

Sermon: How well do we know Jesus?

Reading: Colossians 1:15- 20

Introduction

An old joiner I once worked with asked me how long I had been married? Five years I said proudly, thinking five years was a long time. He started laughing and said, five years, I've waited longer in a queue!

How long do we need to live with someone before we think we truly know them? We may be able to know someone fairly well after five years but what about ten years? Do we really know someone well after ten years?

A wise person once told me, when you think you know the person you are married to, be very careful that you don't fall into complacency because when you get comfortable there is the danger of falling into a rut. We should never stop expecting to discover new things about each other. I think that is very true. While we are alive, we are growing and continually changing. Some will say as they have got older they have also got wiser. I can definitely say, Chandon heart, the older I've got the wider I've become! There is something joyous and exciting when we learn and discover new things about ourselves and about those we love, whether they are friends, colleagues or our spouses.

I think we could all say we are not the same person we were 10 years ago. Life experiences and challenges helps us to grow, mature and even stretch us to strive. The question I'm pondering today is this, 'Can the same be said about our journey of faith and knowledge of God?'

Just like the wise person who once told me to beware of complacency and falling into life's rut and thinking we know a person, that is not a good place to be. The same can be said for our relationship with Jesus.

Now before I begin looking at today's passage, what do I mean by our relationship with Jesus? To be in a relationship with someone means we are committing our lives to that person. We honour them, spend time with them, find out about them and enjoy being in their presence. A relationship is a two way process and so it is with Jesus. We believe Jesus lived, died and rose again, conquering sin and death which means He is alive today. Jesus is our resurrection hope and our living hope in this world today. Being a Christian is not do good things today and hope we will go to heaven tomorrow. Being in a relationship with Christ is to follow Him and enter into His life as He enters into our through The Holy Spirit.

So with that said, the question I am pondering is how well do we think we know Jesus? Do we know more about Him today than we did this time last year? Are we drawn closer to Him today than we were when we first met Him? If the answer is I'm not sure or I don't know then the answer is probably not and this sermon is for you. If you answered yes, I know Jesus closer to me today than ever, then read on for there is still more to learn.

Context

This letter to the Colossian Christians is a well composed letter undefiled with great teachings of the supremacy of Jesus Christ. The reason behind this letter derives from a problem that has come to Paul's attention from Epaphras concerning a problem in the church in Colossae. Somehow they have strayed from the gospel and have started to be influenced by strange teachings which is leading the church into heresy.

The church has lost sight of the vision of Jesus identity and false teachers have introduced the idea that Jesus is not enough. There is something more that is needed in order to receive salvation, and this is a secret knowledge made available to a select few.

The heretics are undermining the truth of the gospel by attacking the very foundation stone of the deity of Jesus Christ. This sets the basis for what Paul writes in the this chapter as he lays again the foundation stone which presents a beautiful image of our Saviour Jesus and His supremacy over and above all things.

Those who preach and teach or promote a different Jesus than the Jesus of Scripture are in danger of receiving the very curses outlined in the book of Revelation. This is a really serious issue. Not only will heresies bring in a spiritual dry rot into the church which slowly eats away at the pillars until everything crumbles and crashes down, but also brings down curses upon those who promote falsehoods who are in danger of not entering the Kingdom of God. **(Rev 22:14)**.

The Watchmen

Before we look at the Jesus of Scripture I want to recognise those within our congregations who are appointed as God's watchmen/women. These watchmen/women have been gifted with a spiritual gift of discernment in order to watch over the body of Christ.

These watchers were appointed as guards over towns and cities and would sound the alarm if they saw an enemy approaching. The people would hear the alarm and would respond accordingly. They would not be taken by surprise and be overthrown, but they would be ready, prepared for battle and would protect their families and communities from raiders, marauders and enemies set out to destroy and steal and to kill.

The watchers are God's appointed people with the gifts of discernment to watch over the body of Christ. Their role is to sound the alarm, warning the church if the teachings are straying from the truth of Scripture. The watchmen/women are not always the minister or preachers. They are likely to be the one who sits faithfully in the congregation each week and will sound the alarm of teachings that are not constant with the Scriptures. Some ministers and preachers will know exactly who I'm speaking about because they will either receive commendation from God's word or be challenged by referring to God's word.

There are times when ministers or preachers may say things which may be misinterpreted and the conversation that follows can clarify this. However there are some who influence churches that the false teachings are the right ones and the watchers are not taken seriously. Phylgelus and Hermogenes **(2 Tim 15)**, were two such people who caused such harm to the body of Christ. Imagine having your name recorded in Scripture for all eternity as one who taught falsehoods and brought errors into the church.

False teachers have been infiltrating the church since the beginning, this is nothing new to us. It's Satan's most effective strategy. What better way to send a ship off course than by alienating the watchmen/women, altering the dial by just a degree or two on the compass and see how quickly a ship or plane will go off course the further it travels.

Jesus told the disciples the day of Judgment will be the time when the true separation will happen as the wheat will be separated from the tares. Paul was not only a watchmen but he was also a great teacher who has left us with letters filled with sound biblical teachings and doctrines which are useful for teaching and rebuking and maintaining the church on its course, without deviating or getting lost. Today's reading reveals to us the great doctrine of Christ's supremacy and what an amazing portion of Scripture we have to read and digest today.

Supremacy of Christ

The letter before us today provides the church with an exceptional and outstanding understanding of Christ's supremacy, shattering the falsehoods which were being sown in the church at the time, which had been undermining Jesus divinity.

