



Colossians 1:15-20 – “How big is your vision of Christ?”

Lakeshore Community Church of Christ, 9:30am, 2 August 2009

What is your vision of Jesus? Who is Jesus, to you? There are a wide range of views in our society.

To some, the words Jesus Christ are no more than a **casual swearword**. To these people, Jesus is not even a person.

To some, they see Jesus only as a **Simpson's character** (the episode where Homer goes as a missionary to the South Pacific), a **bumper sticker** (“Jesus would use his indicators”) or a **T-shirt Slogan** (“Jesus is my homeboy”). This group of people have an extremely superficial view of Jesus, reflecting more about themselves and their society than Jesus Christ.

To some, Jesus was a **great moral teacher – an influential historical figure**. Michael Hart, in ‘The 100’ (a ranking of the most influential people in history, mentioned by David Cook at the Sunshine Coast Bible Convention) presents entirely human portrait of Jesus & his influence. What effect can this vision of Jesus have? Some inspiration possibly, but no change in heart.

A different vision of Christ - the view of a **“Spiritual Baby”**, as LT preached from Heb 5 last week. This is like an introductory view of Jesus - an “Easter and Christmas” view. The birth and death of Christ. This vision of Christ will have an effect – this person can become a Christian - spiritually alive, they have a relationship with God. But if their vision of Jesus does not grow, they will not “go on to maturity”.

Finally, we can see **Christ as he truly is!** This is Paul's vision of Jesus in today's passage, Colossians 1:15-20! This is an awesome vision of Christ! A mind blowing, majestic, vast and glorious vision of Christ! Among Paul's descriptions are such descriptions as Christ the **firstborn over all creation**, Christ whom **all things were created for**, Christ **supreme in everything**, Christ indwelt with **all the fullness of God** Christ who existed **before the universe was made**, Christ **our head** today.

Here's my point today: **“Your growth in Christian maturity will match the size of your vision of Jesus Christ.”**

If your vision of Jesus is **no more than a casual swearword, a fashion image or a TV character**, this is not Jesus as he really is, and this will bring about no change in your life.

If your vision of Jesus is at **“baby” level** – he has changed your life, but you will not grow to maturity in him.

But if you will **“fix your eyes”**, as Hebrews has encouraged us to do, **“fix your eyes”** on Christ as he really is, he will lead you on to maturity in him.

Paul's Letter to the Colossians

- Letter to young church
- Started with thanksgiving and prayer
- 1:15-20 starts the real meat of the letter, an introduction of central theme:
 - John Piper calls it "**the most concentrated description of Christ's glories in the NT**".
 - John Stott calls it "**the most sublime Christological passage in the whole of the NT**".
- Why does Paul break into this awesome vision of Christ to begin his letter?
 - What was his purpose in writing? To correct some errors in the church.
 - Examples: legalistic rules, angel worship, secret knowledge.
 - Paul's correction starts by reminding them of **who Christ is**.

Imagine I started a basketball club, then moved away. I hear that the club having various problems, and in fact have decided to stop using a ball when they play! I could communicate with the club, and remind them of the fundamental importance of using **a basketball** when playing the game of **basketball**. I'm confident that this would address any other issues the club was experiencing!

This is what Paul does – he reminds these **Christians** of the fundamental importance of **Christ** – and who he is. This will overflow in the other areas, solve the other problems.

So... **How big is your vision of Jesus?** To borrow John Stott's word – What is your "Christology". Jesus has his own field of study – Christology – and we are all students. So let's examine Paul's Christology; Paul's vision of Jesus Christ. And I pray that after today, your vision will match Paul's vision – that your vision will match the reality of who Christ is!

Paul speaks of 4 relationships of Christ:

- In v.15a, His relationship with God the Father (largest possible view)
- In v.15a – 17 His relationship with the Created Universe (still very large)
- In v.18, His relationship with the church (zooming in)
- In v.19-20, His relationship with you and me (full zoom)

What is Christ's relationship with God the Father?

1. "Christ is God, revealed" (v15a)

- **"Image"**: The term reminds us of Hebrews 1 ("exact representation of His being"). Read v19 also – "all his fullness". **Christ is God, in all his fullness**.
- **"Invisible"**: No one has ever seen God. A consistent message throughout the whole Bible. **Christ is God, made visible**. He is the incarnation – God, come to us in human form. How could you respond to an invisible God, who has not revealed himself? You couldn't. But **you can respond to God, because he has made himself known in Christ**.

When I was at uni, my sister was also at uni, studying law, and I learned from here an obscure legal theory: "**A law is not a law if it is not enforced**". At this time I was struggling with such weighty moral issues as whether I should cross the road while the little red man was still showing, and this legal theory caught my attention. For example, if the laws against speeding were not enforced, the law might as well not exist. But they are enforced by police and speed cameras, and thus we pay attention to them, and they have an impact of us.

If you do **not believe that Jesus is God, revealed** to us, your relationship with God might resemble my obscure legal theory. He's there, yet you feel free to ignore him as you have not seen him. But if **you believe that God has revealed himself in Christ** – that you can know God, through Christ - God becomes much more real to you, and you can respond to him.

