

Back in my schooldays when assemblies were taken by the deputy headmaster he always began with the words: "The HEAD is away..."

This antiquated phrase conjured up an image of a disembodied head floating around like something out of Dr Who. But of course his words made perfect sense: the headmaster was the HEAD. Without him the school was incomplete.

A HEAD is vital for ANY body to function, it holds it together: whether a school, a business, or a football team; you need someone at the top to run things.

Without a head, body can't live. The head gives life, direction, meaning, control and purpose to the body.

In Colossians Ch 1, v 15-23, Paul is making that very point in relation to Jesus Xt.

He says that He is the HEAD of His body – the Church. But he is more than that – he is the Head of everything. Ultimately nothing makes any sense without him.

If a well-known journalist like Louis Theroux had stopped Paul in his travels and asked him, Who is this Jesus you're always speaking about? He would have said exactly what he says in these verses which give us one of the clearest statements about Jesus in the whole Bible. It's mind-blowing in its simplicity and depth. Even so you feel that Paul is struggling to find the right words as he tries to convey the greatness of Christ in a way that will leave people in no doubt as to who he really is – and why he came – and why he died and rose again.

Why is this important? People have all sorts of mistaken ideas as to who Jesus was – seeing him as a mere man, even an exceptional man, who taught and did some amazing things, but whose life came to an end on a cross outside Jerusalem 2000 yrs ago. Full stop. And that's it. But that's not how Paul saw him – and it's not how the rest of the New Testament sees him, so listen again to some of Paul's descriptions of Jesus:

- The image of the invisible God... ie God's visible likeness
- The 1st born over all creation....
- he is before all things...in whom all things hold together...
- by him all things were created visible/invisible...
- it was all made through him and for him...
- he is the HEAD of the body, the church...
- he is to have the supremacy – 1st place in everything...
- AND... God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him. ie He has in himself the full nature of God...these tremendous expressions highlight who Jesus really is.

And when Paul explains what Jesus has done, supremely on the cross, we find that it touches not only individuals, but the whole of creation, even the whole universe.

So let's look into this further:

1. Jesus is **The image of the invisible God.**

By looking at JESUS we discover who GOD is. Think of it this way:

Imagine you're sitting in a room, and there's someone in the next room, but you can't see them because there's a wall in the way. So that person's invisible to you. You can't see them.

But say there's a mirror on the wall facing the two rooms and both doors are open, then you could look out and see a mirror-image of the person in the next room - and the invisible person would become visible.

Well here, Paul is telling us that Jesus is God's mirror-image, he's the only image that accurately represents God to us. All that God is, is summed up in Jesus. To look at Him, is to find yourself looking uniquely at God. So all talk of God without reference to Jesus Christ is incomplete.

Just look at Jesus in the pages of the New Testament –

- See him with the blind, the lame, the sick, the possessed
- See him at the grave of Lazarus
- Watch him cleansing the temple
- See him weeping over the stubborn city of Jerusalem
- Study him befriending rip-off merchants and prostitutes and changing their lives
- Hear him teaching with authority
- Listen to him giving scribes and Pharisees a piece of his mind, exposing their hypocrisy
- Hear him praying in the garden of Gethsemane and witness even a glimpse of his mental and spiritual anguish

Look at him bearing the grossest indignities and the cruellest pain

See him hanging on the cross, covered in blood and hear his words of forgiveness...

And then notice the way he greets his disciples the first Easter morning, and say to yourself, THAT'S GOD I'M SEEING. Nothing and no-one less than GOD!

Because Jesus is the image of the invisible God.

Next, Paul expands this by saying he is also *"The first-born over all creation - the first born from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy"*.

Now that he's been raised from the dead - Jesus takes the highest place in the family of God and in the whole creation. And so he's entitled to the highest esteem and love. He is **the** HEAD, with priority over everything...superior to **all** created things.

Think of "the noblest work of God" you can imagine – the highest mountain – the finest lion – the most intricate insect – the most majestic sunset – the most stunning burst of lightning – or in human terms even Robbie Burns' "honest man" or indeed the finest person you've ever known: Jesus is far superior to them all.

