

THE APOSTLE’S SAVIOR

Colossians 1:15

Reader: Steven Nagai - John 1:1-18

Intro: I am just taking one verse for my message this morning, but it is a verse which is packed with important truth. It is a verse in which the Apostle Paul was describing the Lord Jesus Christ. In the verses which we considered last Sunday morning, verses 12, 13, and 14, Paul gave a brief description of salvation. This was the salvation that Paul had. The salvation that most of you have, and the salvation that I have. It is the only salvation that there is. Paul was thanking God the Father for this salvation, but he made it very clear that God had saved him, as well as, the believers in Colosse, through the One Whom Paul called, God’s “dear Son,” or *the Son of His love*, as it could be translated. This is the equivalent of “My beloved Son,” as the Father called our Lord when He spoke from heaven when our Lord was baptized. Paul, speaking of the Lord Jesus when he wrote in verse 14, “in Whom we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins.”

But then in verse 15 Paul went on speaking of the Lord Jesus when he wrote, “Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature.” What did Paul mean that Jesus Christ was “the image of the invisible God”?

He meant that Jesus Christ was like God. Paul used this same expression, “image,” in 2 Corinthians 4:3 and 4 when he wrote,

3 But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost:

4 In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

The writer of the book of Hebrews began his epistle with a very strong statement concerning Christ being in the image of God. He used a different word for “image,” but the meaning is the same as in our text. Let me read the first three verses of Hebrews 1 to you, and you will see what I mean:

1 God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets,

2 Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds;

3 Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of

his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high (Heb. 1:1-3).

The NASB translates “the express image” as “the exact representation of His nature,” *i.e.*, of the nature of God. The NIV renders it, “the exact representation of His being,” *i.e.*, of God’s being.

Bishop Lightfoot says that the word “image” means three things. It means that Jesus Christ was like God, totally like God, that Christ came to represent God, and, thirdly, that He came to manifest, to reveal God.

This is the reason that I asked Stephen Nagai to read for us the first eighteen verses of the first chapter of John’s Gospel. And in connection with our text for the morning, I wanted us all to see what the Apostle John wrote toward the end of the first century in verses 14 and 18 of John 1. Verse 14 says,

14 And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.

This is a statement of the absolute Deity of the Lord Jesus, and His likeness to the Father.

The we read in John 1:18:

18 No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him.

And this ties in exactly with our text for this morning. Nobody while on earth has ever seen God. To us, and to all other people in both the Old and New Testaments, He has been in invisible God. And He still is, and always will be for us until we get to heaven. His Word is evidence that He has spoken. The passage in Hebrews tells us that God in the past has spoken in different ways at different times, but in these last days He has spoken to us “by His Son.”

So the existence of God has been very evident from creation on. As we have read God has revealed Himself in many different ways. But with the coming of Jesus Christ into the world we have the final and complete revelation of God in Jesus Christ. At least it is as complete a revelation of God as we will have while we are here on earth.

But what does this mean?

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It means that if God had been born of the virgin Mary, the Person He would have been on earth would have been exactly like Jesus Christ was. The Members of the Godhead as distinct Persons, but They are all identical in their Deity. This is why we can say that God has revealed Himself in the Lord Jesus Christ. The more we learn about Christ, the more we are learning about God. When the Lord Jesus became a Man, it in no way tarnished or made any change in His Deity. Jesus Christ was identical to God before He came to earth, while He lived on the earth, when He died on the Cross, when He was raised from the dead, and is still identical to the Father now that He is in heaven. He was the image of God eternally, and that image has never changed.

This truth is extremely important regarding our salvation. We know from the book of Genesis that Adam and Eve were not created as sinners. They became sinners by their first disobedience to God, and the sin of Adam brought the curse of sin upon the whole human race. Every person who has ever been born since the birth of Cain, Adam and Eve's first son, has been born in sin and under the judgment of God. That is the way you and I were born. We could not save ourselves because we were under divine judgment and faced with the penalty of eternal death. The only one who could help us was a person who was not a sinner, one who could die in your place and mine, taking the penalty of our sin upon himself. That is why God sent His Son into the world as a Man that being God, and sinless in Himself, He could die as our Substitute, taking our penalty upon Himself, that by His sacrifice, the giving of His life, the shedding of His blood, we by faith are forgiven of our sins, and have been given the gift of eternal life.

But what did Paul mean when He said that our Lord was "the firstborn of every creature." There are some people who take this to mean that the Lord Jesus was the first Person to be created by God. But that interpretation cannot be accepted because if you go to read in verse 16 Paul went on to say, "For by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities or powers: all things were created by Him, and for Him."

