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First in Creation & the Church

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Series: First
Colossians 1:15-23

BIG IDEA – CHRISTIANITY IS ABOUT JESUS AND JESUS IS GOD

Good morning, Two Cities Church. Whether you're in here or down in Lexington, I want you to know this: we love missionaries. I personally love missionaries. I love being around missionaries. Every time I meet a missionary...I genuinely feel this way...I feel like I'm in the presence of greatness.

Look. I know I've been spending the last nine years telling all of us that we're all missionaries, and that's true at one level. Like, "Be on mission wherever you live, learn, work, and play. Who's someone far from God and close to you? Are you living missionally?" That's all true, but there is something special about the global missionary, the man or woman who crosses an ocean, learns a language, says goodbye to family, and engages a culture.

Here's what the Bible says we're supposed to do with them. Yes, we're supposed to pray for them and send them well, but the Bible says, "Honor people who go out for the sake of his name." So, here's what we're going to talk about for a second: What is our role in global world missions? You have three options. You're either a *player*, a *payer*, or a *prayer*.

You are a player, and there are not many players. They're the ones who go. In every church, there are always more who stay than go, but the people who go (Avi, in that video) are the *players*. Everybody who stays are the *payers*. We send them financially and in other ways. Here's what that means. Because of your generosity, we're able to help fund and fuel her to the Middle East and to the mission field.

It's not just the players and the payers but also the *pray-ers*. The reason we show you that video is so you can better know who she is and... Even what she told you. "This is how I want you to pray for me." By the way, it's kind of an intense video at one level, right? Like, heading to the Middle East, learning Arabic. Wow! Does that feel far away from something *you* would do?

Are you like, "Yeah. It was hard for me to get here this morning. That sounds like it would be hard for me to do"? Well, let me encourage you. It started with... Well, it started with godly parents and other things, but it started with a short-term mission trip. Who knows how God is going to use a short-term mission trip?

I'm going to tell you about two brand-new mission trips that we're launching. Watch it. They're launching right now. Here they are. There are going to be two in February, and one is going to be going to Italy. Who here wants to go to Italy? I know you do. I know you want to go to Italy. This is where the Olympics are going to be.

We're going to partner with the Taylors, and they're going to be doing evangelism to the international... There are a lot of people, obviously, who are descending on Italy in preparation for the Olympics. That's going to be a really great trip. By the way, both of these are going to fill up quickly.

The second one is... We're going a long way. We're going all the way to Cambodia. We're going to Cambodia to partner with AIM. Because of your generosity, we've given them hundreds of thousands of dollars. They rescue young girls out of sex trafficking, and they want to... We're humbled by this. They want to host their first-ever retreat for staff and survivors, and guess what church they want to help host it? Us! Yeah, it's great.

So, anyway, sign up. You're going to enjoy that. And don't forget about the shortest mission trip you'll ever take to our 5:00 p.m. service. Okay? Food trucks at 5:00 launches next week. Who's excited? I hope to see you. I mean this respectfully. I hope to see you *there* and not *here*. I want to see you at the 5:00.

Guys, we're going to have a great time. Mark Clark... If you missed him last time, you don't want to miss him. He'll be at all three of our services, but most likely, I think, hanging out afterward at the food trucks as well. So, let's pray, and then we have to get to work in Colossians 1.

Lord, we want to lift up Avi. The Bible says, "Honor people who go out for his name." We can hear and see the maturity of Avi on that video, even by the prayer request she asked for. So, we ask for the things we would normally ask for. Lord, we do ask for protection for her.

But we ask for the things *she* asked for, which are that she would share Christ not according to her preferences but according to the Scriptures, that you would help her not to have culture fatigue but she would flourish and thrive in that culture, that she would learn Arabic, and that you would bring a community of young women around her, both Christian women, so that she can have brothers and sisters in Christ, but also some women she can lead to the Lord. Would you do that? In Jesus' name, amen.

All right. I have always been interested in world religions. In fact, one of the most famous freshman classes at most universities is some type of intro to world religions. And why not? It's fascinating. If you grew up in some small town and you don't know this, you go off to college, and you're like, "People believe differently than us."

You know, you meet a Hindu or you meet... You're like, "What do Mormons believe, and why do you need a special card to get into their temple?" You're like, "What is going on here?" You watch Tom Cruise, and you're like, "Scientology? What *is* this?" Or you find out that the number one most popular boy name in London is Muhammad, and you might go, "Somebody better really quickly find out what Muslims believe."

