

The Resurrection and Christ's Preeminence Over All Things (Col. 1:15–23)

Easter Sunday

Zionsville Fellowship | April 5, 2026 | Drew Hunter

I wonder if you've ever wondered: *Why do Christians emphasize Jesus's resurrection so much?*

It's not merely because it was a surprising miracle. It's not just because it's become a tradition. It's not just because it gives people a reason for a holiday.

Christians emphasize the resurrection because of what it tells us about who Jesus is. And what it tells us about Jesus changes the way we view everything else.

Many people followed Jesus in his ministry. But when he died, they thought their movement was over. And then he rose from the dead, and everything changed. They started to understand who he really was. And it led them to rethink everything about life, history, and reality itself.

They came to believe that Jesus is truly God—and that he never had a beginning. And that all things were created through him. And that everything was made for him. And that he is moving all of history toward a day when he will make all things new.

And this filled them with joyful hope, even in the midst of suffering. Many Christians have suffered and died to bring this message of hope to others. And they believe it was worth it.

And it can fill us with the same kind of joy and hope in suffering.

But only if we trade our diminished view of Jesus for the real one.

Maybe you have never been taught about Jesus's true and full identity. You've never really understood why it matters whether or not Jesus really rose from the dead.

Or maybe you have, but over time, your view of Jesus diminishes. That's what happens to all of us: Our view of Jesus gets dimmer, smaller, vaguer. And so he becomes less captivating to us.

So, what do we need? We need a clear, exalted, bright view of the real Jesus.

This is what we have in Colossians 1:15–23. This comes at the end of Paul's prayer of thanksgiving for the Christians in the ancient city of Colossae. And at the end of his prayer, he turns this this explosive vision of Jesus.

Colossians 1:15–23

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For by him all things were created, 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. 17 And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18 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. 19 For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, 20 and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

21 And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, 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, 23 if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.

This is a unique text.

- The apostle Paul writes this with exalted, poetic language. This kind of language asks us slow down and think it through.
- He gives us a big vision of Jesus here. This is different than the gospel stories of Jesus. The gospel stories narrate Jesus's life, death, and resurrection. Paul now reflects on this theologically and explains who Jesus is.
- And we'll see that there is one repeated emphasis all the way through here: the preeminence of Christ. This means he is supreme, he is the highest, he has first place, and there are no competitors. He is preeminent over the past, present, and future. He is preeminent over all creation and all things.
- And the resurrection is central to all of this.

So, here is the message of this text:

The risen Christ is preeminent over all things.

If you want to know why Jesus captivated minds over the past two thousand years, this is it. This is the vision of Jesus that fills people with joy and hope in suffering.

The message of this text is that Christ is preeminent over all things. And there are three movements to this text that fill this out. He is preeminent over all of creation, over the new creation, and over your life. We'll walk through this phrase-by-phrase.

1. Preeminent Over All Creation (vv. 15–17)

First, Christ is preeminent over all creation.

This is verses 15–17. Every phrase was carefully chosen—and contributes to this main point. So let's walk through each one.

Verse 15 begins with “He is the image of the invisible God.”

What does an image do? It portrays or reflects something else. Jesus is the perfect reflection of the Father's character.

This is what humanity was always supposed to do. God created us in his image to reflect his perfect character in all of life. We have all failed to do this, but Jesus does it perfectly.

And Jesus does this from before creation even began.¹ From eternity past, the Son perfectly reflected the Father's character.

One of my favorite periods of history to read about it is America's founding era. Every time I start into a new book, I turn to the picture insert in the middle of it. And I look the portraits of the most prominent people in the book. And when you do this for the books in the founding era, you'll see the same artist's name by many of them: Charles Willson Peale. Two things fascinate me about his portraits—their realism, and also the way he was able to portray the person's character. He subtly shows you their emotions, their personality, their fears or confidence or weakness or strengths.

His portrait is not just a snapshot of what someone looked like in that moment—it is also an image of their character. But it's just a portrait.

Jesus is the true and perfect image of God—he perfectly embodies the Father's character. His power, his compassion, his authority, and his love. He is the image of the invisible God.

And then Paul adds, he is “the firstborn of all creation.”

Many have misunderstood this—as if it was saying he is the first part of God's creation. That was the view of the ancient heretic Arius, and also Jehovah's witnesses today.

But there are two reasons why that's not what “firstborn” means here.

1. First, Paul says next that he was before all things, and all things were created through him.
2. Second, term “firstborn” often referred to the place of preeminence. In the ancient world, the firstborn son received most of the inheritance. And this term was used metaphorically to describe the preeminence of kings. So, in Psalm 89, it says the coming Davidic king would be “the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth” (Psa. 89:27). That was a metaphor for the highest rank. The preeminent one over all creation.

