because no one can look at God and live. In the Old Testament, we read that the whole of creation speaks to the glory of God, declaring his majesty to all generations.

We read stories of God, how out of great love and care delivered his people from slavery. How he rescued them from armies, all by miracles.

[8:22] We see descriptions of God who is so mighty that no enemy can stand in his way. We read of a love and a mercy that passes all understanding. We read a God who is jealous for his people.

And that is just a fraction of some of the descriptions that we find about God in the Old Testament. And Paul is saying in verses 15 and 19 of Colossians 1, that all those mind-blowing characteristics of God find themselves in this little baby in a manger.

Every description we read of God is found in Jesus, God in the flesh. I cannot wrap my head around that wonderful truth. But isn't it wonderful that we're not left guessing of what God is like?

Because all we need to do is look to Jesus and see our creator. God has revealed himself to this world in the person of his son, Jesus, God in the flesh. Jesus is the image of the invisible God.

And secondly, Paul goes on in verse 16 to say that all things were created through and for Jesus. Read verse 16 with me. For in him all things were created, things on heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities.

[9:44] All things have been created through him and for him. Now imagine looking up at the sky on a clear night and seeing too many stars to count.

Or looking at beautiful scenery across the world of cliffs, of mountains, of seas, of forests, of deserts. Wonderful, breathtaking scenery. And then also think of yesterday. Every single snowflake that fell across Edinburgh. Each with a different pattern. Imagine all of that scenery from the biggest mountain to the smallest snowflake.

And even our ability to see and comprehend these things is only possible because it was created through and for Jesus. This little baby is the creator of all things.

And verse 17 says he is the sustainer of all things. So the hand that reaches out of the crib to grab Mary's hand were the hands that flung the stars into space as we've been singing in a hymn already.

[10:50] That little baby is the one who keeps our world turning, who maintains our entire universe. And he knows all things. See, Jesus wasn't only involved in the creation of the world, but he is actively involved in every single passing moment of every single day.

That is the Jesus we come to worship. He didn't create the world and then walk away, but he holds the world together. All of history, every single life is actively being kept together by Jesus.

Now doesn't that completely change the way you view this baby in a manger? You cannot walk away thinking that there's nothing special about him.

He isn't like every other defenseless baby. He is the image of the invisible God. He is the creator and sustainer of all things. And thirdly, Paul says in verse 15 that he is the firstborn.

Firstborn of all creation in verse 15 and firstborn from the dead in verse 18. Now what does firstborn of overall creation mean? Well, it doesn't mean that Jesus was created.

[12:05] But Paul is saying that Jesus is the most important person in the world, that he is the son of God. It means that Jesus' existence didn't start back in Bethlehem 2,000 years ago when he was born.

He has always existed in perfect harmony and relationship with God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. And they together, God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, have made life as we know it possible.

Paul isn't talking about a timeline here. He isn't pointing back to a date and saying that's when Jesus was created. But he's using the language of firstborn to highlight Jesus' prominent rank as the most important one.

It's the Old Testament imagery of the firstborn son. The firstborn was the one who was in charge. He would receive a double inheritance. And Paul is saying that Jesus is the highest one, exalted above all creation because it's under his control.

The first readers as they got this letter would probably have thought back to Psalm 89 verse 27 where it says this, And I will appoint him to be my firstborn, the most exalted of the kings of the earth.

[13:23] Psalm 89 is full of messianic promises. Old Testament scriptures that point forward to the Messiah, the promised one, who would come and save the nation of Israel and save the world.

Paul says this is him. This is the Messiah you've been waiting for. This is Jesus. And then he continues in verse 18 and says that Jesus is the firstborn from the dead.

Meaning that he is the first to have been raised to life, never to die again. Jesus is the beginning of something completely new.

Something completely glorious. And it means that he is our forerunner. He is the one who has shown us the way. He is the one who has shown us what will happen to Christians after they die. We die in this life, but we are raised to life, never to die again. And to spend eternity in the perfect presence of God. And these probably aren't normally the things that we think about when we think about Jesus in a manger back in Bethlehem, are they?

[14:34] But these all point to his true identity. That he is God in the flesh. Emmanuel, God with us.

Why does that matter? Because as we go into Christmas, as we think about the busyness of the next few weeks, as we think of all the chaos that will unfold, we cannot forget that everything needs to revolve around Jesus.

And we cannot forget how marvelous and glorious he is. Our response to recognizing who Jesus is should be to worship him with everything we have.

To make him the center of our Christmas celebrations. To come before him in reverence. Awe and worship. Not begrudgingly or quickly saying a prayer so that we can get to unwrapping the gifts. We need to challenge ourselves. How much do we prepare our hearts in worship of Jesus at Christmas? We take the time to prepare Christmas meals.

[15:42] To prepare gifts. To wrap gifts. To make sure that we have a nice time spent with family. We prepare all of those things. But how much time do we spend reflecting on the sheer wonder and majesty of Jesus, God in the flesh?

We do so much at Christmas time to ensure that there's peace. But it's fleeting because at the end of Christmas we're back to where we started.

With our messy lives and the same difficulties as before. The thing that this passage should do is lift our eyes above the temporary things of this world.

The things that are fleeting. Here one second and gone the next. And that it should make us give Jesus the place he deserves in our lives. And I wonder if you've noticed as these verses were read out to us that all things is repeated five times.

Jesus is the most important person in the whole world. All things point to him. All things are his. All of creation is his.

[16:50] So as we go into Christmas, focus on Jesus. Focus on who he really is. Not the sanitized nativity story. Where Jesus is just a cute baby that we're happy to include as long as he doesn't disturb us too much.

