

In the immortal words of the theologian Ricky Bobby, "If you ain't first, you're last." That about sums up how we Americans think doesn't it? We believe first is the best and we always want to be first. We want to be the first person waiting in line. Whenever there is a 4 way stop we want to go first. If there is yield sign, it always means that we go first. We want our teams to always get first place. We want our country to always be first. Our selfish and sinful desire is almost always to put ourselves first.

But Jesus should be first. The message of Colossians and especially our time this morning reminds us that we should not be first. In fact, we are not first. Jesus is first.

Turn with me to Colossians 1:15-23

I. Jesus is first (v. 15-18).

It is not just that Jesus should be first in our lives.

This is who Jesus is.

This is the theme of our series and the theme of our passage.

This whole passage and book tell us Jesus is first.

Verse 15, **"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation."**

Jesus is first because He is the image of God.

What does this mean?

It reminds us that God the Father is invisible.

He is everywhere, but often we cannot feel or even notice Him.

God the Father is incomprehensible and beyond our knowledge.

But Jesus we can comprehend.

We cannot see Him, but Jesus we can see.

And Jesus came to be the image of the invisible God.

He came so that we can see what God is like.

He is a picture of what God is like.

And when we see Jesus, we see the Father.

Next we see Jesus is **"the firstborn of all creation."**

This phrase can be a little tricky.
It can also be problematic if we interpret it wrongly.
Jesus is not the firstborn like we are.
He is not a created being.
He was not born or created at a moment in time like us.
Because if that was true, then He would not be truly God.

Instead, being a firstborn means that He ranks above all creation.
And that before anything was made in creation, Jesus was.
This is why God is the "I Am."
Jesus is and always has been.
It is also a rank.
Being the firstborn comes with responsibilities and it comes with privileges.
Anyone who was born first has experienced this.
Jesus is something similar, but on another level.
Jesus is first.

Verse 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."**

We see that Jesus is first because He created everything.
It is in Jesus all things were made.
This is something we can forget.
God the Father did not make creation on His own.
The Holy Spirit and especially Jesus also participated.
God tells us that Jesus created all things.

in heaven and on earth

This is everything in the spiritual realm and heaven.
And everything up in space.
I love the planetarium in OKC at the children's museum.
They allow you to see more stars than you could ever see at night.
The last time we went they show us galaxies.

And we kept zooming out further and further away from the Milky Way.
And the more they zoomed the more I was in awe.
Because the universe is so much bigger than we imagine.
And there is so much we only guess at.
And Jesus made all of it.
He has made things we will not see until a million years into eternity.

visible and invisible

This really covers all of creation.
It means Jesus has made all of the physical world.
And it means Jesus has made all of the spiritual world.
Every demon that Jesus cast out was one that He made.
Every time Satan tried to tempt and oppose Jesus,
He was doing so to His Creator.
Jesus created every spiritual being.
There is none above or greater than Him.
And He has made all created things.
Jesus made the flowers and the mountains.
He made the invisible things we can't see.
He made the wind, the sound of a baby's laugh.
The very idea of music is the creation of Jesus.
He made the laws of physics and math.
Order, and logic, and rational thought are His creation.

whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities

This reminds us Jesus is over every throne.
Every Presidential desk.
Every seat of Power.
Every single kingdom.
Every great company.
Every authority or ruler.
Everything someone says they built with their own hands through hard work.
Jesus made it or He allowed us to make it.

all things were created through him and for him."

Why does Paul repeat himself?

Why does he repeat this?

It is to hammer it home.

He wants to make sure that we understand.

Jesus created everything.

They are all made **"through him."**

He made it all.

There is nothing that you have ever seen or experienced that Jesus did not make.

You have never made something without the guiding hand of Jesus.

All we do is sub creation alongside the true Creator.

But not just through him.

They are also made **"for him."**

All things were made for the glory of God.

They were made for Jesus.

This can sound different to us,.

We may think it sounds egotistical or narcissistic.

But it means that you and everything in creation was created to be with Jesus.

Everything was made to be in relationship with Jesus.

We were made to experience Jesus.

To love Jesus.

To be in fellowship with Jesus.

He is not optional.

He is what we were all made for.

He is first because we need Him to be first.

He was made to be before us.

So that we could be with Him.

Verse 17, **"And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together."**

He is before everything.

