

Title: Burying the Lead
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Subject: Jesus Christ
Scripture: Colossians 1:15-23

A young married woman calls her parents. They chit chat about the day's events, what they're having for supper, the weather. After talking for 20 minutes the daughter says, "Well, I suppose I should let you go. And by the way, you're going to be grandparents. Bye." That's what's called "burying the lead," putting the most important part near the end of the story.

That's kind of what Paul does as we just now get to a section titled "the Supremacy of Christ." One might think that should be the lead. He brings in Jesus Christ and provides a series of descriptors.

READ Colossians 1:15-23

I. Who is Jesus Christ?

1. Image is everything (15). The Greek word is *eikon* which is used by a camera manufacturer. The idea the company tries to convey is that their product produces a clearer, truer picture. Nice, but we understand that it's still a picture. It isn't the real thing.

While Adam and Eve and people are made in the image of God, Jesus is the **image** of God. Humans can reflect and reveal and represent what God looks like but only Jesus is the express manifestation, the perfect representation of God so people can see, know and comprehend who the Lord is.

First century Jews were looking for wisdom. Greeks were preoccupied with the logos or the word and reason of God, the impersonal force that created the universe, kept it running, made sense of it and imparted a mind to people. Paul portrays Jesus as the perfect combination of what both groups were looking for.

2. Firstborn over all creation (15). Firstborn isn't used as it is in other spots like when it speaks of Reuben being the firstborn of Jacob. It doesn't mean Jesus was the first thing created by God. That's what Jehovah's Witnesses and other groups try to insert into the meaning. He couldn't be created as the next item tells us he created all things. The Jehovah Witnesses try to counter this by inserting the word "other" here and several more times in the passage to specify Jesus was the creator of all other things. There's no reason indicated by the language to add the word "other." It delegitimizes Jesus. If he's not fully God, then how can he as a false god save anyone?

Jacob gave the blessing of the firstborn to the younger son of Joseph when he crossed his arms to place his hands on his grandson's heads (Genesis 48:12ff). Firstborn had more to do with rights, privileges, honor and position. Jesus is proclaimed the owner of creation. The next identifier is his work as creator.

3. Creator (16). Jesus Christ, with the Father and Holy Spirit, were involved in the creation of all things.

An alternate view is presented by Stephen Jay Gould, Harvard paleontologist, regarded as an evolutionary authority on how life began. "We [exist] because one odd group of fishes had a peculiar fin

anatomy that could transform into legs for terrestrial creatures; because the earth never froze entirely during an ice age; because a small and tenuous species, arising in Africa a quarter of a million years ago, has managed, so far, to survive by hook and by crook. We may yearn for a "higher" answer - but none exists."

Kind of leaves a person on the short end of the stick. The Bible holds "Through Jesus all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (John 1:3). Everywhere he looks he says, "I made that." The force known as electricity, "I made it." Tyrannosaurus Rex? "Made it too." Gravity, "That was me." Armadillos, Alpha Centauri, photosynthesis, blue whales. "Me, me, me, and me." Everything, all the forces of nature, all the animals, plants, people, spiritual forces, angels -- Jesus Christ made them.

People like to attach their names to things they're proud of making. Jesus does that with all the things he's made. His name is attached. His fingerprints are all over each and every thing.

There's a second aspect for Creator. Everything is made for Christ. It's for his enjoyment.

4. He is before all things (17). All that stuff he made, He came before it. Before any of it existed he was. This got him into trouble with the Jewish religious leaders. He asserted "Before Abraham was born, I am!" (John 8:58). The people understood what Jesus was claiming. He was insinuating he was God. They wanted to stone Jesus. They picked up stones to start the process. Now if Jesus really didn't mean he was God, he could have raised his hand, "Now just a minute, fellas. Take a chill pill. You must have misunderstood. I'm not claiming to be God. No way. That's way beyond my pay grade." Jesus had the opportunity to do that, but he didn't. He couldn't because he couldn't lie. He was, is and always will be God. He simply slipped away from those who wanted to kill him.

5. He holds all things together (17). The earth hurtles around the sun at 67,000 mph (19 miles per second) while it's spinning at 1037 mph at the equator and about 740 mph for us and all day at the poles. Our sun and its solar system as part of the Milky Way galaxy travels at an average speed of 448,000 mph (124.4 miles per second). Hang on cuz we're spinning and orbiting and hyper driving through space. (space.com/33527-how-fast-is-earth-moving.html).