So this could be translated, “the firstborn *over* all creation.”

And why is he the firstborn, the preeminent one over all creation?

Verse 16 gives the reason: “For by him all things were created, 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.” Jesus is worthy of this title because he created everything and he rules over everything. The Father created all things in and by the son.

And everything is in view here—all things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible.

And notice where Paul goes when he begins to explain this. He could have mentioned mountains and oceans and fish and polar bears. But he mentions *rulers*—both visible and invisible. He mentions the power structures of the world—both human rulers and authorities, as well as invisible rulers and authorities.

This is a cosmic political statement—the greatest political statement that could be made. When the first Christians said *Jesus is Lord*, it means that every other Lord is under him. Every other king, president, prime minister, and governor is under him.

And Paul also includes invisible rulers of the unseen spiritual realm. We’ve largely forgotten about this in the West, but the ancient world and many non-westerners know about this. The Colossians who first read this know them as well. These powers were operating in pagan religions, in astrology, and in magic.ⁱⁱ

We’re seeing a rise in spiritual awareness today. Many wonder if there is not some spiritual darkness behind the tragedies of our times. And many are fascinated by the recent possibilities of UFOs or UAPs or aliens. Some think that if this stuff is real, it calls into question the Christian worldview. But not at all—the Christian worldview has a category for unseen powers that influence our world.

And here’s the powerful point of this verse: Christ is the firstborn ruler over all of them. They were all made through him and for him.

And not just the visible and invisible powers—but all things. Christ is Lord over everything.

And his power goes beyond just creating everything—notice verse 17: “he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”

He is before all things temporally, because he is eternally pre-existent.
And holds everything together—he sustains all things.

“All things” here doesn’t mean some things; it means all things. That means every molecule and atom is held together by Christ. He is currently, moment-by-moment keeping every part of your body together. And he is doing the same thing with every galaxy.

This densely poetic few verses means that nothing is neutral.

Everything is made by Christ and for Christ. He is preeminent over all things. Every person, every ruler—visible and invisible—owes its moment-by-moment existence to him.

Paul—the one who wrote this—did not begin with this high view of Jesus. He was a Jewish leader who rejected the claims of Christ. He personally tracked down and arrested Christians. But then he encountered the risen Christ in a vision—and everything changed. He began to put it all together: This risen Christ is the preexistent ruler over all things.

So, first, Jesus is preeminent over all creation.

2. Preeminent Over the New Creation (vv. 18–20)

This moves to the second part—Jesus is preeminent over the new creation.

This is verses 18–20, and Jesus’s preeminence is the point of this section as well. Verse 18 says, “And he is the head of the body, the church.”

Jesus is the head of the church, which is viewed as his body. It’s a metaphor that shows the relationship between Jesus and his people.

He is the head, which refers to two things:

1. First, the head is the control-center for the body. It is the authority.
2. And second, the head is the source of life for the body. The church is dependent on Christ—who is our head and authority and source of life.

And then Paul says, “he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead.”

“The beginning” probably refers to Jesus being the beginning of the new creation. He is the starting point of a whole new creation that began with his resurrection from the dead.

Here’s what this means:

- The Old Testament prophets spoke of the day when God would renew this broken creation. There would be a new creation—completely renewed. No more sin, suffering, or sorrow.
- And the new creation would also be when all God’s people would be raised from the dead. Our very bodies would be restored and renewed so we could live forever on a new earth.

- Here is the great surprise of Jesus’s resurrection: This new creation began in the midst of this current old creation. Jesus was the first one raised from the dead, the first human to receive a resurrection body. This broken creation continues along, but one man rose in the midst of it.

And notice, Paul did not just say he was “born from the dead,” but that he is “*the firstborn from the dead.*” He is the first one, and the rest will eventually follow. You can think of the coming day of resurrection like a great harvest—the crops all rise up in the field. But 2,000 years ago, one crop already rose. Jesus. And this is the beginning of the new creation.

If you trust Christ, you are part of this. You are already spiritually raised from the dead with Christ—and you will be physically raised when he returns to renew all things.

And why was Jesus the first one raised from the dead? Why was he the beginning of this new creation? So that—as Paul says here—“in everything he might be preeminent.”

This is the purpose of Jesus’s resurrection.

When we are resurrected to live on this new earth one day—it will not be thanks to us. It will be thanks to him. He was the first one raised, and we will only be raised because of him. He launched it all.

If Jesus never rose from the dead, then this world and all of us would end in destruction. But Jesus rose as the beginning of a new world of eternal life. And this is why he is and will always be preeminent.

Paul expands on this next. He says, “For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell.”

“All the fullness of God was pleased to dwell” in Christ. What a peculiar phrase. I didn’t understand what that meant for many years.