Well, this is not a sermon on all of the different world religions; this is a sermon on what Christians believe. You may want to care about what Christians believe, even if your mom and dad dragged you here. Even if you don't want to be here, we're glad you're here. Let me tell you why you might care. You might care because 31 percent of the world's population at least *says* they believe in Christianity. That's a lot.

A friend of mine, who has become a friend recently... I just had him on the podcast. We're going to release this. He's an expert in AI, and he's also a Christian. He knows how to ask AI the right questions, give AI the right prompts. He basically asked, "Based on all the information you know about all of the world religions in the whole world, what religion... I don't want you being subjective. Based on all information, what religion is most likely the truth?" All three AIs he talked to said "Christianity," which means even AI is coming to Christ. Praise the Lord.

Now, with all that said, here's what we're talking about today: *Christianity is about Jesus, and Jesus is God*. That's it. It's very simple. Christianity is about Jesus. To say it a little bit more directly, Christianity is not about *you*. It's like a massive wake-up call for people. "I'm looking for me in the Bible." You're not there! The Bible is *from* God *about* Jesus. Christianity is *for* you; it's just not *about* you.

Now, here's the thing. We have to talk about Jesus a lot more. If you'll turn to Colossians 1:15, Paul can't help himself. He just talks about Jesus all the time. I mean, he's already

saying, "I'm in Christ, and you're in Christ, and I'm praying for you that Christ would do this." So, the introduction is done, and now in verse 15, he just keeps talking about Jesus.

Let me tell you something. I don't know if I've ever said this before. When I teach preaching, I always say when people like you are sitting in the seats, you want to know two things. You need to feel these two things during a sermon: "I didn't know that" and "I need to do that." That's it. I think the sermon is pretty good if you're thinking, "I didn't know that. I need to do that. I didn't know that. I need to do that." I get excited. Okay?

Now, this sermon is a lot less "I need to do that." We're going to be in the "Mount Everest" of theology today. I mean, this is high, high Christology. Paul talks about Jesus all the time. When *you* talk about Christianity, what are *you* talking about? I'm okay with you talking about the church and talking about your Community Group and talking about some new book you read, but I think we need to talk about Jesus more.

When I did ministry at Duke... Whenever I would drive there every day (it was, like, 10 minutes from my house), I felt like I was driving into downtown Manhattan. That's exactly what it felt like. I mean, the worldview... I would go there, and I had to learn, because I was going into these fraternities with all of these guys from the left coast and Manhattan, and most of them were Reformed Jews and stuff.

I'd go in there, and if I tried to just talk about Christianity, they would be like, "What about women's rights and abortion? What about the Crusades? What about Darwinian atheistic evolution?" I was like, "I don't want to talk about all this stuff." If I just said, "Guys, I want to talk about Jesus," which is a little awkward for people...

"Hey, I want to talk about Jesus. In fact, it's not just me talking about Jesus. Let's look at the Bible together and see what it says about Jesus." I found that to be the most fruitful. Like, "Let's just look at who he is. Let's look at what he said. Let's look at what he did. Let him speak for himself. Let's just read Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John."

Well, here's what we're going to do today. We're going to look at the highest Christology in the entire Bible, starting in verse 15. There is no place where Christ is more clarified and exalted than right here. Here it is. ***"He [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation."***

We're first told that Jesus is the image of God. Why do we need an image? Well, we're told why in the second half of the verse. Part of what I need to do is take a moment and state the most obvious thing about God. The most obvious thing about God isn't that he created the world, although that should be obvious. That's another sermon.

The most obvious thing about God that we can all agree on, even if we aren't all Christians in here, is God is invisible. Right? Sometimes you have to state the most obvious thing. Like, everybody knew that. Well, Paul says it. It's important, because you can't see him.

In fact, the Bible says God is spirit. The Bible says (I'm just quoting the Bible here), "Nobody ever has seen God." Paul in another place says, "God dwells in inapproachable light." You're like, "That's a problem, because I don't know what God is like. I'm a visual person. I need to see God."

Look. You know images are important, because what happens as soon as one of your friends comes home and says, "I met a guy. He's really nice. We went on a date or two"? What do you always say? "What is his name, and does he have a Facebook account or an Instagram account?" Or you're looking at his LinkedIn. They're like, "He can see that you're looking at his LinkedIn." You just need an image.

