

## **Sermon Colossians 1,15-23 – Neuhofen 18.5.2025 (Summary)**

Here we have a majestic passage about the Lord Jesus Christ. One of those passages where Paul rises to the height. All about Jesus. Do you remember that it is said to us “he is the first born of all creation”? And then - a little later - an almost equivalent phrase: “the first born of the dead”. That word “first born” used twice about the Lord Jesus Christ. Unfortunately, our translation hasn’t served us particularly well because it has translated different Greek phrases with the same English phrase. But that won’t do.

“The first born of all creation”, “the first born of the dead”. You ’ll think they were the same phrases. No, the Lord Jesus is the one who was born BEFORE all creation.

He’s not the FIRST of creative things. He was there ... before creation was started. Isn’t that important? The Bible uses the phrase “the first born” about the Lord Jesus Christ not to think in terms of a marriage in heaven and “who was God’s wife?” and all that sort of thing. But because birth makes a link between the parent and the child. Because he had the family likeness. That’s why Jesus is called “the father’s first born” not so that we might think of a marriage in heaven - (don’t overdrive symbolic words) - but so that we might say: yes, he is the FATHER ’S son. There is that relationship what we would call an organic relationship between them. He has the full likeness of his father. And he was there before anything of creation happened. He is the first born of the father BEFORE all creation.

Then it says: he’s “the first born of the dead”. But the Greek says. “he’s the first born coming OUT from the dead”. The unique son of God and his unique resurrection.

That’s one of the ways in which many of our neighbours fail to read the Bible. I have met in our village lovely people, delightful people to be with. And I think godly and spiritual people. But they didn’t tie their thoughts down to the Bible and therefore they were prepared to think: “yes, Jesus is alive. But so will YOU be after death ... So will I be alive”. So, what’s the difference?

THIS is the difference. WE are alive in the sense that the DEAD are alive, immediately after death we live on but ... in the isolated life of the soul. We’ve left our bodies behind us. That’s why some verses in the Old Testament speak of life after death as a sort of half-life because we’re only half the people we were. It’s one way of putting a part of the truth.

NOT SO JESUS. Jesus came alive ... FROM the dead. The unique son of God in his unique resurrection. My precious friend and colleague George died a couple of years ago. I used to visit him when in London. Once I said to George: “what are you preaching about tomorrow, George? It was Easter Sunday. “Resurrection”, he said. “And what are you going to say?”, I pressed. And he said: “body, bones and the lot”. That ’s the unique risen Lord Jesus Christ!

So why is Paul putting this magnificent statement about Jesus right at the beginning of his letter? As though to say to the Colossians: look, this is what I want you to KNOW about the unique Lord Jesus Christ, the first begotten of the father, the unique risen Lord Jesus. That I want you to know about him. Why? Because they were going off course and I fear in a very standard way.

We read in chapter two (verse 16): “don ’t let anyone condemn you in matters of food and drink and observing festivals, new moons or Sabbath days”.

They were becoming involved in a religious round and a religious ritual. As though THAT was the essential thing. As though THAT was the way of salvation. Have you met people like that? They’re all over the place.

But NO! NOT that. It is Jesus. You don't have to know about religion and ritual. You want to make sure you know about Jesus. Is that true about you? many people in the world and many clergy are telling you: that's the right thing to do. Many people in the world are thinking like that: "I am all right. I've been baptised. I've been confirmed. I go to communion regularly." Well, praise God if you do. But don't call it a way of salvation. It's only a way of ritual. They are signs, signposts.

People who are trusting in religion and ritual are sitting at the signposts. And fooling themselves, thinking "we've got there". Don't sit up a signpost, says Paul. "Don't let anybody condone you in this matter of food and drink and festivals and Sabbath Days." They're only the signposts. And then we read in chapter 2 (verse 20 at the end): "Why do you submit to regulations: "Do not handle, do not taste, do not touch". All these regulations....

Have you ever met anybody who says: "well, I live a good life". That's my way of salvation. They've got a rule of life and keep to the rules. To be sure: the rule is godly and good. They wouldn't dream of hurting anybody. They live by rules and by regulations making sure they're doing the right thing. As if God were a sort of heavenly grocer sitting with the scales and putting into one pan all our bad deeds and into the other all our good deeds. And then we are hoping against hope that the good will outweigh the bad on the day of judgement. So that even God doesn't know we are placed! Until the day comes...

The Colossians were like that. All around us are people like that... Are you like that? Then tell you you're on the wrong track. *There's no salvation in good works.* Even the best work that you and I do is tainted by our sinfulness. It will NOT do. It's not good enough.

So, what does Paul say? He doesn't say: "well, be a bit more religious than you are and be a bit more observant of ritual than you were. Multiply your good works beyond what they were."

Paul says: "look at Jesus!". He is the first born before all creation, the image of the father. There before the world began. The great Lord Jesus Christ.

And he is the first born from the dead. Yes, he died. He bore our sins in his body on the tree, and he rose triumphantly because the father accepted and approved his sacrificial death and the salvation which he claimed to have accomplished. "Yes!", said the father, and raised him from the dead. That's why - when Paul speaks about Jesus right at the beginning of the letter to the Colossians - he wants them to focus their eyes on HIM. Greater than all creation. Greater than death. That's why he ends to the passage rather unexpected with these words: „*At one time you were separated from God. You were enemies in your minds because of your evil ways. But because Christ died, God has brought you back to himself. Christ's death has made you holy in God's sight. So now you don't have any flaw. You are free from blame. But you must keep your faith steady and firm. You must not move away from the hope the good news holds out to you. This is the good news that you heard. It has been preached to every creature under heaven.*"

What about you? What does Jesus mean to you? Do you see him in all his greatness? Do you see him as the risen Lord, who went to the cross to bear our sins? And because he bore them satisfactorily was raised from the dead. So where do you stand today? Are your eyes fixed on Jesus?

*In his love Jesus found me, rapped his strong arms around me, brought me back safe into the shelter of the fold.*

*Precious saviour that had sought me, precious life blood that bought me. Out of the night into the light. And home to God. Amen*