

# Venit

If you've got a bible, go ahead and turn with me to **Colossians 1**. It's going to **take us a bit**, but we will get there *eventually*. I want to try something a little *different* this morning. If you've been around our church very long, you know that what we normally like to do during this time is teach *from* the Scriptures. We look at one passage in the bible, or maybe 2-3 *different* passages, and then do our best to *unpack* what they teach and how they apply to our lives. But **just for this morning**, I actually want to switch things up. Today, instead of teaching *from* the bible, I want to teach our way *to* the bible, and *then* teach *from* it. Are you up for that? Okay, I was genuinely hoping so because I didn't have anything else planned.

So in order to do that, let's **kick things off with a question**. And I want you to really think on it with me. Here it is: **why did Jesus *matter*?** ~~Now, at least best you can, I want you to try and not answer it like a Christian would. And yes, I do realize the irony in what I just said. I do understand the setting we're in right now. But I want you to try to think about it more logically and objectively than that: why did Jesus, as a person who existed in history, matter?~~ Because **honestly, from a historical perspective, he probably shouldn't have.**

Here's **what I mean**. **Generally**, if you want to make an impact on the world, there are a handful of tried-and-true *ways* to go about it. *One* way is to be born into a **wealthy family**. Today and in antiquity, if you are born into wealth and/or fame, you've got a pretty good chance of being wealthy and famous too. Right? ~~I mean just take the Kardashians for instance. Best I can tell, there is no particular reason that they became famous, except that they came from a wealthy, quasi-famous family. It's certainly not because they're interesting.~~ But that's how the world works: if you come from *money*, you've got a decent shot at becoming *important*. *Jesus*, on the other hand, was born to poor parents, who were displaced by an ill-timed census, living in a borrowed room. ~~Another method would be to **start a family of your own**: get married and have lots of kids who can carry on your business and family legacy. Jesus never got married and never had even a single child of his own.~~

Another way to *matter* is to **grow up in a big city** where you can leverage connections and opportunity to help *rise* to prominence. ~~If you want to be an actor, go to New York or L.A. If you want to make it big in politics, go to D.C. If you want to be a musician, Nashville. If you want to be a star, you should live somewhere where stars are made.~~ *Jesus*, on the other hand, grew up in *Nazareth*: a town in the boonies with a population

of a few hundred people.<sup>1</sup> Such that upon meeting him, someone actually said in response, “can anything *good* come from *Nazareth*?”<sup>2</sup>

Another way to matter is to **travel**. Even if you come from an obscure *place*, if you travel to enough places and are a good enough networker, you can *still* make a name for yourself and become *cultured*. I call this the *Eat, Pray, Love* approach to prominence. *Jesus, however*, never traveled more than two hundred miles from the place he was born, and gravitated towards relatively *rural* settings, not urban centers.

Another way to *matter* in our world is to live a **lavish lifestyle**. Build a *mansion* that people want to visit and photograph and host parties *in*. Think of the Vanderbilts with the Biltmore House in Asheville. But *Jesus*, for the bulk of his life, had no home at *all* (much less a *nice* one),<sup>3</sup> and often slept outside or stayed with family and friends for short periods of time. Another way to *matter* is to **write a book**. Release your groundbreaking ideas out into the wild and watch as the royalty checks roll in. *Jesus*, while he did have books written *about* him, never *published* so much as a single *sentence* of his own writing.

Another way to *matter*—if we’re completely honest—is to just be **really, really, really good-looking**. In a shallow world like ours that tends to value people based on their appearance, *if you’ve got a jawline like Ryan Reynolds or a physique like Michael B. Jordan...then you can be a big deal simply because people like to look at you. You make it into movies and commercials and onto magazine covers*. And yet, we’re told in Isaiah that there was *nothing* about *Jesus*’ appearance *at all* that was exceptional. Nothing about him that would draw people to look at him or notice him in a crowd.<sup>4</sup>

Another way to make a name for yourself is to occupy **political office**. Become the figurehead of a movement. *Jesus*, however, repeatedly *resisted* anyone who wanted to prop him up as a political leader, saying that his kingdom wasn’t that kind of kingdom, and it shouldn’t be thought of as such.<sup>5</sup>

And **we could go on**. But I think y’all are getting my point by now: at least **on the surface, it doesn’t seem like Jesus checked any of the boxes that you need to check in order to matter in the course of history**. He didn’t really *do any* of the things you’re supposed to do. **He should not have mattered, from a logical, historical, human perspective. And yet, it’s hard to argue that he didn’t matter**. In fact, it’s hard

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 2:23

<sup>2</sup> John 1:46

<sup>3</sup> Matthew 8:20, Luke 9:58

<sup>4</sup> Isaiah 53:2

<sup>5</sup> See John 6:14-15, John 18:36

to argue that he *hasn't* been the single most significant person in the history of the world to this day.