Now, here's what's interesting. In the Old Testament, the Bible says, "Don't make an image of God," but then we're told Jesus *is* the image of God. It's like, "What?" The second commandment says, "Don't make an image of God," and that's because whenever *we* make an image of God, it's not going to fully capture who God is. That's the main problem.

Even the golden calf account... They were trying to honor God. If you know that story in the Old Testament, you're like, "Oh, those goofy Israelites." No, they were trying to say, "God is strong, and God will deliver us." But God is not a calf. What it means that Jesus is the image of God... It means he is the exact representation and revelation of God. If you want to know what God is like, you need to look at Jesus.

In fact, I have a really practical application for some of you. You're like, "Kyle told me there wasn't going to be a lot of things we needed to do today." Well, I have one. Read the Gospels more. You should be reading Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. I think you should be reading at least one of them all the time, probably. Would half a chapter a day kill you? Just read about Jesus.

Here's the big idea: you can't know what God is like if you don't know Jesus. There are a couple of things about Jesus that the Bible is like... Let me just give you two really quickly. There are two things you wouldn't know about God unless you looked at the life of Jesus. Here's the first one: *God gets personal. God gets relational. God gets involved.*

There are a couple of people here (maybe *more* than a couple of people) in this room right now who need to hear this. God is not a watchmaker, deist, "wind the universe up

and leave everybody alone." He is deeply invested and involved. He shows up, gathers 12 guys, and spends three and a half years with them. He heals people.

Basically, someone said, "Jesus eats his way through the Gospels." Have you ever heard that? Just go ahead. Read the gospel of Luke. He's going *to* a meal, coming *from* a meal, or *at* a meal. Literally. The Bible says, "The Son of Man came to seek and save the lost." Do you know what else it says? "The Son of Man came eating and drinking." That's a direct Bible verse.

Jesus comes, and he's highly relational. Some of you think, "God doesn't care about me." That's not true. "God doesn't care about me. God doesn't care about my situation. God doesn't care about my feelings or my emotions." You cannot look at the life of Jesus and say that.

The second thing is that *God is merciful*. Yes, I know it's in the Old Testament too, but if you just read the Old Testament, you might be like, "I really don't want to mess with God," which is a good thought. You're like, "Smoke and fire at Mount Sinai, big law... Every once in a while, it seems like he's killing people. I don't know if I want to..." Then Jesus shows up, and you're like, "Wait a second. We knew God was powerful; we just didn't know God was that merciful."

Look. The number one attribute of Jesus mentioned in the New Testament is compassion. Some of you need to understand... You're going through something right now, and Jesus is compassionate toward it. If you're willing to humble yourself...

The only people Jesus wasn't compassionate toward were the arrogant, hard-hearted religiosity people of the day. He couldn't stand them. But if you're struggling with something, even if you got yourself into it, because that's really hard... He goes to the woman caught in adultery and says, "Your sins are forgiven," but then he also says, "Go and sin no more."

Okay. So, he's the image of the invisible God. Do you see what else it says in verse 15? It says, "He is the firstborn of all creation." It doesn't mean he's created. He created everything. He's the firstborn. Basically, it's the idea of supremacy, of importance.

I'm just going to show you this really quickly. I thought about having this long conversation with you about firstborn and the deity of Christ and the humanity of Christ. We just don't have time for it right this second. But what I'm going to show you... You're going to feel like you're at a Catholic church for a second. I've never said *that* before. You're going to feel like you're at a Presbyterian church, maybe. I don't know.

Here we go. I'm going to throw something on the screen. This is the Nicene Creed. This was written 1,700 years ago. I want you to know this. There are certain fights the church fought early on so we don't have to fight them anymore. People way smarter than us wrote this. "We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten not made, one in being with the Father. Through him all things were made."

Jesus is the firstborn over all creation, but *this* is what I want to show you. Verse 16 is the implication of that. **"For by him..."** Notice the phrase *all things* shows up four times here. **"For by [Jesus] *all things were created...*"** Then Paul is like, "Let me just give you some examples." **"...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."**

If you grew up in church, you've heard "God made the universe." Now we're given an even clearer picture. Actually, if you read Genesis 1, it said God created everything through his Word. We're then told in John's gospel the Word is Jesus Christ, and the Word becomes flesh. In other words, even if you read Genesis 1, you see that, actually, God was creating everything through his Son Jesus Christ.

