Congregation of the Lord Jesus Christ,

Hands up who has received a visit from some JWs? During the week I looked at their official website and they have a page called “Do JW’s Believe in Jesus?” Here is their answer. I quote: “Yes. We believe in Jesus, who said: “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.” ([John 14:6](https://www.jw.org/en/publications/bible/study-bible/books/john/14/#v43014006)) We have faith that Jesus came to earth from heaven and gave his perfect human life as a ransom sacrifice. ([Matthew 20:28](https://www.jw.org/en/publications/bible/study-bible/books/matthew/20/#v40020028)) His death and resurrection make it possible for those exercising faith in him to gain everlasting life. ([John 3:16](https://www.jw.org/en/publications/bible/study-bible/books/john/3/#v43003016)) We also believe that Jesus is now ruling as King of God’s heavenly Kingdom, which will soon bring peace to the entire earth. ([Revelation 11:15](https://www.jw.org/en/publications/bible/study-bible/books/revelation/11/#v66011015)).” Sounds pretty good, doesn’t it. The answer even includes *four* Bible references!

But the quote continues: “We do not worship Jesus, as we do not believe that he is Almighty God.” And if you have talked with JWs you will know that this is where they and we differ – they deny the deity or eternal god-ness of Jesus. They believe that Jesus is A son of God, in the same way that angels and humans can be called sons of God, but not that He is THE Son of God. They believe that the Father created Jesus as His first act of creation and that he existed as an angel or a spirit before he was born to Mary as a human. But He is not God.

So the question is: Does this matter? Is it really necessary to believe that Jesus is eternal and Almighty God? And the answer is: Yes! It matters because in **John 20:31** we read: “*but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name,*” and in**1 John 2:22-23**, “*Who is the liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? This is the antichrist, he who denies the Father and the Son. No one who denies the Son has the Father. Whoever confesses the Son has the Father also.* So if you do not believe that Jesus is almighty and eternal God, then you are anti-christ; you are in unbelief; you do not have eternal life.

Well, one of the verses that JWs refer to to back up their belief that Jesus is not Almighty God is v15 of our text. So we want to see that they are wrong in how they interpret this verse. But it would be a tragedy if all we did with this text was to see that the JWs have it wrong! And that is because this passage has to be one of the great passages of the NT! In vv13-14, Paul speaks about the Father “*delivering us from the domain of darkness into the kingdom of His beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of our sins*.” And you will see that He returns to our salvation at v21. But in between He bursts out with what most Bible scholars believe is one of the very first Christian hymns. It is magnificent poetry!

* Stanza 1 begins with v15 and “*He is*…” and stanza 2 begins with v18 and “*He is*…”
* And v15’s “*the firstborn of all creation*” corresponds with v18’s the “*firstborn from the dead.*”
* And the phrase “*for in Him*…” in v16 matches the same phrase in v19.
* And the reference to “*all things … in heaven and on earth*” is found in v16 and v20.

So it is a majestic hymn in honour of Jesus Christ! But it’s not just that Paul had an urge to write a hymn. As we shall see, Paul had a very specific purpose in what he wrote here. And it’s our privilege to be immersed in this glorious hymn for a few minutes this afternoon.

So in these verses, **Paul Sings about the Preeminence of Jesus Christ**. And pre-eminence means superior, most glorious, premiere, first, supreme, highest, best, most excellent… I am sure you have been in debates about the greatest athlete or musician or band or author or designer, etc. Well, your pick is who you think is preeminent!

And Paul sings about the preeminence of Jesus Christ in this hymn with two stanzas, which are **the God of Creation** and **the God of Salvation**.