And then I learned that this is a way of referring to the temple. The Old Testament refers to God being *pleased to dwell* in the temple. This is saying Jesus is the place of God’s presence.

Before Christ, the temple was the pre-eminent place on earth, the place of God’s presence. Now Jesus is the true temple; he is the place of God’s presence.

And what was one of the purposes of the temple? It was the meeting place between God and humanity. The temple was the place where sinners could be reconciled to God.

At the heart of the temple was an altar for sacrifices.

People were restored to God through a sacrifice.

The sacrifice was about substitution: We deserve to die, but the sacrifice takes our place. The sacrifice dies in our place for our sins, so we can be forgiven and reconciled to God.

And now that Jesus is the temple, he is also the true and final sacrifice.

This is what Paul says next in verse 20: “and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.” It is through the blood of his cross that we are reconciled to God. The blood of the cross refers to his sacrifice. He died in our place, so that we could be forgiven and restored to God. It is through his death in our place—that we have peace with God.

And do you see the cosmic scope of this? Paul says, “through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.” Jesus did not come to just restore sinners to himself—but to restore *all things*. The restoration of the whole creation is in view. He came so that one day all things would be set right, all things set at peace, all things made new. This is where everything is heading in history—to the restoration of all things, to a new creation where peace will dwell.

This includes the human world, the natural world, and the spiritual world.

- With the human world, God restores people to himself through the blood of Jesus.

All who trust in Christ are reconciled and restored to God. This doesn't mean that everyone will be saved in the end—because Jesus will come and judge and destroy all who reject him. But all who trust him will be reconciled to him forever.

- With the natural world, all of creation will be made new.

Everything will be set right and put in order. When humanity sinned in Eden, the whole creation was plunged into decay. But when God raises us from the dead, the curse on creation will be lifted. The environment will thrive as it was always meant to do.

- And in the spiritual world, every spiritual being will be in submission to Jesus.

The good angelic world will be at rest, no longer embattled against the darker forces. And the demonic world will be subject to him against their will. Every enemy will be destroyed, including death. Everything will be at peace.

Jesus is preeminent over the creation and the new creation...

3. Preeminent Over Your Life (vv. 21–23)

Which leads to the third movement, and what this means for us—Jesus is preeminent over you.

The exalted, poetic language of verses 15–20 now give way to a very personal address. Notice the first two words in verse 21, as Paul applies this: He says, “and you...”

He addresses Christians here—those who are trusting in Christ for salvation. And he is telling those of us who believe what is true of us in light of this. He tells us something about our past, our present, and our future.

First, our past, in verse 21: “And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds.”

We were once alienated from God, separated from him. And this is because we were hostile in our minds; we resisted his rule over us and we did evil deeds.

This is the opposite of how we were created to be.
Humanity was made in God’s image—created to perfectly reflect God’s character.
Created to be one with him, not alienated.
Created to be at peace with him, not hostile.
Created to be lovers of God and lovers of others—not doing evil deeds.
But because of sin’s entrance into this world, this is who we all were or are.

If you are a true Christian, if you are trusting in Christ—then this is your past.
You still have remnants of this hostility in your heart, but you have changed.
He has forgiven you. And he is transforming you from the inside-out.
Your life is marked less and less by evil deeds, and more and more by acts of love.

If you are not a Christian yet, then this is a description of you.
It may not feel true at first—many tell us that we are all born innocent and good. They say the only reason we do bad is because of our environment and bad examples.

But the Bible makes better sense of the human condition.
We all have a deep inclination away from God and toward selfishness.
We set ourselves as the center of our lives.
We make ourselves preeminent in our lives.
And to make ourselves preeminent is an act of hostility toward Christ.
He created us and upholds us, and we make ourselves the firstborn rulers of our lives.

But what has God done for his people—and what does he offer you if you’re not yet a Christian?

This is 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.”

Jesus—the ruler of all creation—came to offer himself as a sacrifice for you. He died the death you deserve. On Good Friday, he took the judgment that should consume all of us. He did this so that we could be forgiven and made new. He did this to reconcile us to God.

Your salvation is not your achievement. It's Christ's. And this is why we are not pre-eminent, but he is. We do not get congratulated for being smart and good enough to become Christians. No, we were hostile, but Jesus died for us and then gave us new hearts. He reconciled us to himself.

And if you are not a Christian yet, this is available to you. You can receive this reconciliation through his death.

Verse 23 points us now to our future—we are reconciled, he says, “if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard.”

As Jesus said, it is the one who endures to the end who will be saved. You are reconciled to God right now, if indeed you also persevere in the faith. Perseverance is the test of reality. Your endurance in the faith proves that you have, in fact, been reconciled to God.

This is an encouragement to hold fast.