Okay. Here's the big deal. When it says everything is created by Jesus Christ, it's everything you *can* see and everything you *can't* see. Here's the thing. We don't believe, as Christians, that nobody times nothing equals everything. As Frank Turek said one time, "I don't have enough faith to be an atheist."

You know how personal life is, right? That's what's so hard about it. It's so personal, both the good and the bad. Do you believe the impersonal created the personal? No. Obviously, the personal created the personal. *Universe* is the words *unity* and *diversity* put together, and the *university* is where you're supposed to go study the universe, but that doesn't really happen anymore.

Basically, the whole idea is... You think chaos created order? No. Atheistic Darwinian evolution is an insult to Jesus Christ. It's saying Jesus Christ created everything. Think of it this way. Let's just give some categories. Jesus created everything you see and everything you don't see.

We're so spoiled. I can remember when *Planet Earth* came out. Did anyone else see the show *Planet Earth*? This was before Netflix when we rode our dinosaur to school. *Planet Earth* was this show. It was the first time ever... And this was only, like, 20 years ago. It was the first time ever they were like, "Come see the polar bears." You were like, "How did you get a camera and a helicopter there?" No one had ever seen it.

They were like, "All right. Come see these birds in Africa next week." It was like, "We're going deep in the ocean to see sharks." Now we're spoiled. There are, like, 15 of those on every streaming platform. You can watch 15 episodes of chimps in Africa. You're like, "Ah, no thanks." Right? My whole thing is we're spoiled because we get to see it all, but it should stun us.

The first time I went skiing out west, I was like, "Why do all of these people ski out west? What's wrong with Boone?" Then I was like, "Oh, I get it." As soon as you get out there... We're on this lift for 18 minutes. "Whoa!" A buddy of mine took his 2-year-old to the beach, and the kid got dizzy and fell over because he just couldn't handle the ocean. We have this amazing creation.

Okay. I'll make it more personal for you. Jesus made everything you love. So, if you're like, "I need to love Jesus more," well, why don't you love Jesus more because he already made everything you love? *Friendship and laughter*. I mean, I'm only midlife, but I think it's a top 10 human experience. I'm not going to tell you all 10, but I'm going to tell you it's a top 10 human experience.

Being with friends you've known for a long time, talking about memories and laughing very hard... That's a top 10 human experience, in my opinion. God created that. *Sleep*. It's a top 10 human experience. It really is. After a long day, just crawling into bed... *Food and drink*, a great meal.

This week, one of the guys in our Community Group... He is a very good cook. I still think he needs to open up a restaurant. He said, "Guys, I'm making steak and potatoes, and I'm also making this chipotle mayonnaise sauce." I started getting excited. Then we had our Topo Chicos together. It was like, "Yes! Jesus, you can come back now. We're ready."

I'm not going to get into detail, but *sex and romance*. You know, it's so interesting that people think God is a prude. God invented sex. It changes how you view God, right? It's not like God created Adam and Eve, and then 10 minutes later was like, "What are you guys doing? Stop it!" Everything you love Jesus created.

How about this? Everything you can't see... You can't see it because it's so small. You can only see it through a microscope. You can't see it because it's so far away. Now you can see it through a telescope. We're pretty blessed. He says there's a whole invisible world that he created...angels, demons, heaven, hell, and the departed saints. We can't see any of that.

But then look at this. This is amazing. Verse 16: **"...all things were created through him..."** I think, in some ways, this is the more surprising part. It wasn't just created

through him but *for* him. That'll change how you view everything. Basically, this is why this is more "I need to know that" than "I need to do that."

Here's what you need to know: Jesus Christ made you *for* him. What are the implications of that? I don't know. Think about it for an hour. Think about it in your marriage. Even marriage is about Jesus. Why are we keeping Jesus out of our marriage if marriage is about Jesus? Everything is created *through* him, and everything is created *for* him. It makes sense. Think about all of the things we'll never even see.

If I could put it in common-day vernacular, here's what Paul has been trying to say for two or three verses now. Jesus Christ is the main character in the story God is writing. We get in so much trouble because we think we're the main character. Then you get sick. What do you think? "Well, I'm the main character. The main character doesn't get sick."