Let us focus on who he really is. And so if that's who Jesus is, the next question we need to ask is, well what did he do? Why did he come?

Imagine you live in the most beautiful place you can ever think of. You have a wonderful home. People care for you. They look after you. They bring you everything you need.

You're respected. You're honored. And then you're given the option to move. But it means moving to a place where you'll be hated. Where everyone will only want rid of you.

Who of us would do that? Nobody. Nobody that I know would voluntarily move from a palace, a place of glory, to a shack in the woods.

[17:58] Nobody would choose to be destitute. But that is exactly what Jesus did. He had everything at the right hand of God in his place of glory, in perfect harmony relationship with God.

Yet he chose to step down into a world of mess. Into a world that would hate him and reject him. Why?

Well as verse 20 says, read it with me. He did it 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 highlights something that we all know to be true. There is something wrong with our world. Something is broken. So much war. So much hunger.

So much hatred. But it's closer to home as well, isn't it? It's the situations that we try to escape from as we create peace on that Christmas day. We know intrinsically that there is something wrong when we're going through marriage difficulties.

[19:05] In a world of family breakups, mental health struggles, disease and death, there is something wrong. We know there's a problem out there and there's a problem in us.

And so because of our terrible thoughts, how easy and natural it is for us to lie. How selfish we are as people. All of these things the Bible says are a result of sin.

At the beginning of the Bible, we're presented with the problem in Genesis. The problem of sin. The moment that Adam and Eve said, no God, we don't want you. We want to be like you. They rejected

God's rule and they rejected God.

And every single human being since has been marked by that same rebellion. That is the fatal diagnosis of every single human heart. And our temptation is to try and fix ourselves.

To work to be better, isn't it? We think that if we just maybe do more. If we work harder, we can work our way into God's good books.

[20:09] But the truth is that we will never be able to do enough, to be good enough, to be right with the creator of this world on our own. We will never work hard enough to reach God's perfect standards of perfection.

And the good news is that we don't have to. And he doesn't cast us off, but instead he steps down. God promised to send in Genesis 3, the one who would defeat sin.

The one who would right every wrong. The one who would make it possible for a broken humanity to be in a right relationship with God. How exactly can a baby in a manger do that?

As verse 20 says, he did it by making peace through his blood shed on the cross. This little baby Jesus went on to live the perfect life that we could never live.

Then he died the death that we all deserve, bearing the weight of sin and the wrath of God. And he rose triumphant, victorious from the grave.

[21:16] Defeating sin, conquering death. So that all those who call on him, all those who confess him as Lord, as Ellen read to us earlier on in the service, are at peace with God for eternity.

And so the peace that we enjoy is not just escapism for one day, but it is true.

It is lasting peace that lasts for an eternity. Now I read that and I think that is definitely something worth celebrating. But don't just take my word for it.

At the entrance of the church, we've got these little books called *Is Christmas Unbelievable?* In this little book, Rebecca McLaughlin goes through four questions about Christmas, and particularly the whole meaning of the life of Jesus.

Is it really relevant? Take a copy of this, please. There's another book out there as well. Take a copy free of charge and see for yourself how exactly this little baby in a manger changed the world forever.

[22:32] See what he has done so that you can be right with God. See the real meaning of Christmas. Now we cannot walk away from this morning indifferent to Jesus.

When you hear about Jesus, you are confronted with a choice. You either take him at his word and you put your trust in him or you reject him.

But by doing so, you're walking away from the peace that you were created to enjoy. By rejecting Jesus, you are looking at a future under the weight of the just wrath of God against sin by yourself. Because for God to be just, for God to be good, sin must be punished. And the good news of Christmas is that for everyone who puts their trust in Jesus, he took that punishment in our place. If you reject Jesus, that punishment for sin is yours to bear. Provision for peace and forgiveness has been made. Run to Jesus this Christmas.

[23:41] Friends, as we draw to a close, if we see Jesus for who he really is, if we truly understand who this baby in a manger is, then our focus won't be on the stuff underneath the tree on Christmas morning.

Instead, our focus will change to the gifts that we can bring him. Our adoration, our worship, our entire lives. As we look forward to time with friends and family in the coming days, let's remember that we gather to celebrate Jesus.

Not the baby in a manger, but Jesus God with us. The one who stepped into our world that we might be reconciled with God. And maybe as we go into Christmas, you're dreading it.

Because every year it is hard for you. I hope that as we focus on Jesus, on who he is, and what he has done, that we will be filled by the Holy Spirit with the peace of God.

And that we will have hope of the life he has secured for us on the cross. Wouldn't it be great if this year, instead of Christmas, being about escaping the chaos of life and pursuing superficial peace for one day, instead of that, we take a step back, recognize who Jesus is.

[25:00] Recognize the true and lasting peace that he's made possible between man and God through his death and resurrection and worship. And

as we'll sing in just a few moments, this is news that will, that does bring and will bring joy to the world.

Because the Lord has come and every heart should take time and prepare him room. Let me pray together. Let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, we thank you so much that we get to gather and celebrate Jesus. Father, we thank you for Christmas and all that Christmas means, that you sent your son into this world.

A world that had rejected you from the very beginning, you still decided out of grace and love to send your son so that we can be reconciled to you. So that we can be right before you.

So that we can come before you and worship you as you want us to. Father, we pray that you would help us worship you well this Christmas. Help us be a church family.

[26:16] That in every single conversation, in the way we act, in the way we talk, in the way we think that we are pointing people to Jesus. Jesus, the real reason for the season.

That Jesus came, took on flesh, lived the perfect life, died the death we deserve, and yet rose victorious from the grave, showing us how we will be with you one day.

We ask all of this in Jesus' name. Amen.