

Over recent weeks we have as a church been trying to help those outside our church to DISCOVER faith in Jesus Christ. However, sometimes we who are followers of Jesus can be a bit hazy as to what we believe about Jesus. So this morning as we come to the second in our series 'This we believe' we look at some of what we believe about Jesus and we will use this passage from Col 1:15-23.

Colossae is in modern day Turkey. It was a church that had its roots in the gospel as all churches do but it was Epaphras not Paul who had brought the gospel to them. As we read the letter as see Paul's emphasis here on Jesus we ask what was the problem? Why did Paul write this to them? I think the answer is that while these Christians had come to faith through the gospel some teachers had come into the church suggesting that if they were to be fully spiritual and fully saved they need to add some religious practices. If you just look across at 2:16 we get a hint of this, "Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day".

What Paul had to say to them and down the centuries to us about Jesus is that he is supreme and he is sufficient for all our spiritual needs and especially for our salvation.

So what does Paul say here about Jesus

1. Jesus is fully God v15 &19

"He is the image of the invisible God". The word image is the word ikon. The danger for us with such words is that we get the impression that the image or the ikon is not the real thing. A photograph is an image of someone or something and not the thing itself. But Paul is not saying that. For him ikon meant manifestation or representation. So what he was saying is that the immortal invisible God only wise has made himself mortal and visible in Jesus. In case the Colossians didn't get the drift Paul spells out exactly what that meant v19, "For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him". When we talk of Jesus as the Son of God or we talk of Jesus and God we can somehow think of Jesus as less God than the Father. But here Paul leaves these Christians and us in no doubt that Jesus is God, not a pale or inferior replica of God he is God in all his fullness yet God made visible through being born as a man.

Jesus is God in human form and as such is the clearest revelation of God.

We don't have to try and guess what God is like because in Jesus he has come and shown us.

We are familiar with Rolf Harris and his art and those words "can you tell what it is yet?"

As we look at the Bible we see that kind of progressive revelation or building up a picture as God reveals more and more about himself until finally he reveals all in his Son Jesus, "In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he

made the universe. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being" (Heb 1:1-3)

When one of his disciples asked Jesus to show them God, Jesus reply was "he who has seen me has seen the Father (that is God)" (John 14:9).

This is vital for them and for us. Why is it that we spend time and effort trying to help people come to Jesus – because he is God and because through him uniquely we can know God.

We live in a world with a plethora of religions. Many people today believe that all religions lead to the truth. But that simply doesn't stand inspection. Just a cursory glance will show that at various key points the religions of the world contradict each other. Hinduism is based on the existence of a multitude of gods – polytheism; but Guru Nanak, the founder of Sikhism rejected Hindu polytheism saying there was just one Deity. Gautama the Buddha on the other hand rejected Hinduism by denying there was any God at all.

As one preacher put it "Now if there are lots of gods, there can't be just one. If there's just one, there can't be many, and if there are no Gods, there's neither one nor many."

While we should acknowledge that world religions must respect each other as humans and respect the freedom of expression, there is no point pretending that theologically they're all saying the same thing.

When we or our contact people are thinking how can I know God the answer is Jesus for in him is God fully revealed.

He is the full revelation of God but they and we need to recognise that he is fully God and therefore he is sufficient for all our needs both physical and spiritual.

Let me ask how do you speak when you are on the phone and especially when you are on a mobile phone? I can't quite get those people who seem to need to shout when they are on a mobile. I was wandering through town the other day and heard from some distance away a man shouting into his phone "can I speak to your supervisor". That's it go to the top and that is Paul's message here. Again looking across at 2;18 where he mentions "worship of angels" Paul is saying that this is dealing with the lesser while Jesus is the greater, the supreme one who is God.

Jesus is fully God and therefore supreme and sufficient.

2. Jesus is supreme over creation vs 15-17

Jesus is "the firstborn over all creation" (v15). Paul is not saying here that Jesus is the first created person or thing. The word "firstborn" can refer either to priority in time or in rank. Perhaps both meanings are to be understood here. Christ is before all creation and supreme over it. He is its Lord. All things were created by him and he sustains or holds together all things. As we saw last week, creation is one of the great things that makes God God. Here we see Jesus' involvement in creation

and through it his true nature as God. Just picture what Paul is saying here. In the beginning was God Father, Son and Holy Spirit. In the Son at the will of the Father and by the power of the Spirit all things were created and find their unity and purpose.

He is supreme over all creation. He has authority as we see here over the whole of creation, over thrones and powers that is over rulers on earth and rulers and authorities that is over spiritual powers. He is supreme as Paul says in v16 over all things "in heaven and earth, visible and invisible" As we look at the account of his life we see something of his authority being shown.

In the physical realm we see many occasions where people came to him with different ailments and he healed them. Then we see him calming a great storm and we see him raising the dead.

By in the spiritual the unseen realm we see him casting out demons and we see him forgiving sinful people.