What is Christ's relationship with Creation?

2. "Christ is Supreme over Creation" (v15a-17)

- **"Firstborn over"** – Again, similar to "Heir of all things" in Hebrews 1. He's in charge! "Over all creation." Not "of all creation"; Christ is not a created being. Christ is Lord of creation.
- **"By him all things were created"** – Christ was the creative power who made everything in our universe. This rolls easily off the tongue, but it's an incredible statement.

- Consider the immensity of this universe that he created:
 - o **Our Sun:** Produces more energy in 1 second than we've produced in all of human history! You could fit 1 million Earths inside our Sun.
 - o **Our Galaxy, the Milky Way:** Our Sun is only average size! There are 100 billion stars in the Milky Way! Would take 100 000 light years to get across it!
 - o And I could go on! The Milky Way is not a big galaxy...
 - o "Look up into the heavens," says Isaiah, "Who created all the stars?"

- **"Before all things"** – Jesus is before all things in time, and before all things in rank.

Is this your vision of Jesus?! What is the proper response to someone like this?! **Worship!** We are part of creation, and Christ is our Lord and Creator.

- **"All things were created ... for him"**. The purpose of every created thing is for the worship and glory of Jesus. You are. Everything you own is. Every relationship you have is. All for the worship and glory of Christ.
- **"In him, all things hold together"**. (Is Paul making a point, possibly – he keeps repeating the phrase "all things"?). Hebrews 1 says Christ is "sustaining all things by his powerful word". The whole universe he made holds together in him. The very life within us was given by His breath, and is sustained by him. And everything you have, every relationship you have, every hope and dream you have - holds together only in Christ.

Is this your vision of Christ? Is it this big?! If so – how can you not worship? How can you not surrender everything you have to him, for his glory?

Your growth in Christian maturity matches the size of your vision of Christ.

What is Christ's relationship with the church?

3. "Christ is the head of the church" (v18)

- **"Head of the body, the church"**. The analogy is obvious – he's the head, we're the body. The body can only do what the head directs it to do. Christ is our head.
- **"The beginning"**, or the Origin. He started the church, while he was here on Earth! He's the founder of the church.

- I was involved for 10 years with Campus Crusade for Christ, founded in 1950 by Bill Bright. He was a Great man, who for 50 years was used in amazing ways by God. While I was with CCC, Bill Bright died. He's not in charge any longer – the next guy has taken over. Yet Jesus, the founder of the church, is still in charge. He's the only founder of anything who is still in charge more than a lifetime later. He the beginning, and he's the eternal head of the church.

- **“The firstborn from among the dead”**. Christ started the church physically, and he also started the church spiritually. Because Jesus was first raised from the dead, we can be raised from the dead. The church is the group of people who have shared in his spiritual resurrection now, and look forward to sharing in his physical resurrection one day.
- **“So that in everything he might have the supremacy”**. Supreme in the old creation – creator, sustainer, Lord. Supreme in the new creation, the church – beginning, firstborn, head. Supreme in everything.

Don't miss the significance of the church. Jesus' creation of the church is given equal weight as his creation of the entire universe. The Lord of the entire universe, also the Lord of... the church. And the way we take part in this church of Jesus? Largely, through this little church at Lakeshore. Remember the significance of church – it's not in the same category as our other activities.

Here at Lakeshore, Christ is our head. Not the Elders. Not LT. Not even the congregational vote at the AGM holds the final authority! Christ is our head. We must follow him and obey him. **He's in charge. HE REALLY IS!** He's made his will for our church quite clear to us, in the bible, his Word. We have in our heart His Spirit to guide and empower us. Here at Lakeshore Community Church of Christ, Jesus is our head.

What is Christ's relationship to you and me?

4. **“Christ is the source of our peace.”** (v.19-20)

- **Reconcile to himself all things** – Christ was the agent of reconciliation between God and all of his creation. The image is of a broken relationship. We were made for relationship with, but because of sin, the relationship is broken. By his blood on the cross, Christ has reconciled that relationship.
- **“Making peace through his blood”**
 - o As always, we struck by the astounding contrast of Christ on the cross – here is the Lord of Creation, a figure of astounding, eternal majesty, dying on a cross.
 - o And so, we can have peace with God. We were a person without a home. We were a child without a Father. We were a creation without it's creator. But now ... we can have peace.

How can we make this peace real in our lives?

1. **Find peace in Him.** Please ask me about this, ask a leader, ask a friend.
2. **Live in him, at peace.**
Colossians 2:6-7 “Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him.”
3. **Grow to maturity in him.**
Colossians 1:28 “We proclaim him (Christ) ... so that we may proclaim everyone mature in Christ.”

How big is your vision of Christ?

Your growth in Christian maturity will match the size of your vision of Christ. So fix your eyes on him! I pray that your vision of Christ has been enlarged as we have examined Paul's vision of Christ in Colossians 1:15-20.

As John Piper puts it, a vision of Christ like this “should intensify your **trust and obedience and worship.**”

As John Stott puts it, If we have a vision of Christ like this, **“our worship, our faith, our obedience will be drawn out from us,** and we shall give him the honour and the glory which are due his unique name.”