

Focused On Jesus

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Colossians 1:13-20 ¹³ He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed *us* into the kingdom of the Son of His love, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins. ¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. ¹⁷ And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist. ¹⁸ And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the preeminence. ¹⁹ For it pleased *the Father that* in Him all the fullness should dwell, ²⁰ and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross.

Who wins most stubborn hunter? How long are you willing to sit outside without moving to get the record? It takes tenacity, persistence, patience, perseverance, and focus to be a really good hunter. You have to be single-minded if you're going to get that 20-point buck.

While single-mindedness might not be natural to humans, the Bible is supernatural in its single-minded focus on the restoration of the image of God through the person of Jesus Christ. This is one of the ways in which Scripture proves its reliability.

Right away in Genesis 3, it was foretold that God would send one who would crush the head of Satan. This Advent season, and on Christmas Eve, we are going to be tracing that single-minded focus of Scripture beginning in Genesis and then through Abraham, Moses, David, Jonah, and finally Jesus.

In our text this morning, Paul addresses the Christians at Colosse, who had, like the Jews, veered from keeping their focus on Jesus. The letter to the Colossians was written probably only 7-9 years after the church was founded. Even though it hasn't even been a full decade yet, the church at Colosse had already lost its focus.

It's hard for us to stay focused even for a year, much less a full decade. But God hasn't lost His focus, and Paul reminds the Colossians that Jesus is, all in all, the firstborn over all creation, the head of the church, through whom we are reconciled to God.

It is so easy for us to veer off and lose focus, not just as individuals but as a church. I was just reading an article the other day about the Church of England and their attitude towards the increasing number of Muslims living in the UK. Some of them want to embrace them with a loving attitude; others want to reaffirm Christian values. Neither side is focused on Christ and the reconciliation that He brings us with the Father.

As we finish our year and head into another festival season, God calls us as well not to lose focus. As we celebrate Thanksgiving—as we sit in the field hunting—as we make Christmas cookies and wrap presents—as we enter a new year with new pains and trials and heartaches and joys—God calls us not to lose focus.

Jesus, who has reconciled us to the Father through His blood on the cross.

He is the image of the invisible.

Your neighbor texts you at 1 a.m. saying the northern lights are out. So, you get up and go outside, only to see nothing. But then you take a picture with your phone, and there on your phone you can see there are green and purple streaks in the sky. Your camera can give you an image of what your eyes cannot see.

Jesus is the image of that which is invisible. Through Him, we can see that which cannot be seen. Through Him, that which is unapproachable is approachable.

In the Old Testament, God gave the strict command that they were not to make any idol, or image, or likeness of God. God Himself creates a living image by which we can know and see God—Jesus Christ. He is not just a picture of God, but the very essence of God, made visible. Here Paul uses the term *ikon* or image, but in Philippians he uses the term *morphe*, that is, form, essence, substance. Jesus isn't just a picture but the very essence of God made flesh.

In the Old Testament, you had pictures—the ram, the lamb, the snake, the temple, Jonah, Isaac, David, etc. These were not the real thing but imitations. Jesus is not a picture but the essence, the invisible made visible.

This is what was foretold all the way back in Genesis 3: Adam and Eve lost the image of God, and God no longer walked with them in the cool of the evenings. But through Jesus, the image of God comes back to earth, and God once again walks with men.

This needs to be our focus as well—to walk with God and to once again see the image of God in the person of Jesus Christ.

The Kingdom is Spiritual

Colossians 1:13: He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love.

Adam and Eve were taken out of the garden of Eden, God's purpose is to return us to that garden. It was always God's purpose not to restore the kingdom of Israel but to take us out of this world into the kingdom of heaven.

Starting in 1830, the U.S. government forced about 60,000 Native Americans to leave their ancestral homes in the southeast and move to what is now Oklahoma. Thousands died from exposure, disease, and starvation while en route.

In April of 1942, in what is now called the Bataan Death March, the Japanese forced American and Filipino prisoners to march 65 miles without food.

Ancient history is filled with similar such forced relocations, including the dispersion of the Israelites under the Assyrian empire and the Babylonian captivity of Judah.

This is the connotation of the word that Paul uses here—the transfer of a people from one kingdom to another. But Paul uses it in reverse here. We are not leaving our home but returning to it. God brings us out of the kingdom of darkness and into the kingdom of His Son.

This too was pictures in the Old Testament. Abraham was called to leave Ur and go to the promised land as a picture of how we would leave behind this dark world and be brought into the kingdom of heaven. The Israelites were taken out of slavery in Egypt and brought to the land of Canaan. After 70 years, Judah returned from Babylon, where they had made their home, and was brought back to Judah.

It was never God's intention for the Messiah to restore the kingdom of Israel but to remove us from the darkness of this world into the kingdom of heaven.

God doesn't want us to lose focus; the goal is not ease and comfort in this life, but the life and kingdom which is beyond. The goal is to leave behind the things of this life.

This new kingdom is attained through the reconciliation of His blood.

Colossians 1:14: in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.

This also has always been God's plan and focus—that we should receive this kingdom by virtue of the forgiveness that is ours through Jesus' death and resurrection. This is pictured in the sacrifice of Isaac, the substitution of the ram, the blood of the Passover lamb, the animal sacrifices, and many more. All picture the forgiveness that is ours through Jesus' blood on the cross.

Jesus is the firstborn of creation and the firstborn from the dead.

That term "firstborn of creation" is easily misunderstood in English. It does not mean that Jesus is the first created thing; rather, it teaches that He is the source of all creation. This is clearly taught in verse 16, where the Scripture says that **"by Him all things were created."**

The term "firstborn from the dead" should also then be understood in the same way—that He is the source of our resurrection. Yes, He is the first of those who will be raised, but the emphasis here is on Jesus as the source.

Thus Paul says, "He is all in all." He is the source of invisible things in heaven, namely the angels, by virtue of creation, and He is the source of the church by virtue of His death and resurrection.

Again, from the beginning, it was God's plan and focus that we should be brought into the kingdom through the death and resurrection of His Son. Not because we are such good people, not because we are physically descended from Abraham, and not because we attend a Lutheran church, but only because Jesus died for our sins and rose again.

It is true that we must travel through death to receive that kingdom, and death doesn't just mean the day we die; it includes all the pain and suffering of life on this earth, but we know that this pain and suffering which we endure here is not a punishment from God. Jesus has reconciled us by His suffering.

From the beginning, it was God's plan to send Jesus, through whose death and resurrection we would enter into the kingdom of heaven. This is His single-minded focus, and it should be ours as well.