One of my favorite TV shows of all time... Not *Planet Earth*. That was good, but my favorite TV show... I don't even know what this genre is. You know the multi-season, long-story action drama? I think the father of all those, in my humble opinion, is *24*. Every episode was like *Doon! Doon! Doon!* You were like, "I've got to wait a week!" This was before Netflix. You went through this 24-hour day.

Well, Kiefer Sutherland wrote that. He's the executive producer. He's also the main character. His name is Jack Bauer. I was never worried about Jack Bauer when I watched the show, because he's the main character in the story. It's going to be fine. You didn't know what was going to happen to anybody else, but you were like, "Jack Bauer will be fine."

What I'm trying to tell you is Jesus Christ is the Jack Bauer of the universe. That's what I'm trying to say. It's clear in the Greek. That's what the apostle Paul is saying. Okay? Now look at verse 17. He says, **"And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together."** Paul is like, "Look. If he's really all of these things I'm saying, then he also should be before all things in your life." You have to figure out... How do you have the principle of first, that you're going to put God first in something?

Danny Akin, who I don't know well... He's the president of Southeastern Seminary, and he has four kids...four boys, actually. All of his boys are in full-time ministry. They all married great ladies, and they're all godly. They're all raising great families, and they all like each other. It's the kind of family that kind of annoys you. You're like, "Oh, really? You're all vacationing together again?" You know, like *that*. They're *that* family, but they're godly, and they're great.

Well, in a momentary lapse of judgment, he asked me to speak at Southeastern Chapel, and I went and spoke there. Afterward, I went out to lunch with him, and I was like, "Hey, I've been meaning to ask you this for a long time. How is your family so awesome?"

He was humble about it, and all that, but he said (Charlotte is his wife), "Charlotte and I just decided very early on that Jesus was going to be the seventh member of our family. We have four kids. We're married. That's six of us, but Jesus is going to be the seventh." He said, "We just talked about it. We told our kids 'Jesus is here. Jesus is at the dinner table. He's more important than anybody else in this family. He's the seventh member of this family.'"

When you have a high view of Jesus Christ, you start bringing a Christian worldview everywhere you go. Here's an interesting guy to study. I think he lived one of the most interesting lives. You've probably never even heard of him. Abraham Kuyper. He's the one who famously said something like, "There's not one square inch on planet earth over which Jesus Christ does not say 'Mine.'" You've probably heard that quote.

Well, that guy wasn't just a theologian. He became prime minister of the Netherlands. He was like, "Man, you have to bring Christ to everything. Well, how can I do it? I'll be the prime minister." You'd be like, "Well, that's enough in life." Right? He started two newspapers. He was like, "Yeah, I want to get truth to people, so I'm going to start two newspapers." What? And he was the editor of one of them.

Then he started a university, and he was a teaching professor there, because he thought we needed to bring Christ to education. All I'm trying to say is if you start having a big view of Christ, you're like, "Man! I need to bring Christ and his kingdom to so many different places."

Well, then in verse 17, we're also told that he holds all things together. In verse 18, there's a transition. ***"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."***

So, here's what's interesting. If you didn't catch it, he goes from the cosmos and all of creation to the church. Why wouldn't you go from creation to the government? Just pick Rome or whatever is doing really... That's what's going on in the world. Right? Rome.

This would sound arrogant for a Christian or the church to say this to the world. I'm saying this on the authority of God's Word that we just read there, that verse. The creation exists to allow the church to complete its mission. In other words, if you go, "Why hasn't Jesus returned...?" Well, Jesus says, "I will return when we've reached every nation."

Think about it this way. When the church universal all over the world completes the Great Commission, what happens? We're done with creation. Or to say it more biblically, Christ returns and we have a new creation. What I want to do... Here you are. You're in church. That's great. But listen.

What I'm trying to say is I want to, in our minds... I'm not elevating Two Cities Church or any one local church. The average American Christian needs the church way elevated in his or her mind. What God is doing in the world he's doing through many things, but he's working through his church. In fact, we're told he's the head of the church.

There are so many metaphors for the church. You could say the flock and he's the shepherd. You could say the family and God is the Father. You could say army and he's the general or the bride and he's the groom...all that. Probably the best is Christ is the head and we are the body, because the head gives direction. The head gives nourishment through eating. The head gives life through breathing. The head gives strategy and thinking through the mind. So, it's saying Christ is the head of the church.