This means that He ranks above it all.

He is first.

Nothing can be ahead of Christ.

And He keeps the entire universe together.

Everything not only was created by Him,

But He continues to keep it together with His power.

On the cross, He kept the wood and the nails together.

He kept the bodies of His torturers together.

All reality itself only holds together because of Jesus.

Without Jesus everything in our world would just dissipate into dust.

He is the only one who holds it together.

Verse 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."**

This tells us that He is the head of the church.

It is not the pope.

It is not pastors or elders.

It is not just a creed or a statement of faith.

It is a person, who is Jesus.

And He is the beginning.

Jesus is the beginning of all things.

All stories have their beginning with Jesus.

Most of all, He was the beginning of resurrection.

He was the first to be brought back to life.

Others like Lazarus were brought back to life.

But they died again.

Jesus is the first who tasted true resurrection.

The resurrection that means we never have to die again.

And Jesus is preeminent in everything.

This means again that Jesus is first..
Any ranked list of best things needs Jesus at the top.
He is above all.
He is before all.
He is in all.
Jesus must be first.

The question we need to ask ourselves is, is Jesus first in your life?
Do you treat Jesus like He is above all things and in all things and before all things?
Or do you treat Him like seasoning.
Do you treat Jesus like an advisor or something to add to your life?
Do you treat Him like first in a checklist instead of the ultimate priority?
Because Jesus is and must be first.

II. Jesus will reconcile all things (v. 19-20).

One day, He is going to reconcile all things to Him.
One day, He is going to make all things right.
Reconciling is always the idea of making peace.
Restoring what was lost and fixing what was broken.
This is why Jesus being first is good news.

Verse 19, **"For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,"**

We reminded who Jesus is.
It is in Jesus and Jesus alone God fully dwells.
Jesus is not just a little God.
He is not just partially God.
Jesus is the fullness of God.
Jesus is not a little version of God.
He is not a water down version of God that we can handle.
When Jesus comes to us, he comes to us in the fullness of God the father.
The complete essence and substance of God is found in the body of Jesus.

This is what Jesus does and will do.

Christ who is first,

Christ who is preeminent.

Christ who is the most important thing in the cosmos.

He does not just come so that we make sacrifices and give to Him.

He does not come demanding worship and fealty as if He was lacking.

He came to save us.

He came to deliver us.

He came to reconcile and make the world right.

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."**

The only hope for reconciliation is through Jesus.

Our only hope for salvation is through Christ.

And this salvation is described in terms of being reconciled.

Of being restored.

Of having the relationship with God restored.

In Eden, man used to walk with God in the cool of the day.

Man and woman could talk with God face to face.

But sin destroyed it.

It removed our ability to be in the presence of God.

But Jesus has come to restore it.

Our sin broke the relationship, but Jesus brings us back.

He does all the work so that we can be with Him again.

Salvation is not just about going to heaven.

It is not just about paradise and life without pain.

It is not about being reunited with our loved ones.

Salvation means being reunited with Jesus.

And this is true not just of humanity but of creation.

Everything in the heavens and earth.

All things need to be restored to God.

They all need to be brought back to Jesus.

Creation itself is groaning.
Life on earth is not as it should be.
Things should not have to die.
Disease and death should not ravage God's creation.
Pollution, climate change, and more are not how the world made designed
They are a result of sin and a result of being separated from God.

When we look up at the stars,
or when we see the trees and the mountains we still see beauty and glory.
But they have been disfigured and broken.
They are like ancient sculptures who were once painted and are now
missing limbs.
But one day Jesus will bring it back.

The only way to be reconciled is through the blood of the cross.
It is only through the blood of Christ.
There is no other salvation.
It can only be found in Christ.

And it can only be found through the cross.
Jesus went to the cross to spill His blood.
It was the only way we could be restored.
It was the only path to reconcile not just us but creation.
Nothing else would satisfy justice.
Nothing else could make things right.