Because He's the finest. He is supreme. When we look at him, we're seeing someone quite unique.

Now why does Paul lay such great emphasis on Jesus like this?

Because the Christians in Colossae needed to know this about him if they were to grow in their faith – as do we.

As in our own day, false teachers were doing the rounds hawking false philosophies which downgraded Jesus, and treated him as just one among a number of ways to God. So Paul has to clear the Colossians' minds on this: and tell them that **you can't get more of God than you get in Jesus**. v19 *For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,*

The God-ness of Jesus was God's idea, not dreamt up by the apostle Paul or anyone else and as Hebrews Ch 1 tells us **He alone is God's final word to the human race**.

God has nothing more to say to the world than he's said in Jesus Christ.

And in this postmodern, pick n' mix world in which we live, anyone who claims to have new revelations about God that go beyond what the New Testament teaches, are - I have to say: simply liars. Because the fullness of God lives in Jesus. So any claims to spirituality that reject him as GOD incarnate, are wide of the mark and should be avoided.

Say a couple of nice well-meaning people turn up at your door this week, offering to talk to you about God, about Jehovah. Ask them what they think about Jesus Christ. This is key. They'll tell you he was the Son of God, yes - but they'll never agree that he was God incarnate: God in human flesh.

But the Bible knows no other Jesus. He is the image of the invisible God and all spirituality is fulfilled in him.

2. Jesus holds everything together.

He holds creation together...the whole universe no less.

For a start He is the agent of creation – it was all created through him and – significantly – *for* him.

All that we can see and can't see- the whole natural world and the unseen spiritual world – planets and galaxies – insects and microbes – the plant and animal kingdoms – those creatures scientists are finding in the depths of the oceans that no-one has seen before, or the unknown species they're finding in remote jungles - all of it was made by him! The human race itself was made by him. As Paul says in v 17: *He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*

Everything comes into its own in relation to Christ.

The Colossians needed to grasp this, because these troublemakers were confusing them; they said that the material world wasn't important. In fact they even said it was evil; in extreme cases they said it was the creation of a malevolent deity other than God.

Sometimes the Church has fallen into the same trap –

the sacred is seen as more important than the secular; the spiritual more important than the material. But Paul says that God created *everything* through his Son.

Every single thing.

The natural world is as important to God as the spiritual world.

God made BOTH together through Christ.

So matter *matters!* It's his creation. And he holds it all together.

I don't know if there's life on other planets – I really think it's irrelevant, but if they ever do find life out there it will only be there because of the Son of God. That's really quite a thought, isn't it? It'll only be there because the 2nd Person of the Trinity – the Son of God –put it there.

But we must go further, because He's not only the agent of creation, he is the agent of the new creation.

You don't need me to tell you that our world is fatally flawed. It's damaged goods. It's not as he originally made it.

So many times in the course of visiting, people would ask me -

“What's the world coming to?” or “It's a terrible world we're living in”.

Yes, because people have gone off course – they've turned away from God and the whole natural order has been disturbed in the process.

- Forests the size of small nations are being cut down to feed human greed.
- Someone makes a wonderful scientific discovery and it turns into a potential nightmare.
- Climate change is wreaking havoc with the weather, and portends future disaster: whatever Donald Trump may say...

Creation is damaged goods. It needs to be re-created.

Don't get me wrong, I'm not falling into the trap I mentioned a moment ago – I'm not saying that matter is bad: we live in a beautiful world, a wonderful world as old Louis Armstrong used to sing, but its scarred and vandalised – as though someone had taken a Stanley knife to the Mona Lisa!

But: by Jesus' death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead, God began to reverse the rot, and set in motion a process that will heal his ruined world:

verses 19 & 20: *For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.*

Without Jesus' death on the cross the rot would have stayed unchecked and got worse and worse.

But because of that death, and its result: his resurrection, everything is different. A new process is at work.

Like the undertow of a tsunami, the resurrection sent a silent shock wave through the whole universe. Something totally new had happened. A man had died and been raised from the dead.

That had never happened before. Nothing could ever be the same again.

