

Hope of the World

Part 2, Colossians 1:15-23

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The Supremacy of the Son of God

¹⁵ The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷ 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 and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. ¹⁹ 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.

²¹ Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of ^[a] your evil behaviour. ²² But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation— ²³ if you continue in your faith, established and firm, and do not move from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

I have divided the passage into 3 parts for emphasis:

- Description of Jesus
- His position in relation to the world
- Our position in relation to Jesus

MY GOAL TODAY – a servant of the gospel – same as Paul.

In this passage Paul encapsulates the position of Jesus as the supreme arrangement by God for us. Paul was aware in Colossae that heresy was abounding – as it was in other cities as the Gospel was proclaimed – and so it is today. Colossae was made up of Greeks, Romans, Jews, and probably locals with mystic beliefs – similarly our society today is not homogeneous and is subject to conflicting beliefs. Even the church is not homogeneous. The relevance of establishing the position of Jesus with respect to God and ultimately to us is paramount to Paul in all his letters.

In 8 verses Paul presents the Gospel of Jesus in very clear and succinct terms. Jesus is not some second rate prophet or an angel or even a spirit midst a number of potential alternatives. He is the reason for creation and for our existence either as believers or unbelievers. Jesus is the firstborn – before all of creation he existed – he is the “first in rank and honour” as we follow after him – this is the firstborn.

Psalm 89:17 says

“And I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth”

Paul takes it further when he says “all things were created by him and for (towards) him” – He is the Alpha and Omega! Paul emphasizes this throughout his letters – in Romans 11:36 he says “For through him and to him are all things created”.

A poem by Joseph Plunkett says

I saw His blood upon the rose
And in the stars the glory of His eyes
His body gleams amid the eternal snows
His tears fall from the skies

I see His face in every flower:
The thunder and the singing of the birds
Are but His voice – and carved by His power
Rocks are his written words

All pathways by His feet are worn,
His strong heart stirs the ever-beating sea,
His crown of thorns is twined with every thorn,
His cross is every tree

The link between Christ and us is spelt out in our whole relationship with the creation and God. Paul’s description lifts us from the reality of being “of the world” to a member of a kingdom of new creations.

Paul, as he proceeds in the letter (Chap 2), emphasizes the inadequacy of the alternatives – Gnosticism where the deity of Christ is de-emphasized and the sinful nature never conquered.

Our challenge is to maintain the faith in its purest form and in the truth the Bible expounds – this is Paul’s message to the Colossians –get it clear in your mind the supremacy of Jesus and his position with God – what Christ has wrought for the Colossians and for us.

One of the movies over time that has remained in my heart was the 1982 film “Chariots of Fire” – a box office hit due to the story and the music.

Some trivia about the film – it is a story about a Jew and a Christian – in a way “works” vs “faith” - the Jew wanting to prove himself and his superiority and a Christian submerged in faith and humbleness. The name of the film was grabbed from the music “Jerusalem” - the music of the film offered by a Greek who wrote it to honour his father – an Olympic athlete. All these things conspired to come together to make the most inspiring film of its time.

The story of Eric Liddell is an amazing one – the film plays out a part of his life that emphasizes a deep faith and trust as well as obedience to God.

It is also one of those pieces of music that seem to inspire you to something higher – maybe that is why God gave us music – somewhere to seek the Holy Spirit in worship of Him. The music emphasizes the feeling of running a race.

Eric was a man that wondered about his place in the world – a shy man who was unsure of why God gave him the natural talent to run yet he had a deep sense of wanting to serve God.

He realized later that it was indeed God's plan for him to run in athletics and also to stand on the principle and belief that he should keep the Lord's Day for God. It was this that made his story one of greatest triumphs and remembered for his success in the Olympics of 1924. He gave up the 100M because the heats were scheduled on a Sunday – it was his signature race. He decided to enter and trained for the 400M that he only took up seriously as the Olympics drew near (8 months). He needed to run in the qualification races to get selected for the team. This was a story in itself. He fell during the race, got up, and then won the race. The story of the final in the Olympics is, of course, the amazing victory even after having the outside lane (the most difficult for the race) in world record time. His co-competitor in the English team, Harold Abrahams, won the 100M indicating how dominant Eric would have been in that event.

This made Eric famous and it is where the movie ends – however it is really the beginning.

Why his story today? – Eric saw in Jesus the Hope of the World and committed his life to serving him. It is an example of God's timing and planning that is in all our lives. God has a timing plan for you even if you do not realize it now.

The rest of his life could make another movie – more potent even than the first.

I would like to use him as an example of how someone with such humbleness used his talents for God– his headmaster said this:

"I have never met a more humble person – entirely without vanity."

In the Edinburgh University student magazine of the time it said *"he carried unselfishness almost to a fault"*.

Steadfast faith and conviction are the characteristics that stand out. Eric really understood that, indeed Jesus was the hope for the world and worked to fulfil the calling of that.

Soon after his Olympic triumph he went and prepared himself to go back to China to reach the people with the message of Christ. He served in a poor area of Hebei province, teaching and ministering to the local people. He met his future wife Florence who was a daughter of a Canadian missionary family –they married and had 2 daughters in China.

As the war drew closer and the Japanese invasion occurred the British government advised that foreigners should evacuate China. He sent his wife, pregnant with another girl, and the 2 daughters back to her family in Canada. He never saw his 3rd daughter. In the meantime Eric stayed and ministered and taught – the stories of his bravery looking after villagers under bombing attack and others make heartbreaking reading.