Here's how famous author **H.G. Wells** put it:

*I am an **historian**; I am not a believer. But I must confess as a **historian** that this penniless preacher from Nazareth is irrevocably the very **center of history**. **Jesus Christ is easily the most dominant figure in all history.***

**Time Magazine** put it this way when they named Jesus not just the man of the year, not just the man of the *millennium*, but the man of *all* millenia. *They explained it this way:*

*It would require **much exotic calculation** [...] to deny that the single most powerful figure—not merely in **these two millennia** but in **all human history**—has been **Jesus of Nazareth**. [...] A serious argument can be made that **no one else's life has proved remotely as powerful and enduring as that of Jesus.***

So, just to give you **a few surface reasons** that people would say things like that about Jesus...today is March 19, 2023 A.D. "A.D." stands for *Anno Domini*, which is Latin for "the year of our Lord," i.e. *Jesus*. *Human history*, currently, is divided into two eras: there was one chunk of time *before* this one guy was born, and this other chunk of time *after* he was born (the dates are off by a few years based on a miscalculation—which is unfortunate—but *still*...). Additionally, the most widely celebrated international *holiday* is *Christmas*, the holiday commemorating Jesus' birth and bearing part of his title, *Christ*, which means "messiah."

As we mentioned earlier, **while Jesus never wrote a book** of his *own*, more books have been written *about* him than any other person in the history of the world. Over 100,000 *biographies* of Jesus in the English language alone. There are more pieces of art, paintings and sculptures *depicting* Jesus than any other person in history. More songs have been sung about Jesus in the history of the world than about anyone else. As one author put it, the life of Jesus is "a comet with an exceedingly long tail."

But to be honest with you, **those few things** I just mentioned **don't even scratch the surface** of Jesus' impact on our world. Jesus and his movement have shaped society as we know it. For this section, I'm just gonna give you some *categories* to consider.

First, let's consider the very concept of **human rights & equality**. Let me know **if you've heard this line** before: "We hold these truths to be *self-evident*: that all men are *created*

*equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights...*” Sound familiar? Those ideas are ground zero for our entire *understanding* of human rights, at least in America, and most of the West. Most of *us today* take the reality of human rights for *granted*. “*Of course* all people are created equal. *Of course* that’s the case.” That *is*, like the Declaration says, “self-evident.”

**But** here’s what you should know: **for the overwhelming majority of human history, equality has not been self-evident at all.** One popular thinker who didn’t believe in it was a guy named *Aristotle*. He once said, “*for that some should rule and others should be ruled is a thing not only necessary, but expedient; from the hour of their birth, some are marked out for subjection, others for rule.*” In other words, to *him*, it was *actually* self-evident that *not* everyone is created equal. And *that* was the *predominant* way of thinking in *most* ancient civilizations—that is, until the movement of *Jesus* started taking hold. **Part of the reason people of low social status flocked to Jesus is because he preached this absolutely radical, novel idea that they mattered as much as everybody else.**

**Nicholas Wolterstorff**, philosopher and former professor at Yale, puts it this way:

*What happened to cause this moral subculture that says every human being has rights? [...] (Answer?) The teaching of the Jewish Scriptures, clarified and made available to all the world through Jesus.*

**Simply put,** the concept that human beings have *rights*, just by virtue of being human, and the idea that all humans are created *equal*, is a uniquely and distinctly **Christian idea**. Now, I’m **not saying** that if you don’t believe in Jesus, you can’t believe in human rights. That would be silly. But I *am* saying that **if it were not for Jesus and his movement, you wouldn’t believe in human rights.** I wouldn’t. Because that’s where the idea itself *came* from.

