



“Is He Safe?”

Good morning, brothers and sisters. Today is our last sermon in this session of our series on Colossians; it has been a joy and an honor to share with you from the Word, and to hear all your questions and reflections. I hope these reflections continue long after this series is over – and I would love to hear them, if you’re willing to share. For our last sermon, we have some different things we want to do in and in response to the Word, so let’s dive right back into Colossians 1.

Last week, we looked at **verses 15-17**, and we discovered a poem hiding in plain sight. The Apostle Paul used this poem to remind the Colossian believers of three truths about Christ:

- (1) Christ is **divine** – He is the God of All Creation and keeps it going;
- (2) Christ has **primacy over Creation** – the power and authority to rule it; and
- (3) Christ’s **rule is total** – nothing escapes His control. We saw these truths about Christ, and we summarized them as Christ’s ultimate reality: Christ is more real than anything we think of as real.

But is this all there is to Christ? Is this everything Paul wanted the Colossian believers to know? Paul’s heart for them was that they would continue growing in faith, hope, and love – is knowing Christ’s ultimate reality all they needed to grow in faith, hope, and love? We already know the answer to these questions is a resounding No. No, this isn’t all there is to Christ; and if anyone wants to grow in faith, hope, and love, then, no, it isn’t enough to know that Christ’s reality is ultimate. Because knowing this tells us nothing about what kind of person He is. Knowing Christ is powerful does not tell us what He would do with that power.

Last Sunday, we compared Christ’s power over Creation to our power over a videogame: We have the technology to create entire worlds from our imaginations, filled with things to see and do and experience; we can enter these created worlds with characters we control, and we can build an entire life for them; and when we’re finished playing, we can reach out and press a button and cause these worlds to end; at any point,

we can turn it all off; but we would continue existing, because we are more real than a videogame, because we exist on a deeper level of reality; Christ exists on an even deeper level of reality – the deepest level of reality – and He has the same power to do with this world whatever He pleases. This should scare us; it should stop us dead in our tracks and grab ahold of our attention.

Imagine coming home from school or work – and as soon as you enter, you encounter a lion, a lion bigger than any you’ve ever seen at a zoo or in a documentary. You don’t know how it got there, but there it is, towering over you, eight hundred pounds of muscle, fangs, and claws, claws as long as steak knives. With one swipe of its paw, it could tear you to shreds. What would you do? Would you hang up your keys, take off your jacket, and head into the kitchen for a snack? Maybe defrost some chicken for dinner? Get started on your homework? Pull out your phone for a selfie?



Obviously not! Whatever plans you had for your afternoon, they’re gone. Whatever was on your list of things to do, that list is toast – you have to deal with this reality sitting in front of you, this reality that could end your reality in an instant. The only thing that would be on your mind is the question, “Is this lion safe? Am I safe from this lion?”

Fans of C.S. Lewis’ *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* will recognize this as the question on Lucy’s mind when she heard from Mr. Beaver about Aslan, the Great Lion of Narnia. She asked Mr. Beaver, “Is he safe?” And Mr. Beaver replied with the only sensible assessment of any lion: “Safe? ...



Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe." Christ's ultimate reality isn't safe, brothers and sisters. As the Creator of All Reality, Christ has the power to end ours in an instant, with a swipe of His paw, with a word of command. And this knowledge alone – if left alone – inspires more fear than faith, more despair than hope, more defensiveness than love.

Lucy's question was wrong, and if we bring the same question to Christ, we won't get the answer we need to hear either. Lucy asked if Aslan was safe; Mr. Beaver explained that safety had nothing to do with it – she needed to know Aslan's character: *"Who said anything about safe? 'Course he isn't safe. But he's good."* This is what we need to know about Christ, brothers and sisters: Is He good? What has He done, what is He doing, and what will He do with His power as the God of All Reality? Safety is irrelevant – is Christ good? This is what we need to know. Paul agreed. It turns out that **Colossians 1:15-17** was just the first stanza of a longer poem – the second stanza is in **verses 18-20**. The first stanza was about Christ's power; it's in the second stanza that Paul reminded his readers of what Christ has done, is doing, and will do with His power.