Here's the big thing. If the church is going to be fruitful and faithful, it needs to stay connected to its head, Christ. Something with no head is dead; something with two heads is a monster. Let's avoid both. What happens in a lot of churches is that, knowingly or unknowingly, oftentimes they leave Christ. How do you leave Christ? You leave his Word and his Spirit. How does Jesus lead the church? Through his Word and his Spirit.

Ninety percent of churches are declining, plateaued, on life support, dead and don't know it. I'm not saying every church that's dead or even declining or plateaued has left the gospel, left Christ. Sometimes it's like, no, the population has completely changed or whatever. I *am* saying a church begins to die the moment it leaves the headship of Christ.

So, he goes from creation to church to the individual Christian. Look at verse 19. It says, ***"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."***

We have to hold the divinity and the humanity of Christ together. We go from "He created everything. And not only that; it's for him. And not only that; he's holding it together. And not only that; he's leading the entire church." You're like, "Whoa! That's a big view of Jesus." "And he dies on a cross." You're like, "I'm confused."

We have to hold the cross and the resurrection, the first coming and the second coming, the divinity and the humanity, the humiliation and the exaltation. It's hard in our minds. We have to hold it all together. What I want to talk about now is what Christ did with all of his firstborn preeminence. The word that we get here is *reconciliation*.

Now, this will be fun. *I'm* going to have fun. I think you'll have fun. I'm going to take a couple of minutes here, and I'm going to explain salvation using five words. If you've never heard this before, it's going to make a lot of sense to you. I think, as Christians, we get confused because... Okay. Here are a few words: *forgiveness, reconciliation, redemption, justification, adoption*. You're like, "Is that all the same thing?" No. It's all connected, but let me explain.

These five elements (we're going to end with *reconciliation*) are so important to understand. The first is *justification*. People who love to talk about justification read Martin Luther, and they read the book of Romans. They're like, "Justification!" Very important. *Justification* is when God moves you from guilty to righteous in Christ.

Here's how you teach it to a 4-year-old: "It's just as if I never sinned." That's what *justified* means. It's like, how are you going to be able to stand before a holy God when you die? The answer is, "The righteousness of Christ, because he lived the life I could not live and died in my place for my sins." Okay. That's justification.

Then there's *forgiveness*. You're like, "Is that the same thing as justification?" Not exactly. *Forgiveness* is you were unbelievably poor. The Bible says, "Forgive us our debts." Financial terms. You were a debtor. You filed Chapter 11. You were bankrupt spiritually. You go from unbelievably poor and in debt to rich in Christ. That's forgiveness.

"Well, is that the same as redemption?" No, but it's kind of connected. Paul uses these terms together sometimes. *Redemption* is you were enslaved to sin, to selfishness, to Satan, and you needed to be set free. We'll get to that in Colossians, chapter 2. You needed to be set free. In redemption, you move from a slave to being free. Then there's *adoption*, or sonship (that's talked about all the time), in which you move from being a stranger to being adopted as a son or daughter in God's family.

The fifth way is *reconciliation*. *Reconciliation* is when you move from an enemy to a friend. Reconciliation is probably talked about most commonly in marriages that are on the rocks. They'll say something like, "Let's try to have a period of reconciliation," which is basically a way to say, "This is really getting bad and really going in separate directions, but let's give it one more shot." Well, here's the amazing thing. Every time reconciliation happens... Think about reconciliation.

Let's say you have a married couple, and they need to be reconciled. Here's normally the problem with that. The wife goes, "It's 80 percent his fault." Maybe she's willing to own 20 of it or maybe 30 of it. "Yeah, yeah. I could be a little bit nicer," or whatever. The problem with the guy is he's like, "Ah, you know, here's the problem. It's 80 percent her

fault." He might be willing to own his 10 percent or his 20 percent. For reconciliation to happen, you both have to come together and go, "This is what I did."

In fact, if you're ever stuck in a... Marriage isn't easy, but if you're ever stuck in a marriage conflict, and you can't get out of it, and you feel like it's all her fault or his fault, one thing you could do is think about the last dumb thing you did in that marriage and go apologize for it. It would be the beginning of softening that relationship. But that's normally how reconciliation happens.

Or occasionally (this is even more humiliating, but this happens), reconciliation happens where somebody did something terrible, and they are the guilty party. They go to the wife or the husband or the friend or the dad or the mom or the son, and they go, "I really messed up. This could ruin our relationship. You didn't even do anything wrong, but would you be willing to extend forgiveness? Could we still be reconciled? Could we move from bad relationship to good relationship?"