Ultimately, along with many he was interred in a camp near Weifang (today) in Shandong Province – a place of deprivation and squalor (now a school) however Eric, who became leader of the camp, always remained cheerful and ever serving God. 1800 people were interred there. According to the Chinese Government in the first part of this century he was given a choice of prison swap to freedom however he refused and allowed a pregnant woman to take his place.

He said this when asked about his life in China vs his chance for continuing fame in athletics:

"It is natural for a chap to think over all that sometimes, but I am glad I'm at the work I'm engaged in now. A fellow's life counts for far more at this than the other"

On the 2nd February 1944 Eric Liddell died of a brain tumour after suffering bouts of headaches and the attendant effects of the growing tumour. He did not see liberation or his family again but died and was buried somewhere nearby that camp – there is a commemorative gravestone that says

"They shall run and not be weary, and they shall walk and not be faint"
Isaiah 40:1

The book of Isaiah had an influence on his life as we see in the verse from Isaiah 41:10:

"Fear not, for I am with thee: do not dismay, for I will guide thee"

This was the verse sent to him by his sister way back before the Olympics that encouraged him to first become the most famous athlete of his time and then a great servant of God. It was sent by sea post from China and arrived on the morning he had to say "yes" to preach at a meeting in Scotland – it came when he most needed reassurance. He considered it divine inspiration and came at a time to confirm his calling.

Let us look at a few of his statements about life with God – understand what it means to find the truth and the reality of serving the "Hope of the World".

We are all missionaries. Wherever we go we either bring people nearer to Christ or we repel them from Christ.
Eric Liddell

In the dust of defeat as well as the laurels of victory there is glory to be found if one has done his best.
Eric Liddell

Before the start of the 400M Olympic final the US team masseur handed Eric a slip of paper in the locker room. On it was this from 1 Samuel 2:30:

"Those who honour me, I will honour".

Paul, in his letter to the Colossians has the same desire – for the Colossians to see Jesus as a living Son of God – there is no other option.

This choice of following Christ is not always an easy option – Oswald Chambers said:

"If we are going to live as disciples of Jesus, we have to remember that all noble things are difficult. The Christian life is gloriously difficult, but the difficulty does not makes us faint and cave in, it rouses us up to overcome"

William Barclay said:

"Progress in life is in proportion to the fare we are prepared to pay"

Paul left a legacy in his life -1/2 the New Testament and the establishment of the church to the Gentiles – Eric Liddell left a legacy of service and love for the Lord – Oswald Chambers book “My utmost for his highest” never been out of print and translated into 39 languages. History is littered with sacrifice for Christ – not all of us are called to those levels however we are all called to the sacrifice Jesus made for us. Paul wanted the Colossians to understand completely the sacrifice God the Father made through Christ – the head of our life.

In this world today we will see things that disturb us – things that challenge our heart and our beliefs. We may even be ridiculed and challenged about our faith.

What is the answer to this?

1. God is the supreme creator and our Father
2. Jesus is Lord – the Hope of the World
3. God loves the people of this world
4. God loves you
5. What is left?

Your answer to the first 4 questions – where are you in Kingdom of Heaven on this earth?

Remember this from Eric Liddell

Circumstances may appear to wreck our lives and God's plans, but God is not helpless among the ruins. God's love is still working. He comes in and takes the calamity and uses it victoriously, working out His wonderful plan of love.
Eric Liddell

God has plans for you – not plans to just sit but to take part in the glorious riches that he offers.

A couple of weeks ago we went to Hope Valley church in Cessnock and sang a song “God Unstoppable” – believe it.

Jesus is God UNSTOPPABLE – nothing is impossible before him.

On Tuesday night recently Steve spoke about Gifts of the Spirit. In closing he used the following quote from Matthew 16:15-19:

*“But what about you?” He asked. “Who do you say I am?”
Simon Peter answered, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God”
Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but by my father in heaven.
And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hades will not overcome it.
I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven: whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.”*

Jesus said to Peter that the understanding and revelation that He was the Son of the living God was the rock on which the church was built and still stands today – not on the ideas and things of man but by the Hope of the World – the firstborn from the dead.

Why am I telling you all this? – history, Scripture, life stories – because God wants to move in our hearts and only through Jesus will this happen – he is the rock – the hope of the world.

The person of Jesus reveals the heart of the Father – in our spirit we need right now to take on the reality of the revelation of Jesus, Son of God, as Peter did. The outcome of this is to take part in the life revealed by God – one of miracles, one of healing, one of salvation. We need to see the history of the church of God from Acts to today – we need to have the unity of belief and purpose as in Acts:

“They were together in one place and in one accord”

The unity of the body and the Holy Spirit in one accord will lead into the position that the saving grace of Jesus has established – a renewal in our hearts and a revival in the church.

What is revival? – a fresh realization of God, Jesus, and the power of the Holy Spirit – allowing God to move afresh in our lives and thus impact the lives of others.

Right now revival is in our hands – in the USA, in April, revival has started to spread across the nation – God is on the move for those who will get down and pray for Him to move.

Please go home and find a quiet place to reflect on this – lives sacrificed for Jesus over centuries – pray that the Holy Spirit charges your heart with a refreshed knowledge of the hope we have in Jesus Christ so we truly share in the mission of the Gospel.