This is not unique to the early church, this heresy is prevalent in cults like the Jehovah's witnesses today as well as religions like Islam which both deny the divinity of Jesus Christ. Paul in this letter offers a warning to the believers saying, "See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ." **(Col 2:8)**.

Who do people say I am?

There is a question which Jesus asked His disciples which is a very revealing question. He asks them, 'Who do people say I am?' The disciples responded saying, some say you are a prophet, a teacher etc. Turning to His disciples Jesus asks them the question directly, 'Who do you say I am?' **(Matt 16: 13-20)**. This is the worlds most important question and the answer we give will set us on the right course if we have wisdom or will set us in the wrong direction if we respond with an answer that does not hold to Christ's supremacy.

JW's would say Jesus is an angel of God, Muslims would say Jesus is a prophet of God, the secular world would say He was just a teacher. But when Jesus asks us that question, how do we reply? Do we say like Peter you are the Christ, the Messiah, the Holy One of God? If so then the question I would ask following this is how well are we getting to know Jesus and how is our relationship, our knowledge and understanding of Him growing?

The Supremacy of Jesus Christ

Our reading today opens with these words, "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For by Him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by Him and for Him." **(Col 1:15-16)**.

The definition of supremacy refers to the quality or state of being: supreme authority or power. Consider the words associated with supremacy, Sovereignty; Supreme authority; Matchless; Outstanding; Commanding Power; Celestial; Crucial; Eminent. These are the words we need to consider when we think about Jesus.

Although some think of Jesus as a prophet, a good man, a teacher, a revolutionist etc, Paul does not and neither do the other gospel writers. Each one expresses distinctively the divinity of Jesus in their own unique way.

St. Mark writes about Jesus divinity in the first verse of his gospel saying, 'The beginning of the good news about Jesus Christ, the Son of God' **(Mark 1:1)**. Mark then spends the rest of the gospel proving this fact. John sets out the great mystery of the Incarnation, opening up his gospel mirroring the words of Genesis, 'In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God and the Word was God' **(Jn 1:1)**.

Look again how Paul sets out the detail of Jesus saying, 'The Son is the image of the Invisible God' **(Col 1:15)**. If we wanted to know what the character, personality, nature, essence of what God our Heavenly Father is like, then we need to look no further than Jesus Christ, who is full of grace and truth. It was Philip who asked Jesus, show us the father and Jesus says, 'Philip have I not been with you all this time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.....Don't you believe that I am in the Father and that the Father is in me?' **(Jn 14:9-10)**. The writer of Hebrews says of Jesus, 'The Son is the radiance of

God's glory and the exact representation of His nature, upholding all things by His powerful word' (**Heb 1:3**).

The JW confusion

There is a statement from Paul in our reading which has led some to fall into error like the JW's. It can be found in verse 15 Paul speaking about Jesus writes, "The first born over all creation' (**Col 1:15**). This is a verse cited by the JW's to back up their claim that Jesus is not God but a created being. It would be rather clumsy of Paul to speak of the supremacy of Jesus Christ in all things and then to say He is a created being, that would make no sense, so let's us consider the Jehovah's witness problem.

The JW confusion centres on the word '*firstborn*' and at first it may seem a straightforward argument they are making. When we speak of being born, we are speaking of being created. Is Paul saying Jesus is a created being? Of course not! The term '*firstborn*' refers to a position of authority. To be "firstborn" was to hold the honoured position. The first born held a double portion of inheritance. This is Paul's intention for writing firstborn as he is speaking of One who received double honour for He is above all things. This becomes more clearer immediately after saying, 'For in Him all things were created through Him'.

Paul goes on to explain Jesus' role in creation: "For by Him all things were created; things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by Him and for Him" affirming what was written in John's gospel. Interestingly this letter of Paul was written long before John's gospel.

Paul says of Jesus, 'He is before all things in heaven or on earth' (**Col1:17**). Jesus affirms this when speaking to John in the book of Revelation and says, 'I am the Root and the Offspring of David (**Rev 22:16**). Only the Incarnate One could ever make the claim that He was before King David (the root) and also at the same time the Offspring of king David. No one could ever make this claim except Jesus, because He is the first and the Last, the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End.

Only the Christian will affirm Jesus is the Head of the body the church so that in He has supremacy in all things. If we are still unsure after all of this then read verse 19. When something is full, can anything else be added to it? Of course not. If there is something missing, then it cannot be full! Consider these words, 'God was pleased to have all His fulness dwell in Him.' Did you notice the word all? It was through Jesus, the perfect Lamb that God would be the atoning sacrifice in order to reconcile the world back to Himself, through the shedding of His blood on the cross' (**Col 1:20**). Wesley summed it up well, 'And can it be that I should gain an interest in the Saviours blood? Died He for me....Amazing love, how can it be, That Thou my God, should'st die for me.

Summary

Tis both amazing love and mystery that Christ should give up His life as a ransom and atonement for ours. Paul wants us to grasp and hold to tightly without compromise, to the Supremacy of Christ Jesus. For there is no one higher, no one greater no height no depth and nothing in all of creation can ever separate us from His love. Jesus supremacy in all things is essential for our worship and Jesus supremacy is enough for our salvation. Over thirty years ago I gave my life to Jesus. My knowledge of him was probably the size of an acorn. In those 30 plus years Jesus has grown so large, so magnificent, so majestic and so beautiful He just keeps growing with every passing year. How well do we know Jesus?