Here's what's interesting about Christianity. The innocent party reconciles with the guilty. You're probably one of the 60 million people who saw the Coldplay kiss cam. What a moment that was. All of the memes... I saw one meme that said "Coldplay hasn't made two singles like *that* in a long time." Why am I telling you that? Because it was horrible, and what everybody was saying afterward...

It took us a while to find out about her, but him... Immediately, we were like, "All right. Here's who this guy is. He's a billionaire, or something like that, and his company is worth *this*. Here's who his wife is, and look at his three kids. She's going to get half." That probably *is* what's going to happen, and that's probably what *needs* to happen.

Could you imagine if she goes to him and says, "I'd like to be reconciled"? Some of you right now go "Ah!" You're like "No!" Well, we sinned against Christ so grievously, and it was caught on heaven's kiss cam. He saw it all. All I'm saying is God, even seeing our blatant rebellion, decided to pursue us and be reconciled to us. It's not just that Jesus is the firstborn. It's not just that he's the head of the church; it's that he would come after people like us.

In the next verse, Paul goes, "Hey, guys, in case you forgot who you are..." Look at verse 21. **"And you..."** "Don't start thinking too highly of yourself." **"...who once were alienated..."** Which is the opposite of reconciled. **"...and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds..."** Basically, he goes, "Part of what you need to do is to remember who you were before you met Christ."

There's something called the *noetic effects of the fall*, which is basically the effects of the fall on the brain and the mind. One of the noetic effects of the fall on the mind is that we

don't remember things correctly. We tend to think maybe we weren't as bad as the Bible says we are. Maybe in moments we feel like God is kind of lucky to have us on his team. We're told here, "No, you're alienated, and you're hostile in mind, doing evil deeds."

Then, one more time. This is the key thing. Verse 22: **"...he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him..."** I want to focus on that word *now*. I want you to know, if you're not a Christian, you can be reconciled to God right now.

Paul David Tripp is a great Christian author. He's an older guy. He has written a lot of books. He said Christians forget the "nowism" of the gospel. It's for right now. It doesn't say, "One day we will be reconciled." It says if you transfer trust to Jesus Christ, you are reconciled to God.

See, when I became a Christian... I told you I came out of Roman Catholicism. Very formal. If you've ever been to a Roman Catholic church, there's a lot of standing, a lot of kneeling, a lot of "Our Fathers" a lot of "Hail Marys." You have to be fairly athletic to go to a Catholic church. There's a lot of up and down. And you have to have a good memory, because you memorize all of your prayers.

What happened to me, though, was as soon as I became a Christian, one of the first things I learned was "You can actually talk to God in a relational way." I learned that mostly from praying with my Christian friends. I'm like, "They're on friendly and familiar terms with God."

He says, "Now you've been reconciled." There are two words theologians talk about. Things are *accomplished*, and then they're *applied*. So, Jesus accomplishes our reconciliation at the cross, and then it's applied by the Holy Spirit when we believe. Immediately, it's like, "Yep, you're forgiven; you're adopted into the family," all of the things I told you. "You're given the righteousness of Christ. You're set free, and now we're on friendly terms."

Look at what Paul says in verse 23. **"...if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard..."** I just need to say this quickly. In verse 23, we are introduced to a warning passage. There are warning passages in the Bible. There are a lot of them. They're everywhere. They're really in the book of Hebrews. If you want to kind of scare yourself, read all of the warning passages in the book of Hebrews.

It doesn't mean you can lose your salvation. We don't believe you can lose your salvation. All of the things I told you... You don't become unadopted. You don't go back to

enemies. You don't have your debts paid, and then they're taken away again. No. You can't lose your salvation.

What this addresses, by the way, is something called *apostasy*. Apostasy is something the church has dealt with forever. It's "What do we do with people who have not continued in the faith?" There are people... I'm not *that* old, but I'm old enough now that... There were guys on my staff team with campus outreach... We raised support together. We went and asked people to support us financially.

We went into college dorms and shared Christ with people who didn't know Christ. We gave our summers to these college students, and then there are a couple of these guys who say they don't believe. You know, it messes with you. "Dude, what *was* that?" The answer is either they're having a King David moment, and they're going to come back, or they never believed in the first place. He says the sign of believing is enduring.