More specifically, consider Jesus’ contributions to how we think about **children** in our society. In the ancient world Jesus was born into, children were not primarily seen as cute, cuddly, bundles of joy. They were largely seen as *liabilities*. In a hand-to-mouth society, children were often a *burden*. Such that it was common for unwanted children—or children who weren’t *male*—to be left out in the elements to die of *exposure*.<sup>6</sup>

But **something changed** when Jesus and his movement started taking hold. One gospel writer named Mark captured a moment where Jesus’ disciples were trying to keep

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<sup>6</sup> Aristotle again summarized the cultural sentiment well: “Let there be a law that no deformed child shall be reared.”

people's children away from Jesus. "Get these pesky kids away from Jesus! Don't you know how many Instagram followers he has?!" That was the general vibe from the disciples. But here was **Jesus' response** to the situation:

*"Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these."<sup>7</sup>*

Jesus bestowed **unprecedented dignity on children**, in stark contrast to the society around him. Such that one scholar published a work about it, titled *When Children Became People: the Birth of Childhood in Early Christianity*.

Here's **one that may surprise you** if you read many of the headlines about Christianity: the Jesus movement bestowed a unique honor and dignity upon **women**. If it was rough for kids in the ancient world before Jesus, it was in many ways worse for women. By Roman law, a father was required to raise all healthy male children, but was only required to raise the *firstborn* female; all the other girls were essentially disposable. The same book of law said that men could *physically beat* their wives with a rod or switch so long as its circumference was no greater than the man's thumb.

But **Jesus treated women very differently** than the world around him. Women were included in listing his family lineage, which was highly unusual for his time.<sup>8</sup> Women were invited to be His disciples and to travel with him, participate in ministry with him, even deciding to *provide* financially for his ministry out of their own means.<sup>9</sup> Jesus repeatedly held up women as examples of faith, devotion, and spiritual maturity,<sup>10</sup> in a day and age when almost *no one* thought of women that way. Author Rebecca McLaughlin summarizes it this way:

*Indeed, the way that Jesus treated women tore up the belief that women are innately inferior to men: a belief that was pervasive in the ancient world. We should not be surprised, therefore, that women have been flocking to Jesus ever since."<sup>11</sup>*

Christianity also revolutionized the way people thought about **the poor**. We have accounts of ancient leaders who wanted to stamp out Christian movement. But many of them were nervous to do so because *Christians* were the only people consistently, impactfully caring for the *poor* in their cities. One leader goes on record as being anxious

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<sup>7</sup> Mark 10:14

<sup>8</sup> See Matthew 1:1-16

<sup>9</sup> Luke 8:1-3

<sup>10</sup> Matthew 15:28, Luke 7:44-47, and Luke 10:42, respectively.

<sup>11</sup> McLaughlin, *Jesus Through the Eyes of Women*, p. 8.

that if they were to extinguish Christians, there would be *riots* because the poor in the city wouldn't be cared for well enough.<sup>12</sup>

Christians also *pioneered* the way that many societies cared for **the sick**. St. Basil of Caesarea, a follower of Jesus in the fourth century, founded what was essentially the first-ever *hospital* based on his conviction that Christians should care for the sick, as taught in the *New Testament*. To this day, many hospitals bear names and indicators of Christian denominations: *Baptist, Presbyterian, St. Mary's, St. Joseph's*...because they were originally *founded, funded, and run* by followers of Jesus.

Historically, followers of Jesus have also led the way in the fields of **science and reason**. Galileo, Isaac Newton, Blaise Pascal, George Washington Carver, or people like *Francis Collins* today—all these people attribute their pursuit of science and research to a *Christian faith or Christian ideals*. It's easy to overlook in a day where some followers of Jesus love to pit their faith *against* science and reason, but followers of Jesus have *always* been active on that front, even *pioneers* in it. Historian **Rodney Stark** explains it like this:

*While the other world religions emphasized mystery and intuition, Christianity alone embraced reason and logic as the primary guide to religious truth.*<sup>13</sup>

This helps explain why historically, **Christians have founded** so many well-known institutions of **education** that exist to this day: places like *Harvard, Yale, Princeton, Oxford, Cambridge*—and, not to state it too broadly, but—virtually the *entire* Western system of education that we have today. **You don't start universities if you're opposed to education, reason, and science—that would be a very counterproductive thing to do.** //

So **to summarize**: **whether you realize it or not, Jesus and his movement are actually at the foundation of quite a few things that we take for granted today.** *Human rights, care for the poor, healthcare, science, reason, logic, education.* And we haven't even looked at more conceptual values like *freedom, progress, consent, justice*—those ideas *also* find much of their roots in Jesus' movement.<sup>14</sup> Attempting to *summarize* the impact of Jesus, Oxford grad **Dwight Longenecker** (which is definitely one of the most *British* names I've ever heard). He says:

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<sup>12</sup> Full text available [here](#).