In each of these situations he did it by his word. In the same way that creation came about by the word of God so God the Son showed his authority over every aspect of creation by his word.

He still is supreme over the whole of creation, over Kings and rulers and over each one of us.

I'm sure you are aware of the significance of 2nd June 2013. It is 60 years since the coronation of Queen Elizabeth the second. During that coronation the Archbishop of Canterbury gave her an orb under a cross with these words, "Receive this Orb, set under the Cross, and remember that the whole world is subject to the Power and Empire of Christ our Redeemer".

But it is not just over kings and princes and spiritual authorities that he is supreme as God but over you and I as well.

You see if Christ's is the one who sustains the whole universe from its remote beginnings to its final goal is it reasonable to doubt his power to sustain the individual believer from conversion to glory? The answer of course is no but that was what it would seem some in Colossae were doing. Jesus is Lord and as he sustains creation so he can keep you until that day when by his grace and mercy you enter heaven. He is sufficient and so day by day we can come to him with the things that concern us, our health, our family, the issues of today, our fears of tomorrow. You may be familiar with the song for the joys and for the sorrows which has the verse,

For the weakness of my body

The burdens of each day

For the nights of doubt and worry

When sleep has fled away

Needing reassurance

And the will to start again

A steely-eyed endurance

The strength to fight and win

And then the refrain “for this I have Jesus”. He is sufficient because he is God and he is supreme over creation.

So just now in the moments while I am speaking think of the things that are on your heart, the concerns and hopes, the joys and trials and bring them to Jesus, thank him that he is sufficient and ask him for help where you need it.

3. Jesus is Lord of the church v18

Christ is head of the body the church. He is the head of the church because he is God. He is head of the church because v20 he has reconciled us to the Father through his own death upon the cross. He is head of the church because v18 he is the beginning and firstborn from the dead. That means as the one who rose again he, having defeated the powers of death, has opened the way to resurrection for all who follow him. He is the beginning for many have and will follow him. He is the firstborn because he was first to rise and rose uniquely because as God death had no power over him. So he is the head of his body the church. And when we say he is the head of the church two words come to mind, Lord and life. As head of the church he is our Lord, our master. He has authority over us. So as Jesus said in John 14.15 “If you love me you will obey my commandments”. The church bows in obedience to Jesus as Lord. But also he as head is our life. The church depends upon Christ through the spirit for its life and being. If a body doesn't hold fast to its head it can't hope to survive. I have to admit headless chickens can sometimes be a very apt description of the church. The church is dependent upon Christ for its continued existence. Cut off from him our head we have no meaning and no purpose. But in fact that was what the Colossians were doing. The false teachers who had come into the churches were in effect claiming that they would complete and perfect the simple and elementary faith to which the Colossian Christians had been introduced. In other words they were saying it is alright to start with Jesus but we will lead you into deeper spiritual truths. Paul's response is to point to the sufficiency of Christ the life of faith begins with Christ, it is centred on Christ and it continues in Christ.

Again for us as a church this is why prayer is so important. It is in prayer be it on our own, at the central prayer meeting, before Council meetings that we recognise Jesus as head, we recognise our need of his direction and guidance of his power to work out his purposes and will in and through us. As someone one put it in the title of a book, ‘Prayer is the Christians vital breath’. Let me encourage you if you have never been to the monthly prayer meeting to come and give it a try as we come together as the body of Christ under our head.

4. Jesus is the sufficient saviour v2-23

Here Paul spells out that Jesus is head of the church not just because he is God but because he died for the church. But he also points out that his death is sufficient. V23 through his death we if we accept what he has done are made “holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation”. The death of Jesus is effective.

Here is what we believe about Jesus he is the sufficient saviour and let me just quickly make three points about this.

a. we are saved by grace alone. If we look at v19-20 we see that Jesus is fully God and through his death on the cross the Father has made peace between himself and humanity. This is what God has done not us – God reconciled us to himself. We cannot stress this enough that we are saved not by anything we have done but by God’s great grace. All we have to do is receive what God has done.

b. there is no other Saviour. Jesus is fully God and died for our salvation. If there was any other way for us to be saved would God have died for us? The words of Acts 4;12 ring out very clear, “Salvation is found in no-one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.” This is why we point people to Jesus because we can be saved through him and only through him.

c. we must make the gospel message clear. In Colossae as we have seen there was confusion about salvation because the teachers were adding things to how people were saved. We must avoid that. We must hold out the very clear gospel for people so that they can see that Jesus is the sufficient saviour. When we do Christianity Explained in a few weeks time I will look with people at who Jesus is, why he died, at his resurrection, how we are saved, what faith and repentance mean. This is the gospel and if you have someone you know who would value chatting over these things then encourage them to come along.

So what do we believe about Jesus?

He is fully God. He is supreme over creation. He is Lord of the church and he is the sufficient Saviour.