As I read to you both stanzas of this poem, pay attention to their similarities and their differences:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things were created through him and for him. And 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, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. (Col 1:15-20 ESV)

The Head of the Church

Paul began the second stanza of this poem with the declaration in verse 18a that "[Christ] *is the head of the body, the church.*" If the Church was a human body, Christ would be the head, the part of the body that rules and directs every other part of the body. This applies whether we are talking about the global Church – all the believers who ever lived – or about the local church – PBCC, for example. Just as Christ is the God of All Creation, so Christ is the Head of the Church. He is its Lord and Master, and He sustains the Church and keeps it going.

So what is Christ doing, in the present, with His power as the God of All Creation? He is ruling, guiding and sustaining His Church. People often say that Christianity is

always one generation away from extinction, that unless we evangelize and disciple the next generation of believers, Christianity will disappear. And there is some truth to this suggestion, because this is how we see Christianity continuing: Through, not apart from, our obedience to Christ's Great Commission.

It is also true that it is Christ, the Head of the Church, who sustains believers, just as He does all Creation. Christ keeps the Church going; Christ is the source of its life; it is Christ working in the Church, in each member of each local congregation, strengthening each believer to obey His commands, empowering each believer to reach out to others in love. It is not that we can sustain the Church by our own efforts and abilities – it is Christ who empowers us to build one another up, like the many parts of the human body working together to live and grow. Christ the Head rules and guides and sustains it all.

Christ, the Firstborn from the Dead

As the Head of the Church, Christ leads the Church into its destiny, as Paul declared in the rest of verse 18: “[Christ] is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent.” Christ is “the beginning” – this is a reference to Genesis 1:1, “In the beginning,” where God, who existed before Creation, brought Creation into existence. But here, the phrase applies not to the Old Creation of this Heavens and Earth but to the New Creation, the New Heavens and Earth that Christ will bring with Him when He returns. Christ is “the beginning” of this New Creation because He is “the firstborn from the dead” – literally, chronologically, the first person to be resurrected to the New Life to come.

Note that I said “resurrected” and not “revived,” for there’s a difference. Many people throughout human history have been revived from death, only to die again. But resurrection implies living on a new level of reality, a level of reality that is more real than this one. When Christ rose from the dead, He did not merely return to His pre-crucifixion body, to the limitations of that body; no, when Christ rose from the dead, He resurrected in glory, a glory that could bend this so-called reality, open locked doors, pass through solid walls, appear and vanish at will, radiate blinding glory, and ascend to the Right Hand of God the Father.

Christ is the “*firstborn from the dead*,” the first person to resurrect from the dead and to enjoy the resurrection life promised to all God’s people. In other words, He previews for us the glory we, too, will receive when we are raised from the dead and

enter the New Creation. Christ previews our resurrection with His own. And when this preview becomes reality, Christ will lead us into it.

So what will Christ do in the future with His power? He will share His resurrection glory with us. So we follow and trust Him. We give Him the primacy, the authority that He deserves in the Church as the One who is leading us into the New Heavens and Earth, the New Creation, the Eternal Kingdom of God.

Christ, the Reconciler of All Things

The final truth Paul reminded his readers of was the reconciliation Christ achieved between God and All Creation, including us, sinful humankind:

For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. (vv. 19-20)

The language here strongly resembles the language of verse 16, the middle of the first verse of Paul's poem, where Paul declared, *"For by [Christ] all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities – all things were created through him and for him."* In this stanza of the poem, Paul pointed to Christ's authority over all reality as its Creator and Sustainer – Creation belongs to Christ, every part of it. But, as we know from Scripture, and by experience, Creation is fallen. Creation is broken. Creation is filled with sickness and disease, with destruction and decay, with violence and instability, with threats and with danger, with Death in all its forms.

Creation is fallen because we, humankind, fell. Creation is fallen because we are fallen, because in our foolishness, in our pride, we decided we could be our own gods instead of depending on God. Though He gave us everything and would have given us more had we only asked, we broke off our relationship with Him. We fell into Sin and Death, and Creation fell along with us. But the good news is that we didn't fall out of Christ's reach. Though we fell as far as we could, Christ's reach went farther. Christ's love went deeper, His mercy stretched wider, until He wrapped Himself around the full measure of our Sin, wrapping our humanity around Himself, and died for us, in our place. He took the punishment that belonged to us. And He did this so that we could be reunited and reconciled with God.

