

Why Does Jesus Matter?  
Colossians 1:15–23  
Sunday, September 22, 2024

Let us pray: Lord Jesus, show us who you are, and who you are calling us to be, that your will might be done in this world and in our lives, in Christ. Amen.

For the past year, we have been going through a long-range strategic planning process. We formed a Transformation Team that has been working with a consultant to discern who God is calling us to be and what God is calling us to do now, at this particular chapter in the life of our church. In their first meeting with the consultant, they spent a lot of time asking the question *why*. Why are we going through this process? Why does our church exist? Why should people want to come here?

Some people said *community*. In this digital world where we are becoming more and more disconnected from each other, the church provides community that brings people together and puts them in relationship. But, the consultant said, people can find that anywhere. Join a book group or a running club. There are online groups that bring people together based on their interests. We can find community anywhere.

Some people said *service*. The church provides a place where we can give of ourselves to help others. But if that's all you're looking for, you can join Kiwanis or any other community service organization. You can volunteer at a school or a food bank or a homeless shelter. We can serve anywhere.

Some people said *support*. The church provides a place where people can live life together, supporting and encouraging one another; walking with one another through our celebrations and

our struggles. But if that's what you're looking for, you can just as easily get it with a support group like AA. There are all kinds of groups that provide support for people who are grieving, sick, *caring* for someone who is sick, going through a divorce, struggling with depression. We can find support lots of places.

Some people said *peace*. In a society with such high rates of anxiety and fear, the church is a place where we can find peace. But if that's what you're looking for, you can go to a therapist, take a yoga class, read a self-help book, or just meditate on your own.

If you want to *sing*, take vocal lessons or join a community choir.

All of these things that the church provides can just as easily be found any number of other places. Why should people want to come here? What makes us different? Any guesses? It's Jesus. The one thing that makes the church different from any other civic club, community organization, or support group, is Jesus. The one thing that we offer the world that no one else does is the ability to know Jesus. We are not *about* community or support or service. We are *about* the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and all those other things – community, service, support, peace, singing – all flow out of our relationship with Jesus.

But why does *that* matter? In an increasingly secular society where less and less people have any interest in religion, less and less people are even familiar with who Jesus is and what he's about, why should people who do not already *have* faith care about Jesus? Why does Jesus matter?

This is essentially the question that Paul is answering in our reading from Colossians. The church in Colossae started off strong, but apparently they started doing all these other things that took their focus off of Jesus. So Paul writes to them and says, “You need to remember why you exist and what you’re about. You’re not about all this other stuff that you’ve been doing. You are about *Jesus*. You exist *because of and for Jesus*.” And so early on in this letter, he tells them why that matters; why *Jesus* matters.

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The first thing he says is that Jesus “is the image of the invisible God.” We cannot see God. But if we want to know who God is and what God is like, we look at Jesus. He is the *image* of the God that we cannot see. This matters for a couple of reasons.

First, let’s start with the fact that you came from somewhere. We look around us at the trees and the vastness of the sky, we hear the birds singing and feel the wind blowing, and all of that had to come from somewhere. It was *created by someone*. Even if you believe that the universe and all of us were created as the result of some cosmic chance – there was a Big Bang, and then elements began coming together until eventually stars and planets were created, and *you* were born – I can understand that, but something had to make all of that *happen*. All of those cosmic elements that were condensed down into one singular subatomic particle which then burst out in the Big Bang, that had to come from *somewhere*. And you can say, “It came from *this*,” well, where did *that* come from? It came from *this*. Well, where did *that* come from? And we keep going all the way back, until there’s only one possibility left. It had to come from a *creator*.

Paul says that “in him (in Christ) all things in heaven and on earth were created...all things have been created *through* Christ and *for* Christ,” and, “Christ himself is *before* all things.” Paul is not trying to put forth a scientific theory of creation, and neither is he diminishing the role of

science. Science and religion can coexist, they can partner together perfectly, because science seeks to answer the question of *how* we are here, and religion seeks to answer the question of *why* we are here. And the *why*, Paul says, is *Jesus*. If you want to know your creator, look at Jesus. If you want to know *why you exist*, look at Jesus. If you want to know what your purpose is in this infinitely vast universe, look at Jesus. If you want to know what God's will is, for your life and for all of creation, look at Jesus. If you want to know where all of this is headed, look at Jesus.

People always say, "We can't know the *mind* of God or the *will* of God." But we *can*. Jesus is the image of the invisible God, and in Jesus we see God's will for us. And we see that God's will for us is not just *survival*; keeping our species going. God's will for us is not hatred or pain or sickness or suffering or violence or death. Those things *happen* in this world, they are a *part* of our lives, but they are not what God *wants* for us. They are not a part of God's *plan* for us. In Jesus we see that God's will for us is *life* and *healing* and *wholeness* and *peace* and *love*. If you want to know why you exist, if you want your life to make sense, then you need to look to the one who *created* you, and to *do* that, we look to *Jesus*.

Jesus *matters* because he shows us who *God* is and who God created *us* to *be*.