And HE holds everything together – in him all things come into their own. So –

- Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God, and that
- he holds everything together.
- But you might be thinking, this is all v interesting – but

3. Where am I in this vast scheme of things? Tom Wright, the former Bishop of Durham now teaching at St Andrews University, uses the illustration of an immense shopping mall he once visited in Minneapolis.

This place is so vast that it can take a whole fun-fair in the middle of it. Not just a clock like the one in the Eastgate Centre with figures that come out and dance every hour – but an entire Fun Fair! It's huge! Ladies – this place is a shopper's paradise! You can be there all week, and not visit the same shop twice. Imagine!

And Tom Wright describes going into this mall to buy a pair of shoes: but he hadn't a clue where to begin (it's bad enough in Inverness – this place must have been a nightmare!) – but then he found a map, and after a while his eyes focussed on a blob that said: "You are here".

After that he found the shoe shop.

Well..... where are we in this vast scheme of things?

In v 21 Paul points us to the blob that says: "You are here".

He moves from universes to us. To you and me.

As if to say, All this affects you, personally. v21: *Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of^{al} your evil behavior.*

But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight.

This is where we fit in.

- At one time we weren't even ON the map!
- We were cast out of God's presence –
- we were his enemies, because of sin – which has become so deeply ingrained in us.

BUT NOW – (2 of the most welcome words in the whole Bible)

BUT NOW, says Paul – through the death of Jesus – God has made us his friends.

The 2nd Person of the Holy Trinity left the glory of heaven to enter this damaged world as Jesus Christ, in order, to bring damaged people and damaged goods back to God. And in the process of doing that, He GAVE his life. That's the extent to which he put himself out for us.

Before the 1st Christmas and the 1st Good Friday - even the best of human lives could only reflect the broken world in which they lived, and the broken gods they worshipped. That's still true for those who don't know the Lord Jesus Christ.

But once we come to know him by faith – our lives begin to reflect the new creation, and they begin to reflect... him, the God-man Jesus.

Do YOU know Him?

Have you got your OWN faith in HIM as YOUR rescuer and Saviour from sin, and the wreckage it has strewn across your life?

Is HE now in total charge of your life?

This is how God brings us into the vast picture of his new creation.

When Jesus died on the cross he reconciled us to God. And when we come to faith in him, that reconciliation takes immediate effect, and we begin to enjoy the eternal life Jesus spoke about so often.

The Cross is the true meeting place between God and mankind.

And Jesus' goal in dying for us there was, as Paul says, *to present (us) holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation.*

If we know ourselves at all we know we're anything but that, at present; but that's his goal, and nothing's going to put him off getting there.

Does that encourage you this morning?

If you're struggling with this sin or that – with this temptation or that? Nothing is going to stop God fulfilling his work in your life: because nothing can undo what he has done for us at the Cross.

Our part is to keep the goal before our eyes –

the goal of perfection in the presence of God for ever – perfection that's rooted and grounded in Christ alone; only then will we be like Him and God's work in us will be complete.

And that goal calls for faith in a Living Christ, crucified and risen for our sake, and it calls for a willingness to build our lives on Christ the one, true and only foundation: refusing to be shaken from it - not moving an inch from the hope of ultimate eternal life with Christ for ever, which is held out to us in the Gospel message.

We don't get more of God than we find in Jesus.

To use the words of the preacher HD MacDonald: Jesus is –
“The ultimate.

There is none before him,
nought beyond him and
nothing without him.

“Other than Jesus will not do;
less than Jesus will not suit (us);
more than Jesus is not possible....

Everything of God is to be found in him and
little of God is to be found apart from him.”

The wonder and the miracle is that he - through whom the entire universe was made was willing to die to reconcile the entire creation - and us! – to God by his death: and now that he's alive for ever, he's willing to come to our tarnished, troubled hearts with all his reconciling and re-creating power – to renew and remake us.

He invites us to share in who he is, and in what he has done, and in what he is doing as he moves towards his goal of the ultimate renewal of the whole creation.

So this morning, let's all renew our faith in him, and

let's resolve to remain on track towards our ultimate goal – which is LIFE, with him, for ever.

Amen and may God bless His Word to us all.