

Pentecost 6, Sunday July 21 2019

'BE: Christ Focussed'

The Reverend David Browne

Colossians 1:15–29

Intro

Well the whole world has gone mad. This week thousands of people downloaded a phone app that has a filter that makes people look older and younger. Here are some of my favourites. Filters are amazing things because they bring certain things into focus. One of the most crucial filters for how we see the world are our beliefs. As we come to the second part of our Colossians series we'll see that what we believe about Jesus, filters and focusses our lives on different things. And if you look around the world you'll find that lots of people believe lots of things about Jesus. Muslims believe Jesus was a prophet of Allah whose body was switched at the cross. Mormons believe Jesus is the archangel Michael who travelled to America after his resurrection. Hindus believe Jesus was a holy man who took Hindu spirituality to Israel. Many atheists and agnostics believe Jesus was a man who people made into a god over time.

A couple of years ago a study crunched the numbers to determine the most influential figures in history. Elvis Presley came in at number 69, Queen Victoria came in at 16, the Prophet Muhammad came in at number 3 and number one by a big margin was Jesus of Nazareth. The question 'who is Jesus?' still captivates us and it's the question our Bible readings focus on today.

In our passage the apostle Paul gives us a picture of Jesus, then a picture of us, and he invites us to focus our lives on Jesus, to Be: Christ-Focussed.

A picture of Jesus

–Jesus is creator

Let's look at Colossians 1:15 where Paul writes:

"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation"

This is a stunning poem or song about Jesus. The *He* refers to

Jesus the 'beloved son' from v.13 who Paul now tells us is the image of God and firstborn over all creation. Now firstborn here has nothing to do with birth, it's a title, the firstborn son in Paul's day had all the rights of their Father and was their representative and heir. While many people in Colossae and even in our world today believe Jesus is a created being, Paul says no, Jesus created all things v.16:

"For by him (Jesus) all things were created"

If you heard last week's sermon you'll remember that the Colossian Church was under attack from two directions, **the grumps were religious folk who wanted the Colossians to follow their religious rules, and the humps wanted Christians to buy their snake-oil wisdom.** Both the grumps and the humps believed Jesus was part of creation, not the Creator. But here Paul writes v. 17:

"Jesus is before all things"

From the beginning the people of God had shared the radical idea that their God was not part of creation, but created all things. Who created God? Well nobody because God is before all things. **Here Paul is saying Jesus is Creator. He made us and we belong to him.**

-Jesus is sustainer

Next Paul tells us that Jesus is the sustainer of all things. Read with me from the second half of v.17:

"and in him all things hold together. And his 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"

For Paul, Jesus didn't just create everything, he is the one who keeps everything together. Jesus gives us the breath in our lungs and sets the beat in our hearts. Our planet may revolve around the sun but the whole universe revolves around Jesus.

Jesus is also the head of the church. The head is the command centre, the guide for the body and Paul is saying Jesus is the king, the boss, the top priority of the church. Then as now the church was being tempted to downplay Jesus, to see him simply as a good teacher, but friends Jesus is the head of this church, he's our great high priest, he's the reason our church and every church exists. To downplay Jesus or move on from him is to chop off the head of the church.

Jesus is the creator and the sustainer of everything and these two ideas point to Paul's conclusion: Jesus is God!

-Jesus is God in the flesh

Now for a monotheistic Jew to say: Jesus, a person like us, is God, is mind blowing. The humps of this world operating from a Greek mindset saw this as foolishness. Bodies and physical things were part of the evil perishing world and to say that God became a man was disgusting. For the grumps to say that Jesus is equal with God was blasphemy, which is why Paul spent most of his time in jail or on the run! But he writes in v.19:

"God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, making peace through his blood, shed on the cross"

Paul sees Jesus' death on our behalf as the most important event of all time. This was such an offensive idea that Paul used to kill Christians for sharing it until one day (on his way to capture Christians) he was struck down with blindness. Jesus changed Paul's filter and revealed to him that he is the God Paul longed for.