1. So the first stanza of the hymn describes Jesus Christ as **The God of creation** (vv15-17).
   1. Who remembers our **first Bible study principle this morning**? Context is king! Well, a read through Colossians reveals that there was a problem there that Paul was addressing.And the problem was false teachers who were very focused on rules about eating and drinking and diets and exercise, on the need to observe Jewish festivals and ceremonies, on all sorts of elaborate theories about angels and spirits, and on the importance of visions.
      1. One minister who talked about the Colossian problem illustrated it by imagining a Christian bookstore of that time. It would have been called something like Spirit of Life books. As you walk in, you see sections of books about angels, visions, diet, exercise, food and drink, angel CDs and DVDs, angel sculptures, angel tee-shirts, equipment and clothes and food for celebrating the feasts, and rows of books about how to observe the feasts properly. But if you asked for a book about Jesus, you might have been lucky to find one or two on a dusty shelf down the bottom. And just as an aside, I have to say that, sadly, especially if we add the topics of miracles and healing and the Holy Spirit, this description of a Christian bookshop is not too different from your average Christian bookshop today. So the problem in Colossae was that Jesus had been relegated to personal Saviour status. He got you saved at the beginning, but that was about it. *That’s* the problem that Paul was addressing.
      2. So having mentioned the “*kingdom of His beloved Son*,” in v13, Paul wrote this hymn to help the Colossians, *and us*, see that Jesus is so much more than just a personal Saviour; He is in fact the Lord of creation, the King of the Universe, the God who reigns supreme over all! Let’s see how He does this!
   2. He begins stanza 1 by singing about Jesus as the “**Image of the invisible God**.”
      1. The Greek word translated as “image” is *eikon*. It means duplicate copy, exact reproduction. Think of a photocopier. You get an exact replica image. So the point here is that whatever the Father is Jesus is.
         1. We saw this also in **Hebrews 1:3**. “He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature.”
         2. And we have heard Jesus talking about this recently in John 14. He said to one of His disciples, “*Whoever has seen me has seen the Father*.” And He could say that because what the Father is, He is.
      2. So let me ask you this question: Is the Father eternal? Is He without beginning? Yes. So if Jesus began at some point in time, would He be an exact copy of the Father? No. But we are told here that “*He* *is the image of the invisible God*.”
      3. We read about this earlier in **John 1:1**: “*In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God*.” JWs insert the word ‘a.’ That is absolutely wrong! (Look up my John 1:1 sermon). The whole point of John’s Gospel, as we have been seeing, is to demonstrate the eternal god-ness of Jesus!
      4. So Jesus shares deity or eternal god-ness with the Father. He is without beginning. There was never a time that He did not exist. Even before He was born to Mary, He existed in heaven as the second person of the Trinity.
   3. But what about this next phrase: “***the firstborn of all creation***”?
      1. Boys and girls, do you know the Passover story? Who did the angel of the Lord kill in every Egyptian household? The firstborn. It is the same word. It is the word that the Bible always uses to describe the first child or animal born to its parents.
      2. And **Jesus did become a part of this creation** when He took to Himself a human nature and was born of Mary. But He is also the only begotten Son of God. That does not mean that at some point the Father ‘gave birth’ to Jesus. We have already seen that Jesus is without beginning. But the Bible reveals that Jesus is eternal and that he is the only begotten Son of God. So He is the eternally begotten Son of God. And this is wonderful mystery! But His having become a part of creation when on earth and His being the eternally begotten Son of God make Him deserving of the title – firstborn of creation.
      3. The illustration almost doesn’t work anymore, because nowadays everyone gets a medal or a certificate in a race or a contest, but way back in the olden days, first meant special. And that is Paul’s emphasis here – Jesus is pre-eminent, first, special, unique, superior, premiere, supreme, most excellent…
      4. Now, the JWs say that this verse proves that Jesus was created by the Father, that He was the first thing that the Father ‘gave birth to’ in creation. And it won’t surprise you to learn that they add a word into v16 as well. They have the verse as: “By him all *othe*r things were created,” as in God created him and he created the other things.
      5. But we have already seen that Jesus is the image of the invisible, eternal, uncreated God.
         1. John 1 make this point also– “*In the beginning was the Word.*”John’s whole point there is to demonstrate Jesus’ equality with the Father and that both were there when the work of creation began.
         2. And Paul’s whole point here in Colossians is to magnify the majesty of Jesus as God by recognizing Him as the Creator of all things! That is why v16 says, “*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*.” Jesus Christ is the God of creation!
   4. So, do you see why this matters? Do you see what Paul was saying to the Colossians and what He is saying, by the Spirit, to us? The one who came to be your Saviour is also the Creator of the Universe!!!! And “*He is before all things and in Him all things hold* *together*.”
      1. You belong to Jesus! You exist for Jesus, all day every day! **1 Corinthians 10:31** says, “*So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God*.” Well, Jesus Christ is God. You must glorify Him in everything you do! Boys and girls, your school work is about serving Jesus Christ. Brother and Sisters, every email you send and every shirt you iron is about serving Jesus Christ. Every letter to the editor or an MP about some political issue is about serving Jesus Christ.
      2. And it matters also for evangelism. You see, this world has the idea that we Christians can have our private faith so long as it makes us feel good and we keep it to ourselves. But Jesus Christ is the Creator and King of the Universe! We do not need to be fearful about sharing the gospel and declaring the Word of God. Jesus is the God of creation!
         1. I am not sure I recommend this approach, but I once heard about a street evangelist who would approach people and say, Do you realize that every breath you take is a gift from Jesus? Do you thank Him for it and praise Him as the Lord of lords? And if they said, No, He would rebuke them for being ungrateful to King Jesus. At least this person understood Colossians 1:15-17! Jesus Christ is the God of creation!
2. But this is, as we have noted a two stanza hymn. And in the second stanza, Paul sings about Jesus Christ as **the God of salvation** – vv18-20.
   1. As we have seen, the Colossians had this idea that Jesus’ work on the cross had secured the forgiveness of their sins, but that is about all. What they needed to understand though is that Jesus is at the beginning, the middle, and the end of every aspect of salvation. And Paul speak to this by saying, “***He is the head of the body, the church****.*”
      1. Boys and girls, let me ask you a question: Is your head important? I know it sounds a bit gory, but if your head fell off, would that be a problem, do you think? It would, wouldn’t it. Your head supplies you with so much that enables your body to function properly.
      2. Well, the Bible describes the church as the body and Jesus as the head. And we need our head! Jesus supplies us with what we need to function properly. And He does this through the preaching of the word, and through the elders and deacons that He gives to a congregation, and through every member of a congregation, because they are all prophets, priests, and kings. This is why active participation in a local congregation is so important; it is how the head supplies the body; it is how Jesus Christ blesses the church.
      3. But there can be times when life in the congregation is very difficult. Sometimes elders have to make difficult and unpopular decisions and sometimes members disagree with the decisions of the elders or with brothers or sisters. And then it when it is especially important to remember that Jesus is the head of the church. He is busy working in us and our brothers and sisters to accomplish His good purposes and we must trust Him and be patient. Do you see why it is liberating and vital to understand that Jesus is the head of the church?
   2. But wait, there’s more! We read, *“He is the beginning,* ***the firstborn from the dead***.”
      1. The preacher, Sinclair Ferguson has a beautiful illustration of Jesus as the firstborn from the dead that I am so glad I can borrow! The first man to walk on the moon was? Neil Armstrong. What did he say? “That’s one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind.” And he said this because he was aware that he represented humanity and that others would do what he had done. Well, Sinclair Ferguson imagines Jesus walking out of the tomb on Easter Sunday and saying, That’s one small step for man, one giant leap for the church! Isn’t that beautiful? Believer, just as Jesus rose from the dead and entered heaven, you too will also rise from the dead and enter heaven!
      2. The hymn-writer says, “Jesus lives and so shall I! Death thy sting is gone forever! He who deigned for me to die, lives, the bands of death to sever. He shall raise me from the dust: Jesus is my help and trust!”
      3. So, does this matter? You bet it does! Have you ever attended the funeral of a non-believer? So sad! But the funeral of believers is sadness at our loss and gladness at their gain!

