

Prayer of Preparation: *I’m so glad Jesus lifted me, I’m so glad Jesus lifted me. I’m so glad Jesus lifted me singing glory, hallelujah Jesus lifted me.* Gracious God, Speak, your servants are listening. **Amen.**

Paul has the impossible task of explaining to the Colossians who Jesus is...and why they should stop worshipping the stars to worship Jesus. Now I want you to remember that the Colossians are new converts, brought to Christ by Epaphras and as such, Paul doesn’t really know them, and they don’t know Paul. So here Paul is, sending out a blind letter to Colossians, or dare I say a blind email which somehow or another makes it to their Inboxes instead of their Spam folders...or depending on how old you are, the letter has made it to their For You page on TikTok.

At any rate, Paul is sending this letter to let the Colossians know that he is grateful, *so grateful*, that they have heard the good news of Jesus Christ. He LOVES the fact that the Colossians are faithful and that their love for one another, and Christ, is commendable. As a matter of fact, Paul has been praying for them day and night, ever since he heard that they have accepted Jesus as Savior.

Yup, Paul pours it on thick in the beginning of the letter. He *really* gets into praising the Colossians. Paul praises the Colossians *so much* that you KNOW bad news is coming...you know what I mean. Paul’s letter reads like a “what do you want first...the good news or the bad news” type of situation. Honestly, this letter feels a lot like the parent-teacher conferences I used to have when I taught school; you know the ones where the child is a terror but before you say anything bad to the parents, you start with something positive.

So here Paul is, starting with the positive to let the Colossians know how *wonderful* they are. And then he lets down the kaboom...y’all need to stop worshipping stars. Seriously...that mess is over. We have a savior, Jesus the Christ who lived our life, died our death, rose from the dead, ascended into heaven, sits at the right hand of God, judges the quick and the dead, and is now and will be forever our salvation. Now, that’s a HUGE kaboom.

Paul tells the Colossians: I want you to stop doing what you’ve always done and I want you to do something new. Now I know that doesn’t sound so bad to us so I want you to think about it this way...it would be like me saying no more coffee and donuts before or after church. I guarantee you that if I said that to y’all, someone would be ready to fight me in the parking lot...or even in the sanctuary!

Sounds a bit dramatic...that’s because it is. I want you to stop what you’ve been worshipping and I want you to start worshipping Jesus, Emmanuel, God with us. This is where we get to when Paul explains the Colossians *who* Jesus is. Paul writes a song, *a hymn to Christ*. According to Paul, Jesus is:

- the image of the invisible God,
- the firstborn of all creation,
- before all things,
- the one in whom all things are held together,
- the head of the body, the church
- the beginning,
- the firstborn from the dead so that he may raise us from the dead,
- the fullness of God,
- reconciliation,
- and maker of peace.

I'm going to share something really important with you...who we believe Jesus is and how we describe Jesus to others says everything about our faith walk with God. If you were to ask me, I'd say Jesus is love but Paul doesn't mention love to the Colossians because the Colossians are to be commended for their love...Paul says that what the Colossians are missing *hope*. So Paul goes in depth with his description of how Jesus is hope for the world and the Colossians.

Hope for the world...kinda sounds like Christmas in July, doesn't it? Listen to verse 15 again with a fresh ear, *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation*. Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. Paul's hymn is all about Emmanuel, God in Christ... who becomes God with us. Who is Christ? Christ is God who lived and breathed and was born to us so that we can find our way home to God. Christ is restoration...a way back to God's love...hope for the world.

You may ask, pastor, where do you get the whole reconciliation thing from? What does Jesus have to do with bringing things together? Listen, once again, to Paul's hymn to Christ, verse 20, *and through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross*. The fact is that **we are all made in the image of God**...all of us everywhere. And when Paul says Jesus holds everything together, Paul means **all of creation**. The problem with us is that we want to see God's image only in who we believe should carry God's image....and that we want to believe that creation is limited to what we see with our own two eyes.

Not so, says Paul. Paul lifts up before the Colossians, and us, that there is no limit to Jesus's reconciling power and it is in that power we are to place our hope. May your hope lay in God's reconciliation power found in Jesus the Christ.

Response to the Word: *When I was a sinner, Jesus lifted me. When I was a sinner, Jesus lifted me. When I was a sinner, Jesus lifted me, singing glory, hallelujah Jesus lifted me.* Gracious God, Speak, your servants are listening. **Amen.**