<sup>13</sup> Stark, *The Victory of Reason*.

<sup>14</sup> More on these ideas [here](#), or in book form [here](#).

The development of **science** springs from a **Christian theology** that the natural world is **real**, and that it is **ordered** and **structured** and can therefore be **studied** and **analyzed**. The idea that one can take **initiative** and **change** one's life and **change** the world springs from the **empowerment** that comes from the **doctrine of free will**. **Human rights** would never have been **thought** of without the belief in the innate dignity of each human being created in God's image and likeness. **Justice** is possible because of the **belief** in an **objective law**—which would be impossible without a **divine lawgiver**, and even the **atheistic rebellions** of Voltaire, Nietzsche, and Marx would have been impossible without a **higher belief** in the values of **truth** and **personal integrity**...

Do you see what he's saying? The life of Jesus is a "comet with an exceedingly long tail." Now, **before we continue**: please hear me on this. **In no way am I trying to make the case that only positive things have ever been contributed to the world in the name of Christianity**. I am well aware, just like all of you, that quite a few *horrendous* things have been done by people who *claim* to represent Jesus. *The Crusades. The colonial slave trade. The scandal of sexual abuse in the Catholic church.* Just to mention a few. And if you've been around our church for long, you know we have absolutely *no problem* pointing those things out and *calling* them for what they are. So I certainly today am not trying to ignore *any* of that. Not at all.

But **here's the case I am making**. Sometimes, people like to talk about Christianity as if it has *only* ever contributed negative things to the world. That's becoming very popular, to talk about Christianity like it's only ever the *problem*. Like it only ever makes things worse, and that's why we should leave it behind. And if that's your perspective, I get it. That's an easy view to take if all you do is read the headlines. But with respect, you may want to do a little more reading and listening, before you settle on that view. Because it's not even a little bit true that Christianity has only contributed negative things to the world. Quite the opposite, in many ways. ~~Is that making sense?~~

Because **whether we realize it or not**, the impact of Jesus on our world is *vast*. Which is what leads Yale historians to conclude things like this:

*Regardless of what anyone may personally think or believe about Him, Jesus of Nazareth has been the dominant figure in the history of Western Culture for almost twenty centuries. If it were possible, with some sort of super magnet, to pull up out of history every scrap of metal bearing at least a trace of His name, how much would be left?*<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Jeroslav Pelikan

I think that's a question worth wrestling with, wherever you are in the journey of faith. **The world as you and I know it would look *profoundly* different if it weren't for the impact of Jesus and his movement.** *Profoundly* different—and *I* would argue it would be very much a net *negative*.

So here's why I take you on that entire journey. To me, *all* of this raises a very important question. A question that I would argue *every person* in this room *must* answer, whether they *want* to answer it or not. And it's the question *how? How did Jesus become, undeniably, the single-most impactful person in the history of the world...despite the fact that he did pretty much none of the things a person needs to do to make an impact?* If you're thinking *objectively*, I think that question has to eat at you a little bit, right? **Jesus is, as our series title indicates, a complete anomaly. He fits no categories we have in history, and yet has had an unparalleled impact on history itself.** So...*how* is that possible for a person to do?

Well, I'll give you my answer, which I've just *borrowed* from the Apostle *Paul*. This is **Colossians 1, v. 15-20**. We'll read the whole thing, and then I'll go back and point a few things out for us:

*The Son is the **image** of the **invisible God**, the **firstborn** over all creation. For in **him all things** were created: things in **heaven** and on **earth**, **visible** and **invisible**, whether **thrones** or **powers** or **rulers** or **authorities**; **all things** have been created **through** him and **for** him. **He is before** all things, and **in him** all things hold **together**. And **he** is the head of the body, the church; he is the **beginning** and the **firstborn** from among the dead, so that **in everything** he might have the **supremacy**. For God was **pleased** to have **all his fullness dwell** in **him**, and **through** him to **reconcile** to himself **all things**, whether things on **earth** or things in **heaven**, by making **peace** through his **blood**, **shed** on the **cross**.*

**The answer for how Jesus could have an impact unlike any other person, is because he is a person unlike any other person.** In fact, because he's not *just* a person at all: he's the "image of the invisible God." Jesus wasn't just *made in* the image of God, like we *all* are; he *is* the image of God.