And notice—he says to hold fast “to the hope of the gospel that you heard.” The gospel gives us hope, because the gospel is about Jesus's plan to renew all things. When Jesus rose from the dead—do you know what that meant for your future? If you are trusting in him, it means that everything will be okay in the end. Maybe not now, maybe not in the next year, but you are heading toward a renewed world.

I read an article in a mainline news feed this weekend that missed this entirely. It said that the message of Easter is that, if you are suffering, just wait three days. ...Just wait. You never know what will happen. So Jesus's resurrection after three days means if we suffer, we just need to wait three days? That's silly. But there is a seed of truth there: It means that one day we will rise like him. If you suffer in this life, wait until the resurrection. All will be made new.

Because Christ is preeminent over all creation, and he is preeminent over the new creation—this is why the gospel is proclaimed in all creation. That's the last thing Paul says here: the gospel “which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister.”

The message of the gospel is good news for everything—for sinners and for all of creation.

When Paul said this, the gospel had not yet spread very far. But it was on its way. He knew it wasn't a message for a few, but for everyone. And it is good news not even just for humanity, but for all creation.

You can picture the announcement of this good news as coming from a loudspeaker. The soundwaves started to spread from Jerusalem, then all around Judea, and then to various parts of the Roman Empire like Colossae. And it has continued to spread today—it is on its way to be proclaimed in all creation.

And it still has more room to travel. Which is why we are hearing it today—maybe for some of you, for the first time. And this is why we send missionaries to the least reached places where it has not yet been proclaimed. Because Jesus is preeminent over every square inch of the world, and over every culture, and they need to hear this good news.

Implications

So, as we go, here are three implications for us—I'll ask three sets of questions for you to consider.

First, do you have a big enough view of Jesus?

When you think of him on any given day, is this the Jesus that comes to mind?
When you think of your salvation, do you realize this is what you've been brought into?
Jesus is greater than our greatest thoughts of him.

So, moving forward, how can you know and live in light of this view of Jesus?

- Read the gospel stories of Jesus—get to know him in the gospel stories of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. And then also get to know him in the letters like this one. The gospel stories tell the narrative of who Jesus is and what he did. The letters fill out the theology more clearly. They complement one another, and we need both.
- And read good theology books. We have a number of books out on the table in the lobby that will help. (We don't make any profit on those, by the way—they are there to help).
- And find ways to keep this true vision of Jesus on your mind and heart every day. Memorize this text. Think about it. Pray in light of it.
- And as you grow in this, help others grow. That's what Paul is doing—he is giving this portrait of Jesus to other believers. This is a model of Christians discipling other Christians—Christians helping other Christians grow to know the real Jesus.

Second, does this exalted view of Jesus lead you to joyfully give thanks to the Father?

That's what Paul is doing here. In the paragraph just before this, he says he gives thanks to the Father for their salvation. He said he gave thanks to the Father for bringing them into the kingdom of his beloved Son. And then he launched into this poetic paragraph of Jesus's preeminence over all things.

This whole text is an overflow of joyful thanksgiving. So, as you keep these truths about Jesus and salvation in view through your days—let it lead you to give thanks. And as Paul is doing here, pray and give thanks for other believers. This exalted view of Jesus should lead us to thank God for saving Christians—and to pray that they would grow as well.

Finally, are you remaining stable and steadfast in your hope?

That's what Paul says at the end here—he wants us to remain stable and steadfast in the *hope* of the gospel. The good news of Jesus is not just about a historical event in the past, or even our salvation in the past—it is hope for our future.

Whatever sin you are tempted with, whatever suffering you are going through—Jesus gives you hope. The resurrection gives you hope. Because it says Jesus is preeminent over it all, and one day everything will be okay.

This is what we seek to do every Sunday here at Zionsville Fellowship. One of the central purposes of our gathering is to show that Jesus is preeminent in everything. And this is to cultivate hope in our hearts. The way we welcome in this service, the songs we choose to sing, the prayers we pray, the sermons we hear—it all serves this goal: To show the preeminence of Jesus in all things, so that we can strengthen our hope in him.

Charles Spurgeon—the 1800s pastor from London—said this, and it sums up our text well:

Oh that you and I would never cut and divide Christ so as to choose one part of him and leave another. Let not a bone of him be broken, but let us take in a whole Christ up to the full measure of our capacity. Prophet, Priest, and King, Christ divine and Christ human, Christ loving and living, Christ dying, Christ risen, Christ ascended, Christ coming again, Christ triumphant over all his foes—the whole Lord Jesus Christ is ours; we must not reject a single particle of what is revealed concerning him, but must feed upon it all as we are able.

ⁱ See Greg Beale, *Colossians*, 83-85. And N.T. Wright, *Colossians*, 74.

ⁱⁱ See N. T. Wright, *Colossians*, 77