Verse 21, **"And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind,
doing evil deeds,"**

This reminds us of who we are and why we need to be reconciled.
We need to be reconciled to Jesus because we are alienated from him
There was not peace between us.
You may think of a relationship that you have with a family member or
friend.
Think of somebody that you no longer talk to

Somebody whose life you are no longer a part of
Somebody that you can't even be in the same room as them.
You are alienated from each other.
Relationship is broken and maybe it even looks beyond repair.
That is us with God.
Our relationship is fractured beyond repair.
We are far away from him, and there does not seem to be a path back.
And the reason we are alienated from God is our fault. It's because of what we have done.
Usually in relationships, it's 50-50 or there's some blame to go round.
Here, all of the blame is on us.
We are alienated from God because we have rejected God.
Because we have wronged God because we have sin against God
We are alienated because we told God we were sorry we did the same thing again immediately.
So because we are alienated, we need to be reconciled

We need to be reconciled because we are also still hostile in our minds.
Our inner life is opposed to God.
Our minds and our souls in our spirits are anti-God.
The idea that we must depend on God or bow down to God or worship God alone is difficult for us because it goes against our nature.
Even Christians would acknowledge and admit that we find it hard to depend on God hard to give control to God
And because the scriptures tell us our very minds are hostile to God.
And God knows our minds and He knows them better than we do because we in our souls and in our minds are anti-God and we need to be reconciled.

And it doesn't stop there we also continue to do evil deeds.
Both believers and unbelievers.
We continue to make our estrangement worse.
We continue to rebel against Jesus.
We continue to sin against God.

We continue to behave in ways that make reconciliation difficult if not impossible

You would find it hard to reconcile with somebody if they continued to sin against you.

This is not a real example, but let's say I had a neighbor who kept leaving their trash in my yard.

Maybe every time they drive home I could see them out my window and watch them throw garbage out their window into my yard.

And then I go over to talk to him and they say oh yeah sorry yeah sorry about that. You know I feel really bad. I'm not gonna do that again.

And then the next day, they throw trash out again and again.

I am never gonna be reconciled to them until they stop what they're doing.

Yeah, this is our problem is that we continually are throwing trash in God's yard.

We are continually sinning against Him.

And because of this, we are not reconciled to God.

And we are alienated from him.

But the beauty and the wonder of the gospel is that even though we continue to do all of these things, even though we continue to anger into sin against God, he does all the work of reconciling us.

We don't have to stop before our relationship can be restored before we can have peace.

Jesus did all of the work to reconcile us

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,"**

So now, because of what Jesus has done, we can be reconciled.

If you've put your faith in Jesus, this reconciliation has already happened.

You already have peace with God right now.

You already have been restored

Even though you continue to sin against God,

And even though you continue to wrong Him,
Even though we continue to fail,
God does not let us go.
And our reconciliation to God is not dependent on good behavior
Our salvation is not dependent on our obedience.
Our salvation is not dependent on how good that we do.
God does not look at us as someone who keeps throwing trash.
We have been reconciled.
He looks at us not at the addict or the prodigal, but as the beloved child.

And we have been reconciled by the body in the flesh of Jesus, crucified
for us
They're on the cross we have now
Now we can have peace with God
Now we can be restored and reconciled to him

And he does this in order that one day we may be presented to God.
That God, our creator who we have rejected.
That the holy and incomprehensible God whose face we have spitting,
and whose son we have murdered.
The one in who's presence we would be ashamed to be seen.
And that if we stood before him without having our hands cleaned, our lips
cleaned, and our hearts purified, we would die because nothing unholy
can be in his presence.
One day now Jesus will present us blameless before the throne of God.
One day, we will be able to stand before God with no shame.
One day we will be able to stay before God with no worry, but if he will
receive us or not.
One day we will not have to wonder if God still loves us or if we are still
OK.
Part of the work of Jesus and his reconciling us is making us holy.
So that one day we can stand before the throne.
That is the work of Christ
He makes peace and now we don't have to go face God's judgement.

One day we will be resurrected, glorified, and made whole.

The reconciliation has already happened.

If you have put your faith in Christ, your reconciliation has already happened.

You are now a saint in the eyes of God.

It is the work of Jesus slowly, but surely dealing with our sins making this more like him

A work that will be finished either when we die, or when Jesus comes again so that we can be presented individually and corporately as the pure bride of Christ

And the end of the passage is a warning.

That this reconciliation only happens if we do not shift from the gospel.

III. Jesus must stay first in our lives (v. 21-23).

Jesus has to stay first.

Because too often we start to drift.

Our minds wander and we go on auto pilot.

Like a car slowly drifting out of their lane because they aren't paying attention.

Verse 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."**

Now, in order to be reconciled, you must continue in the faith

You see the Christian faith is not about a one time decision.