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So God has a purpose for us, an intention and desire for our lives and for all of creation. But, if we're honest, we do not always live out that purpose. We do not always *meet* God's intention and desire for our lives. We make mistakes. We hurt each other. We allow people to be hungry and poor and to suffer, while we seek to satisfy our own needs and desires. We hold grudges and seek revenge. We fail to love each other and this world that God has created and entrusted to us. And we don't always *mean* to or *want* to. It's not always *malicious* or *intentional*. Sometimes

we just don't know the right thing to do. And sometimes we *know* the right thing to do, but for whatever reason, we just don't *do* it. Not a single one of us has lived a perfect life. We have *all*, in *some* way, fallen short of what God wants for us. And we all, in some way, carry the guilt and pain of those failures around with us.

But, Paul says, through Jesus "God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross. And [we] who were once estranged and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, Jesus has now reconciled in his fleshly body through death, so as to present us holy and blameless and irreproachable before God." When human beings were faced with the image of the invisible God, God made flesh in Jesus Christ, the response of humanity was not to *love* him but to *kill* him. But as he was hanging on the cross, his response was not to *condemn* us but to say, "Father, *forgive them.*" Jesus took all the sin and anger and hatred and pain of the world onto himself, and he *forgave it*.

In doing so, Jesus forgives *us* and makes us whole again and reconciles us to God. Even though we fall short of what God wants for us, God does not *punish* us or *destroy* us. Our sin and mistakes do not stop God from *loving* us. Jesus shows us that there is nothing we *have* to do to make God love us more, and there is nothing we *can* do to make God love us less. God loves us, not because we have proven ourselves worthy and deserving, but because *God chooses to love us*. God *wants* to love us.

Jesus *matters* because in him we find forgiveness for our sin, healing and wholeness for our guilt and shame and pain. We cannot find that *anywhere else*. And Jesus *matters* because he shows us how to forgive *each other*, how to reconcile with the people we have hurt or who have hurt us, how to be whole with them again, how to *love them*. And Jesus *matters* because in him we find

the ongoing grace that we need to live each day, when we inevitably slip up and make mistakes again. Every single day we can look back to the cross and be reminded of the forgiveness and love that God has for us that enables us to keep going and to want to do it *better* next time.

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So Jesus *matters* because he shows us who *God* is and who God created *us* to *be*. He matters because in him we find forgiveness when we inevitably *fall short* of who God created us to be. And finally, Jesus matters because in him we find *hope*. I don't know about you, but when I look at the world around us, it can be *really hard* to have *hope*. There is so much violence and suffering and death, so much hatred and injustice and oppression. There are so many problems that feel so impossibly big, and the people who *are* in positions of power to do something about it, don't seem to care. It is so easy to look at this world and expect the worst. It is so easy to feel overwhelmed and anxious and angry. It is so easy to *despair*.

But Paul says that in Jesus "all things hold together." This world is not falling apart, because Jesus is holding it together. Maybe by a *thread*, but he's holding it together. Your life will not fall apart because Jesus is holding it together. *You* do not have to hold it together, because *Jesus* is holding it together. You may have experienced the worst pain and loss imaginable, but you are *still here*, because Jesus is holding you together. You may *still* have to experience unimaginable pain and loss. Jesus never promises us that we *won't*. He never promises us that our lives will be free from pain and suffering and loss. In fact, he promises us just the opposite; that we *will* experience these things. But he *also* promises us that he will be *with us* and *hold us together* when we do.

And Jesus promises us that life is not just random and chaotic and pointless. That there is a *goal* toward which God is moving all of creation. That just as all of creation came *from* God, all of

creation will *return to* God. That God is working to *heal* this broken world and our broken lives. That the time is coming when God will wipe every tear from our eyes. Death will be no more. Mourning and crying and pain will be no more. The wolf shall live with the lamb; those who are at odds will be *whole*. The whole earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. And God will make all things, even us, *new*.

It may not always *seem* like it. It may seem like this world is just filled with darkness. But Jesus is the light of God shining in the darkness, and the darkness will never overcome him. He has already conquered sin and death through his own death and resurrection. There is *still* sin, and there is *still* death, but those things do not hold any *real* or *lasting* power over us. They could not stop *Jesus* from living, and they cannot stop *us* from living either.

The time will come when God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven; when all of creation lives under the rule and reign and power and authority and love of God. *That* is what all of this is moving toward. And until that day comes, we wait, and we hope, and we do the best we can to live lives that reflect the peace and healing and love of Jesus to everyone around us.

Jesus *matters* because he gives us hope that *tomorrow* can be better than *today*, and that he will hold us and all things together until it *is*.

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In Jesus we find *purpose* and *forgiveness* and *hope*. *That* is what this church is *about*. *That* is what we have to offer the world that no one else does. *That* is the message that we should be sharing with the world, not just with our *words* but with our *lives*. We are called by Jesus to live lives of purpose and forgiveness and hope. And *that* is the *only* kind of life that *really matters*.  
Amen.