Let's move to the small scale. The electron in a hydrogen atom which is the main ingredient in water (H₂O) travels at 1367 miles per second (education.jlab.org/qa/electron_01.html). And since according to H.H. Mitchell, in the Journal of Biological Chemistry, "the brain and heart are composed of 73% water, and the lungs are about 83% water...muscles and kidneys are 79%," there's a whole lot of shakin' and quakin' going on inside. It isn't the laws of physics or some scientific force that prevents the energy in atoms from self-destructing or holds the universe together. It's the creator of the universe and the laws that govern it. The creator is the sustainer of the creation.

Sometimes I've heard Jesus referred to as the glue that holds it all together. There are times when I'm called upon by the grandkids to repair something that's been broken. Gabey has been pretty insistent at times that Papa will fix it and not daddy. That's why I use Gorilla Glue. The glue holds it together, but I'm the force behind the glue. So it may be more accurate to say Jesus is the gluer.

We only focused on Christ holding creation together. The verse says he holds all things together. That would include the spiritual realm.... Our lives.....

6. Head of the church (18). Our human heads house our brains. The brain is the command center which sends out signals and instructions to the rest of the body. It coordinates the functions and activities of the rest of the members.

It isn't in the reverse order. The little toenail doesn't give the orders. Sure, when I stub it into a chair leg, there's chemical and electrical reactions with information conveyed through neurons, neurotransmitters, synapses up to the head but it's the brain that gives the okay to pull the toe back, yelp in pain and cry out for Jean to kiss it and make it better.

Jesus doesn't take his orders from the church. He's in charge. Jesus is the control center, the leader, the direction giver, the one who maintains order, the problem solver.

7. Beginning and firstborn from among the dead (18). Earlier we discovered the meaning of firstborn as the one who holds the prime position. Jesus was the first to rise from the dead with the newness of a glorified resurrection body. Poor Lazarus was raised to come back to his old, frail, limited body and had to die again. The same is true of the other people Jesus raised. Jesus experience the wonders and glories of the body that was raised imperishable, raised in glory, raised in power, raised a spiritual body, clothed in immortality (1 Corinthians 15:42-44, 54). He was the first, the beginning, the Alpha, the first fruits. Jesus is the first among many who will follow and be raised to resurrected life.

8. Supreme (18). Seven times in these verses the modifying word "all" is used in regards to Christ's relationship with the universe – over all creation, by him all things were created, all things were created by him and for him, he is before all things, in him all things hold together, in everything or all things he might have the supremacy, to reconcile to himself all things.

He is the one who is supreme. He is the pre-existent one who is preeminently sovereign over all human authorities and powers – over the created things; over his church; over government officials from mayor to President, king or dictator; over CEOs, CFOs, COOs; over non-human entities like the angels whom false teachers tried to elevate as beings of worship, demons, and the devil himself. Compared to Christ, they're all in last place. No need to concern self with worshipping puny things like angels, or humans or nature. Why settle for anything less than the best? Everything else is negative googol, and I'm not talking about the search engine but about the number 1 with 100 zeroes behind it.

Christ is the focus. In Leonardo Da Vinci's painting of The Last Supper, our Lord's hands are empty. Da Vinci dedicated three years to his masterpiece. Before unveiling it to the world, he showed it to a friend whose opinion he highly valued. The friend erupted with gushing praise. "The cup in Jesus' hand is especially beautiful." Da Vinci was disappointed and immediately began to paint out the cup. The friend was flabbergasted and wanted to know why. "Nothing must distract from the figure of Christ." Da Vinci removed the distraction

but had to do something with the hand. The left was already palm up just above the table as if to bless and invite. The right, now empty, joined in the gesture.

9. Fully God (19). The Bible declares that God is a triune God, not three different gods. The Father, the Son and The Holy Spirit are all God and are equally God. A full understanding of the Godhead and the interplay among them is a mystery.

Jesus is fully God. All the fullness of God makes its home in him. The totality of everything God is in functions, power, authority, attributes, essential nature -- Jesus Christ is. God is eternal. Jesus is eternal. God is holy. Jesus is holy. God is unchangeable. Jesus is unchangeable. God is all knowing. Jesus is all knowing. It's impossible to exaggerate Jesus as we can't get higher than Almighty God.