The Apostle John said in the verses which were read to us this morning, speaking of our Lord,

3 All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made (John 1:3).

And John had just written:

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1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.

2 The same was in the beginning with God.

Jesus Christ, along with the Father and the Holy Spirit, were the Creators of this whole universe. What does it mean then that “He was the firstborn of every creature”? Well, Paul himself said in our text that it means that our Lord is the Creator. But secondly, and this is implied at least in Colossians 1, in Psalm 89:27 the word firstborn is used to suggest our Lord’s sovereignty over creation. As Paul said at the end of Colossians 1:16, “all things were created by Him, and for Him: 17 And He is before all things, and by Him all things consist.” I wish Al Gore would read this. It probably would be a real shock and disappointment to him.

But now I want to turn your attention for the rest of our time to that word, “invisible.” God is an invisible God. And for us now Jesus Christ is also invisible. We can’t see them like we can see each other. Thousands of people saw the Lord Jesus when He was here on earth, and His disciples in particular got to know the Lord Jesus very intimately. Paul was given a special vision of the Lord. When His apostleship was under attack, he wrote to the Corinthians, “Am I not an apostle? Have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord?” (1 Cor. 9:1).

But you and I have not seen Him. Nor have we seen God. When Peter wrote his first epistle he was speaking to believers who were just like we are because he said this concerning their relationship with the Lord:

8 Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory:

9 Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls (1 Peter 1:8-9).

If we have never seen God or the Lord Jesus Christ, how can we be sure that they exist?

I want you to notice two words that Peter used in the verses which I have just read to you. In verse 8 he said though even then they had not seen the Lord, “yet believing . . .” And then in verse 9 he said, “Receiving the end of your faith . . .” Now where did their faith come from? It is a gift from God, isn’t it? The Lord Jesus is “the Author and Finisher of our faith” according to Hebrews 12:2. “Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God.”

But what is faith? Hebrews 11:1 says, “Faith is the substance of thing hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” And if you read down through that wonderful eleventh chapter of Hebrews, and you read about men and women of faith whose story is told to us in the OT. When you get down to verse 23 we come to Moses, and what is said about Moses continues on down for several verses. But we are told that Moses did a very foolish thing. In fact, it was a very, very foolish thing from a human perspective. He had been raised in the royal family of Egypt. Many Bible teachers believe that he may have been in line for much greater things in Egypt, possibly even becoming a Pharaoh. But listen while I read from verse 24 down through verse 27 of Hebrews 11:

24 By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter;

25 Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season;

26 Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward.

27 By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible (Heb. 11:24-27).

Don't think for a moment that true faith is foolishness. There is no greater reality on earth than faith which is the result of the work of God in the human heart. There is a lot that goes on in the name of faith that is foolishness, but that is not true of faith based upon the infallible Word of God, and imparted to the hearts of the people of God by the Holy Spirit.

In 2 Corinthians 4 the Apostle Paul said a very significant to the believers at Corinth contrasting the things that are seen with the things that are unseen. He was comforting them in their trials, and this is what he said:

17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory;

18 While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal (2 Cor. 4:17-18).

Many years ago when I was teaching at the then Multnomah School of the Bible, we had a speaker in chapel who was speaking along this line of things seen and unseen. I don't remember his name. I think that it was the only time that I ever saw him. But I will not forget one thing that he

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said to us. He leaned on the pulpit behind which he was speaking, and said, "The most cheated person in this room is the person who has a greater appreciation for the things that he can see than he does for the things that he can't see."

Now let me ask you this morning, Which has the most influence on your life, what you can see, or what you can't see? Maybe you are asking me, Where can I find out about those things which I can't see? The answer to that question is very clear in Scripture. You find it in the OT, and it is quoted in the NT. Let me give you the OT reference first. The verse is Isaiah 64:4:

4 For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside Thee, what He hath prepared for him that waiteth for Him.

The quotation in the NT goes like this, and then Paul told us where the unseen things can be found:

9 But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him.

10 But God hath revealed them unto us by His Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God (1 Cor. 2:9, 10).

Where are these things? They are found in your Bible. You can't see God, and won't see Him until you get to heaven. But you can talk to Him in prayer, and He will speak to you and reveal Himself to you as you read His Word.

Concl: As final word of encouragement, why is it important for us to be learning about the invisible God and His now invisible Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. We find this in 2 Corinthians 3:18 where Paul used the same word "image" in speaking of God's purpose in saving us that he used of our Lord in our text for today. I am sure most of you are familiar with 2 Corinthians 3:18

18 But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.

Also Rom 8:28-29

28 And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

29 For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

Closing verse: 1 Timothy 1:17.