In Paul's words, "**all things were created** in him and *through* him and *for* him." And notice: Paul says that *includes* things that are "**visible**" and things that are "**invisible**." So we as human beings were created by him; *nature* and the world itself was created by him—those things are *visible*. But *invisible* things were *also* created by him. Things like

*justice. Equality. Human rights. Logic. Science. Education. Progress.* So listen: **could it be possible that the reason so many people adhere to those things, even when they don't believe in God, is because those things are imprinted on our very nature as his creation?** The reason *equality* is "self-evident" to so many of us is because we are all *made* in the image of God, whose *idea* equality was. Whose idea it was to bestow dignity on every single person as an image bearer of God.

And **then there's that line** at the end of v. 18, "...so that in everything he might have the *supremacy*." The word Paul uses there is the word *próteuó*. It means "preeminence" or to "hold the first place." But it means more than just first in *sequence*. It means first in *importance*. First in *significance*, first in *impact*—or if you prefer, **in the words of H.G. Wells** from earlier: "...the most *dominant* figure in all of history."

You see, **the reason Jesus has the impact he has had** is because of *who he is*. Because God *intended* it to be that way, from the beginning. Jesus has the impact he has because **he is precisely who he claimed to be: God in the flesh, sent to earth, to change the very course of human history.** And as it turns out, he did exactly that. And to be honest, it requires quite a bit of cognitive dissonance to insist that he *hasn't*, starting in the first century, and continuing on today, over two thousand years later. **Western society as we know it would not look remotely like it does without Jesus.** And nearly all historians—at least the *honest* ones—will admit that. Even some that don't *want* to.

So **then the question becomes:** what are *we* supposed to **do with all that?** Why go on that very long journey into the impact of Jesus, especially when at least the *majority* of people in *this* room, already *believe* that Jesus is who he says he is? Here's why. **I want everything we talked about to help guard us against two common mistakes we sometimes make in how we approach our faith.** Two *tendencies* I think all of *that* can help us unlearn. And I want to spend just a few minutes on each of them before we're done. You ready? Okay, first thing all of this tells us is that...

**We don't have to *privatize* our faith.**

Now, for clarity here: I'm **not saying** that our faith **shouldn't be personal**. Our faith *is* and *should* be deeply personal; but that's not the same thing as it being *private*. I think often, you and I feel some amount of pressure to keep our belief in Jesus to *ourselves*. Sometimes, that **pressure is internal**—we don't want to come across a certain way to others, so we keep quiet. Sometimes it's **external**. **In more and more ways, it gets communicated that it's fine for Christians to exercise their faith...so long as that is limited to what we do in private and maybe an hour or two on Sunday mornings. But that we**

shouldn't bring our faith into how we think about work, or how we think about our money, or how we think about politics, or how we think about sexuality—because to do that could be off-putting to others. So followers of Jesus should just keep it all *private*.

Now, there are **a few problems with that**. One is that in general, **it's not very healthy to tell anyone to sequester entire parts of themselves off from the rest**. Imagine if I said to a friend of mine who is a person of color, “okay—it's fine for you to be a person of color; just be sure not to let that impact how you think about any particular public-facing part of your life. Just be a person of color in *private*.” Do you hear how ridiculous that sounds to say? Okay, it's just as ridiculous of a thing to say to followers of Jesus.

The **second problem** is that **followers of Jesus actually can't keep their faith to themselves**. According to the Scriptures, living that way is actually *impossible*. In the book of James, chapter 2, James makes a point of saying that faith without “works” (which is his language for ‘public, visible *outworkings* of one's faith’)—he says that *that* type of faith is actually *dead*.<sup>16</sup> In other words, it's a *lie*. There is actually no way to have *faith* in Jesus that does not work itself out in visible, public ways.