II. What's his purpose? 20-23

His purpose is to provide a reconciler. God's goal is to bring all things back into a right relationship with him. The enormity of bringing about this harmony requires a peacemaker of greater value than the egregious actions that disrupted the connections. Only the perfect would suffice.

The reconciliation includes things on earth and in heaven, inanimate objects, animals, heavenly beings, but chiefly humans. People are God's main concern. People could be reconciled to God, not God to people or God and people to each other, but people to God. It's not a compromise where both sides get a little of what they want but don't get all they want. God is the one who is in the right. People have to be brought back to him and line up with him.

He came to reverse the situation people were in. We were alienated from God and his enemies. The first part doesn't sound so bad. Some might think it can be overcome even as a person who is alienated from another might try to be a little kinder, make the first move, grease the wheel.

But when it comes to the second part, enemies, that's not so easy to get around. It means we were at war against God. We were the ones launching missiles of defiance. We were the ones who exploded dirty bombs of self-righteousness. We were the ones attacking him with weapons of hatred and disbelief.

If we want to unload on a fellow when he's down, on us, we were living in darkness, condemned, slaves to sin, under the power of Satan, lost, objects of God's wrath and reprobates. I thought I'd throw that last one in there because of the way it sounds. Reprobates. It can mean ne'er do wells or rascals. Those are too soft. It really means good for nothing degenerate filthy sinners.

And all we got in return from God was love. For each hateful act he retaliated with his pure love. For each flagrant violation of his moral law he struck back with unmerited grace. For each defilement and desecration of his image he hit back with his profound mercy. Ultimately, he unleashed his doomsday weapon. Jesus died on the cross to spell doom for our sin. By using something so cruel and horrible he shows that there's no length he wouldn't and won't go to bring people back to him.

The effectiveness of God's military strategy is limited only by people's refusal to surrender and accept his terms of peace – seeking forgiveness by throwing selves at the feet of the Savior. Those who do are

reconciled. They're declared to be positionally holy before God, without a sin stain on their life and no longer accused of being an enemy of God. We can back up the dump truck again, this time with more of what it means to be reconciled. Free from the clutches of sin, under the power and control of God, found, forgiven, and no longer a horrible reprobate. Just not having the word reprobate attached to us is motivation to turn life to Christ and accept his gift of eternal life.

This is our position. But it also shows the path of how are to live. More to come as we go through the book. Continue in the faith means to keep on living out the faith. If a person doesn't do that they won't be holy and blameless. They will make it to heaven but by the skin of their teeth. He'll be like the builder who uses improper building materials who "will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames" (1 Corinthians 3:15).

The Boer War in South Africa was between the British and Dutch settlers known as Afrikaners or Boers. Arthur Conan Doyle, author of the Sherlock Holmes stories, served as a volunteer doctor during the conflict. In his book about the war (*The Great Boer War*), he wrote about a small detachment of British troops who were forced to retreat by an overwhelming enemy force. They left behind their wounded who faced certain death. These soldiers realized the only way to survive was to come immediately under the protection of a Red Cross flag. They had a piece of white cloth, but no red paint, so they used the blood from their wounds to make the cross. Their attackers respected that grim flag and the British wounded were brought to safety.

Our Red Cross offers protection and safety. Christ shed his blood so we could be at peace with God and reconciled to him. Our enemy, the devil, has to honor it.

This is the good news that Paul and the other disciples communicated. It's been given to all creatures. Some has come through orally, some in written form and to all it has come through God's proclamation in the heavens as to his person and power (Romans 1).

One Saturday morning a minister was finishing his sermon while caring for his son. The boy was restless and bored because it was rainy and he couldn't go outside. In desperation the pastor picked up an old magazine and thumbed through it until he came to a large brightly colored map of the world. He tore the page from the magazine, ripped it into little pieces and scattered the scraps all on the living room floor. "If you can put this page together I'll give you a dollar." He hoped this would occupy most of the morning, but 10 minutes later His son announced he'd completed the puzzle. The pastor was amazed his son had finished so quickly. "How did you get that done so fast?" "It was easy. On the other side there was a picture of a man. I just put a piece of paper on the bottom, put the picture of the man together, put a piece of paper of top and then turned it over. I figured that if I got the man right, the world would be right."

If get Jesus right, the world will be right. That's a lead that shouldn't be buried.