It is not just about your moment of baptism.

It is not about a single confession of faith in Jesus as your only hope the

Christian faith is something that we continue in in fact, the most important part of the Christian faith isn't the beginning or the moment of salvation, but that it continues.

This is why discipleship and the faith is often described in terms of following Jesus.

Because if you are following someone you must continually follow them.

If I am following you in my car and you're trying to take me to a place I have never been and I have no cell service so I can't use my GPS or other way then for me to get there to the destination I have to follow you.

I can't just start following you and then decide I have a better idea.

I'm gonna do it on my own I have to keep following you until we get where we're going in a similar way.

We must continue following Jesus on our path to the heavenly city.

We can't just start following Jesus and then decide.

Maybe Jesus doesn't know the best way to have I'm gonna follow this other guy that I know Buddha.

Or I'm just gonna close my eyes and do it myself.

Or just pull off to the side and say I don't really need to follow Jesus or anyone I'm just gonna do my own thing.

The completion of reconciliation only happens if we continue in faith.

In the faith doesn't mean that we're always perfect.

It doesn't mean that our salvation is dependent on moment to moment.

Maybe we had it today and we lost it tomorrow.

But it does mean we have to persevere.

We have to keep Jesus because not everybody who says they're following?

Jesus actually follows Jesus and not everybody who starts to follow Jesus continues.

We have to stay in the faith.

We must keep our faith in Jesus.

Jesus must stay first and primary above all other things.

We must stay stable and steadfast.

Stability means that we are not jumping from one religion to another.

That we are not unsure from one day to the next of Jesus really is the way the truth in the life.

It means that we are following Jesus and staying with Jesus and in Jesus.

Instead, that means we stay faithful.

You say it's not about achievement it's not about doing things that's not about earning it's just about being faithful.

It's about trying.

As long as you have Jesus in your sights and you're trying to keep him first and you fail and you get back up again and you keep following you will be reconciled.

We stay on the path and run back to it when we shift.

I don't want anyone to think of the salvation in jeopardy for a moment.

I don't want anyone to lose the assurance of salvation.

But I also don't want you to think that you can just do whatever you want and still be a Christian.

You've gotta keep Jesus first

And we cannot shift off of the gospel.

And shifts are slow and most of the time unnoticeable.

We stand still and shift our weight from one foot to another without thought.

If you are swimming in the ocean you will slowly shift down the beach.

Not making Jesus first is rarely a big powerful moment.

Most people don't walk away from the faith in one sudden decision.

It begins in small shifts.

May this not be true for you.

May it not be true for us.

We must keep our feet rooted in Christ.

We must not allow ourselves to shift off of the gospel.

Because the gospel is our only hope.

It is the hope of all creation.

And it is what has been proclaimed.

People will come and tell us to abandon this gospel.
They will tell us to look to something else instead.
But it is the gospel we have received from God's Word that we cannot shift from.

Some ways this shift happens.

I see this happen when people begin to be disciplined more by their phones, by the news, by television than they are by the Word of God.
A shift happens when pastors care more about building their church than the church.

A shift happens when we start to think small sins aren't a big deal.
A subtle shift happens where they care more about the things of this world than the things of God.

It feels small and fine, but it is a shift.

A shift happens when churches begins o care about what people want instead of what they need.

It feels right, but it is a shift from the gospel.

A shift happens when we assume the gospel is for children in the back and not for the mature people like us.

We must not shift from the gospel.

That is why I want to preach this book.

Because we are all in danger of shifting.

And we must keep Christ first.

do not drift away.

Jesus needs to stay first in our lives.

The good news is that we do not have to do this on our own.

I remember driving all through the night from Nebraska to Virginia where I went to school.

It was a 21 hour drive with no stops.

I was by myself and totally exhausted.

I tried every trick I had.

I hit myself in the face.

I rolled down the windows.

I listened to books, music, the radio.

I stopped to stretch for a minute.

I drank energy drinks.

But eventually I had to just stop and sleep in Kentucky.

Because my own strength was not enough to keep me from drifting.

Now, if we can't drive all night without drifting on our own strength?

Why do we think we could go through all of life without drifting away from Jesus?

We need help.

And the good news is Jesus wants to help us.

He can keep us from drifting.

Because this is part of His work.

As He reconciles all things to Himself.