Now Paul encourages us to focus our lives on Jesus because Jesus alone is worthy of such attention. God alone is worthy of our worship. God alone is worthy of our ultimate focus because he is our creator and sustainer, and Jesus is God in the flesh. ***There is no higher position we can give Jesus but Paul is telling us that this is precisely the position Jesus deserves!***

A Picture of us

Now that Paul has painted a picture of who Jesus truly is he tells us who we are. He compares the old us with the new us in Christ.

V21:

“Once you were alienated from God... but now he has reconciled you by Christ’s physical body to present you holy in his sight”

This brings home for us what Jesus, God in the flesh, has done for us. Once we were alienated from God, but God has made a way back. There are so many things in our lives that distract and take our focus away from God but Paul says that the only way back to God is through Jesus, God in the flesh. He paints a picture of the distance between us and God no matter whether we’re atheists, Buddhists, Muslims, or Callithumpians, Paul tells us the gospel, the good news that the way back to God is through Jesus. He reminds us that no matter what anyone says about us v.23:

“if you continue in your faith, established and firm” then you are Saints, God’s holy people forevermore.

Like a wristwatch is made for telling us the time, and pork spare ribs were made for enjoying every night, you and I are made for God. There are so many competing ideas about the purpose of life but the Bible tells us we are made for relationship with God.

The African bishop Augustine of Hippo said it like this:

“You have made us for yourself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you.”

In his picture of us, Paul paints God at the centre and invites us to BE: Christ Focussed. We can run from God or pretend that God doesn’t matter but until we make Jesus our focus our lives will be pictures of sadness, estrangement, and longing. ***In Jesus, we find everything we need; wholeness and purpose in the God who made us.***

I once shared a session about Christianity with recovering addicts. I told them about the hope, the peace, and the joy I find in Jesus. During question time one of them asked me if I could find these elsewhere. They obviously wanted all those things but they didn't want Jesus. I had to respond that I didn't know anywhere else you could find these things apart from Jesus. ***“Oh precious is the flow, that makes me white as snow, no other fount I know, nothing but the blood of Jesus”.***

BE: Christ Focussed

This is the good news Paul loves to share with every creature under heaven **and he calls himself a servant of this message**. He works tirelessly to serve the Lord. A grump would say he should do this to earn God's love, and a hump would say he should do this to gain hidden wisdom. Paul says he does this because he's: Christ-Focussed. V:24:

“Now I rejoice in what was suffered for you, and I fill up in my flesh what is still lacking”

Paul rejoices in everything he has suffered to tell others about Jesus. He's writing to the Colossians from jail but his focus on Christ means this doesn't bother him. He wants us to be so in love with Jesus and so thankful for everything he's done that we'll stop at nothing to share this truth.

He describes this good news as a mystery. Unfortunately, when we think of mystery, **we think of Sherlock Holmes and something we need to uncover**. Instead the word used here describes something that was covered, but has now be made known. Paul's saying that **if you want to find the meaning of life, focus on Jesus**. The meaning of life isn't found in a good job, perfect kids, amazing abs, a wonderful retirement, fame, fortune, or even your personal happiness. Jesus is the source of life, Jesus is the redeemer of life, and Jesus is the meaning of life.

And it's here that Paul shows us what our lives, indeed the lives of our church, look like when we are Christ focused. He says that his goal is to use all his energy to help others know Jesus v.28:

"We proclaim him, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we present everyone mature in Christ. To this end I labour, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me."

Here we're encouraged to proclaim and to keep teaching each other about Jesus. This is why we're doing a kids' program every week so we can present everyone mature in Christ. This is why our Bible studies kicked off this week, this is why we have KYB, Cameo, and Faith Walkers. It's why we do RI and serve in the Crisis Centre. We do this to increase our faith and help others know and understand Jesus more.

One day we will see Jesus face to face. Till that day Colossians gives us a picture of Jesus, a picture of our lives outside Christ and in Christ, and encourages us to BE: Christ Focused. There are so many things vying for our focus, but the Bible tells us to *'turn your eyes upon Jesus, look full in his wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace!'*