For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things. (vv. 19-20a)

Christ's divinity, *"the fullness of God"* within Him, made Him the greatest offering God could give to pay for our sins; Christ's infinite worth as God the Son made His innocent death on the cross the perfect payment for our forgiveness, to make us acceptable to God – and not only acceptable, not only forgiven, but beloved, welcomed, and adopted into His family, to live in resurrection glory with God forever and ever and ever. And when we are reunited with God in glory, when we are brought into His reality, and given resurrection bodies that can experience Him in all His ultimate reality, all Creation will be restored as well. We broke it, we broke ourselves, but He redeemed it all with His blood. And because He did, God has reconciled, is reconciling, and will *"reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross."*

"But He's Good."

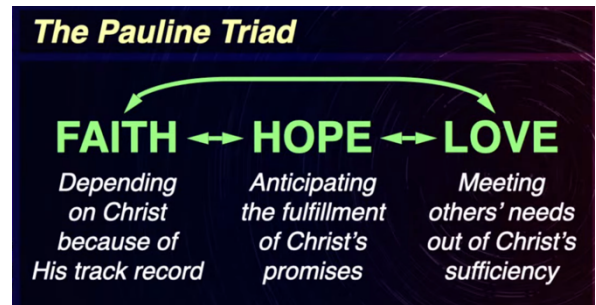
So we return to our original question about Christ: We know He is powerful, but what has He done with His power? How has He used His authority? How is He using it, and how will He use it? What kind of Lion is He?

He may not be safe – "but," to quote Mr. Beaver once again, "He's good." Christ is good, brothers and sisters. Christ is as good as His reality is ultimate; Christ is as good as His glory is infinite; Christ is as good to us as our sins are deep; as far as our brokenness goes, Christ's goodness goes even farther, reaches even deeper, soars even higher, stretches wider and wider until it wraps all of us in a love that will last forever, in a love that will change the world and remake it as it always should have been. What has Christ done with His glory? He used it for us. He poured it out for us. He released it for us, traded it for human flesh for us, surrendered it on the cross for us, revealed it in the empty tomb for us – and He will share it with us when He returns and resurrects us, to live with Him forever in His ultimate reality. And in the meantime, He uses His glory to sustain us and to lead us as the Head of our body.

In view of His goodness and mercies, who would not put their faith in Christ? Considering Christ's power as the God of All Creation and His commitment to the Church, who would not depend on Him to meet their needs? And who would not put their hope in Him? Considering Christ's power over all reality, including death, who

would not entrust their future to Him? Who would not put their hope in His power to raise us from the dead as well? And who would not love as He did? Considering all that Christ has done for us and will do for us, who would not be filled with love for others in the present? Who would not be freed from the anxieties of this life to pour themselves out in meeting the needs of others?

When we remember the glory of Christ, and when we remember how He used His glory, we are moved to faith, hope, and love. Our faith grows as we depend on Christ's power and provision; our hope grows as we look forward to Christ's promises; and our love grows as we are



freed to give to others as Christ gave, gives, and will give to us. When we remember the glory and the goodness of Christ, it erodes our unbelief, and His impact becomes deeper and wider and longer as we grow in faith, hope, and love.

Songs for the Sojourn

But "remembering" and "considering" can be difficult for us. In our brokenness, as imperfect people, we are so forgetful, and even when we do remember, we don't always reflect very deeply. I'll be the first to admit this of myself: It's hard to remember and think deeply about Christ's goodness and glory and to allow them to have their impact on my heart. But God knows how hard it is for us, and how short our memories are and how difficult they are to sustain. So in His grace, God has given us a powerful tool to help us remember the glory and the goodness of Christ: **Music**.

If you haven't already guessed it by now, the verses we've been studying were almost assuredly more than just a poem. These verses, with their balance, with their structure, with the way they develop ideas and build line upon line and stanza upon stanza – this was a song, brothers and sisters. A hymn set to music. Sung by believers. This was a song believers could tuck away in their minds and sing to themselves throughout the day and carry with them into their jobs and schools and routines. And as they sang and hummed this song to themselves, it turned their eyes to the glory and goodness of Christ; it softened their hearts to His impact; it deepened their faith, hope, and love.