* 1. Well, Paul has just piled up the images of the preeminence of Jesus Christ for every aspect of salvation, now including even death and resurrection. And so he says, “*That in everything He might be preeminent.*” And finally, in v20, we see that it is through Jesus that the Father is “*reconciling to Himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of the cross*.”
     1. **1 Corinthians 15:24-25** is a kind of parallel passage to this verse. It says, “*Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet*.”
     2. Do you see how powerfully these words spoke to the Colossian problem? Jesus is not just about the forgiveness of our sins on the cross. He is the head of the church! He is how we can know that one day we shall enter heaven! And right now, He is ruling over every aspect of this world and the angelic world above to reconcile or subdue or make peace. And when He is done, He will come again and bring in the new heavens and the new earth! I hope that they would have cleared that imaginary bookstore I told you about of every thing else and stocked it full of books about Jesus Christ and changed the name to Christ is the King books! Jesus Christ needs to be at the centre and core of all that we think and say and believe and do because He is reconciling all things to Himself!

Jesus Christ is the God of creation and the God of salvation. And this matters, people of God, because this world is corrupt and decaying. I think everyone knows this. Evil exists. Poverty exists. Crime exists. Pollution exists. Corruption exists. Mental health issues exist. Physical disease and injury exists. Death is inevitable. And while we have a duty to work for change and health and compassion and justice, the ultimate solution for this world’s problems is not an idea or a philosophy or a program or a politician, but Jesus Christ.

* + - 1. It is by faith in Jesus Christ as the eternal Son of God that we enter into fellowship with the Father.
      2. And He is in charge of this universe! He rules! And one day He will bring the new heavens and the new earth.
      3. So now I must ask you if Jesus Christ rules your life? A former minister of mine once said, “Show me how you live, show me your priorities during the week, show me your integrity at work, show me what you watch on TV, let me hear the words that come out of your mouth, let me hear what you listen to on the radio, show me the love you have for your husband, your wife, your neighbour, and then I will know whether Christ is King of your life!”

Well, what can we say but Hallelujah! What a Saviour! And all God’s people said, Amen!