No one wants to suffer, but basically, you want to be able to go through certain parts of your life... You want to make a lot of money and go, "I still love Christ. Wow." You want to *lose* some money and go, "I lost my job, but I'm still following Christ." I knew this pastor. It was not until he lost his church, because he was in this goofy denomination that went liberal... He said it was when he lost his church he finally said, "I know for sure I'm a Christian now, because I still love Christ. I'm still trusting God."

This is what you want for your kids. It's like, "I want them to have enough pain and pleasure in their life that we actually see what the heck is going on. Do they really believe?" Paul says if you really believe, you'll be stable and steadfast, rooted and resilient through it all. In fact, this is the last thing he says at the end of verse 23: ***"...which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister."***

Paul goes, "This is the crazy thing. This is what's interesting. The very God who created everything now needs to be proclaimed to his creation." Because of sin, because of brokenness, because of the fall, the creation itself, though the Bible says it groans... The creation does not really know who its creator is.

What's so interesting is what we saw in that first video with Avi, where she was like, "Hey, I'm going to the Middle East. Pray for *this*, and pray for *that*, and pray for my language..." What is she saying? She's like, "There are a bunch of people out in the Middle East who do not know who Jesus Christ is. They don't know that he sustains all things, that he's before all things. They don't know that he's who created them. Most importantly, they don't know they can be reconciled to God, and I have to go tell them."

Paul goes, "Guys, this is what I'm doing. I've been reconciled to God." Let me encourage you. Paul did not always feel this way about Jesus. So, however you feel about Jesus today, you could feel differently when you leave here. The apostle Paul used to think Jesus was a false teacher, dead and not risen from the dead. He thought he was dead instead.

He persecuted all of these Christians, all the way to putting them in jail and killing them. Actually, the first known martyr in the Bible, Stephen, Saul celebrates...Saul, who becomes Paul. Then he has this experience with Jesus where he sees Jesus differently. That's not something I can do; that's something only the Holy Spirit can do in your life.

Here's what I want us to do. If you'll just take a minute, I want you to think about Jesus in a bigger and better way than you ever have before. Maybe take some of the things we talked about today. We need a Jesus who is bigger than our suffering and better than our sin.

How are you going to make it through? When I'm in the oncology department, I'm going to need a Jesus who's bigger than my suffering. When I'm really tempted at some season of my life, I'm going to need a Jesus who's better than my sin. All of us are tempted to domesticate Jesus, to make him kind of... "Isn't he just like me, but a little bit smarter and a little bit bigger?" To diminish who he is.

So, what I want us to do... I'll just give us a little time right now. If you'll bow your heads and close your eyes, I want to give you a second to think about Christ. I do this because I think we need moments like this. All I can do is set up the moment, and you have the meeting with the Lord. Think about Jesus Christ. Think about what he is. According to this passage, he is the revealer of the Father.

Some of you need to commit right now, at the end of this sermon, that you're going to start reading your Bible. You can't know God if you don't know your Bible. You can't know God if you don't know Christ, and you can't know Christ if you don't know the Gospels. Maybe you need to commit right now that you're going to start reading something out of Matthew, Mark, Luke, or John this week.

I didn't focus on this, but one of the things it says is that Jesus Christ holds everything together. Maybe there are some of you in here right now, and there's a part of your life that is out of order. We use language like that. There's a part of your life that's falling apart.

You might feel like your health is falling apart. You might feel like a relationship in your life is falling apart or your career is falling apart. You just need to say, "Jesus, while

you're holding the whole universe together, would you hold *this* together as well? I'm going to trust you while you hold this together."

Others of you, right now, need to give your life to Christ. You need to experience the nowism of the gospel. You need to be reconciled to God in Christ. The Holy Spirit can apply that truth to your heart right now. The great God of the universe died on the cross so you could be reconciled to him, and that can happen right now.

Others of you need to be reconciled to somebody else. You need to realize afresh... Where are you going to get the resources to be reconciled to someone hard in your life? You're going to get them from realizing that God, the innocent party, came after you. Some of you have a text you need to send in the car before you leave. Some of you have a phone call you need to make this afternoon, because reconciliation is a process.

We're going to end by singing. Most commentators think this is an ancient hymn. This was taken and became an ancient hymn the church sung, because the greatest things about Christ can't just be known; they must be sung and celebrated. So, I'm going to finish praying, and then would you stand and sing to the great Christ, the Christ over all creation, the Christ over the church, the Christ who died for every Christian. In his name we ask, amen.