This is the power of music: It creates space for the Spirit to remind us of the glory and goodness of Christ. With meter and time, with rhythm and melody, music stretches our thoughts, redirects our reflections, and forces us to face the truths we so often dismiss as stuff we already know. Music helps lower our defenses; music reunites our heads with our hearts; music gives us the gift of time spent being formed in the truth. This is why Paul gave the Colossian believers a song when they needed to grow in faith, hope, and love, a song full of truths about Christ. Spiritual songs take God's truth from the head to the heart, transforming our souls.

I'm sure there were other songs they sang to help them remember other truths as well. And not only to help them remember truths, but also to help articulate their feelings and release their burdens to Him. The fact is that the people of God have always used music to express a variety of truths and a range of feelings, to help them process all sorts of experiences – just look at the Book of Psalms. There isn't an emotion we feel as humans that isn't represented in its pages.

Now, all this being said, there are also other means of grace, tools God has given us that the Spirit uses to help us see and know and follow Christ. Music shouldn't become the only focal point in the life of the believer. But it also shouldn't be relegated to those rituals we perform to get us ready for "the real stuff," the seemingly more important parts of the service; our times of singing as a congregation should never be reduced to warm-up for the sermon. On the contrary, once we leave the service, a good song can become a miniature sermon we carry with us wherever we go, a tool we always have at the ready to form us in deeper faith, hope, and love.

The song in **Colossians 1:15-20** is one such good song. Of course, we no longer know the melody to this song. But we do have other songs filled with similar truths that can be useful in helping us remember the glory and the goodness of Christ. While they aren't Scripture themselves, they help us remember God's sublime attributes.

But they're only as effective as they are used, brothers and sisters. So I'd like for us to spend the rest of our time together in music. We've used instrumentals to help us meditate and pray over the truths we've heard; I think we're ready now to sing of the glory and goodness of Christ. And as Paul shared a song with the Colossians, I would like to humbly offer you some songs that help me remember Christ's glory and goodness. If you know them, feel free to join with me in singing; if you don't, they're pretty easy to

learn. I'm not the best singer, but we don't have to be to sing to God. The first one goes like this...

Hail to the King (Vineyard)

Verse 1

You came to us a man in very nature God
Pierced for our iniquities as You hung upon the cross
But God exalted You to the highest place
And gave to You the right to bear the name above all names

Pre-Chorus

At the name of Jesus we should bow and every tongue confess that You are Lord
And when You come in glory for the world to see, we will sing

Chorus

Hail to the King in all His splendor and majesty
Hail to the King of kings, Lord Jesus our God

Verse 2

We eagerly await the coming of the day
When the glory of the Risen King will shine upon the earth
Then rival thrones will fall before the Lord of all
And hail supreme authority in the true and living God

What A Beautiful Name (Bethel)

Verse 1

You were the Word at the beginning
One with God the Lord Most High
Your hidden glory in creation
Now revealed in You our Christ

Chorus 1

What a beautiful name it is, what a beautiful name it is
The Name of Jesus Christ my King
What a beautiful name it is, nothing compares to this
What a beautiful name it is, the name of Jesus

Verse 2

You didn't want heaven without us
So Jesus You brought heaven down
My sin was great, Your love was greater
What could separate us now?

Chorus 2

What a wonderful name it is, what a wonderful name it is
The Name of Jesus Christ my King
What a wonderful name it is, nothing compares to this
What a wonderful name it is, the name of Jesus

Bridge

Death could not hold You, the veil tore before You
You silence the boast of sin and grave
The heavens are roaring the praise of Your glory
For You are raised to life again
You have no rival, You have no equal
Now and forever God You reign
Yours is the Kingdom, Yours is the glory
Yours is the Name above all names

Chorus 3

What a powerful name it is, what a powerful name it is
The Name of Jesus Christ my King
What a powerful name it is, nothing compares to this
What a powerful name it is, the name of Jesus

Build My Life (Housefires)

Bridge

And I will build my life upon Your love, it is a firm foundation
And I will put my trust in Your alone, and I will not be shaken

Brothers and sisters, we come now to the Table of the Lord. This is the climax of our worship, the sacrament we use to bring together our whole selves to God in Christ. When we eat of the bread and drink of the cup, we are declaring with our actions and our bodies that we belong to Christ, that we depend on Him, hope in Him, and seek to love like Him. We receive His forgiveness and grace the way we receive food and drink; we've sung songs about these things – let's now take of these things together.

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