But **perhaps most related** to what we've discussed this morning is this: even **if you're not a Christian, you actually don't want Christians to privatize their faith**. You may *think* you do, but you actually don't. If followers of Jesus had “kept their faith to themselves,” the human rights as we know it would not *exist*. If followers of Jesus had “kept their faith *private*,” our society would not be where it is in regards to our treatment of women and children, the poor and the sick. Not to mention minorities. **To just make it abundantly obvious: I am exceedingly glad that Martin Luther King, Jr. refused to “keep his faith to himself.”**

So followers of Jesus: **you do not have to privatize your faith**. You are better off, your neighbors are better off, and the world is better off, when you *don't*. Now, please do make an effort to relate to others respectfully and gently, and not obnoxiously—the New Testament actually mentions that *specifically*.<sup>17</sup> But you do not have to keep it *private*.

The *second* thing all of this helps us realize is that...

### **We don't have to *relativize* our faith.**

This tendency is **obviously similar** to the first one, but also a little *different*. Some of us don't *privatize* our belief in Jesus as much as we *relativize* it. **Relativism, if you're**

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<sup>16</sup> See James 2:14-18 specifically.

<sup>17</sup> 1 Peter 3:15

unfamiliar, is the belief that things like truth and morality exist *relative* to culture—and therefore *aren't absolute*. In layman's terms, it's the belief that while some things are true for *me*, that doesn't mean (and *shouldn't* mean) they are true in *general*, for *other* people.

Some of us have a **tendency to relativize** our faith. We think, “well, *I* believe that certain things are right and wrong, *I* believe that God exists and created the world—but that's *my* truth. *Other* people may have their *own* truth, and that's just as good for them.” Now again: *gentleness* and *understanding* are great values to have towards people of other worldviews. Yes and amen to that. But hear me out: **being tolerant and understanding of other worldviews is not the same thing as affirming other worldviews.**

**As followers of Jesus, we believe** that the *one true* God of the universe, sent his *one* and *only* son, to die on a cross and come back from the grave, so that *he* might be *the* way, *the* truth, and *the* life. **Not a single one of those are relative claims.** That's not *one* true way to view the world among *many*: it is *the one* true way to view the world. As Paul says in Romans 1, “...*I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes.*”<sup>18</sup> Now, I realize that **if you're here today and you're not a follower of Jesus,** everything I just said probably comes across a bit *arrogant* to you. And I get that. We've all been disciplined very well by our society to *view* claims like that as *arrogant*. But I would submit to you that the statement *itself* isn't *arrogant* at all. It's not *arrogant* simply to state that something is true.

**Think about it this way:** if I came up to you and said “the capital of Tennessee is **Nashville,**” you would not respond by going, “wow—how *arrogant* of you to state that Nashville is the capital of Tennessee.” Because *objectively*, Nashville *is* the capital of Tennessee. *Arrogance* and *humility* actually have nothing to do with it. Now, I *could* say “the capital of Tennessee is *Nashville*; *I'm* awesome because I know that; and anyone who *doesn't* know that is a certifiable *idiot*.” And that would be an *arrogant way to present a true* statement. But just saying that something is true is not inherently *arrogant*. Some things *are* verifiably *true*. G.K. Chesterson puts it this way:

*...what we suffer from today is humility in the wrong place. [...] A man was meant to be doubtful about himself, but undoubting about the truth; (but) this has been exactly reversed. [...] We are on the road to producing a race of men too mentally modest to believe in the multiplication table.*

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<sup>18</sup> v. 16

G.K. Chesterson throwing some shade with that quote. But do you hear **what he's saying?** He's saying that **some things are objectively true**. Nashville *is* the capital of Tennessee. Two times two *is* four. And Jesus *is* the only way to God. **And I think the reason some of us so instinctively shy away from sharing the truth of Jesus with others in our life is because we have relativized its truth in our minds.** We've decided, whether we realize it or not, that the stuff we believe about Jesus is true for *us*, but it's not true in *general*. But listen: the claim that the Scriptures make, over and over again, is that it is *true*. *Full stop*. "[Jesus] *is* the image of the invisible God...*all* things were created *through* him and *for* him. He *is before* all things, and *in* him *all* things hold together." In *everything*, he has the supremacy. And *through* him, God "is reconciling *all things* to himself, making peace through his blood, shed on the cross."

And prayer this morning is that **by understanding that**, some of us would have *strength* put back in our bones as followers of Jesus. That we would have *confidence* deep in your spirit that as a follower of Jesus, what we have found is not just *one* truth among many, but *the* truth. Not one valid way of life among many, but the *one true* way to live. Not one true story that makes sense for you, but *the one true* story of the world. And that the cross and empty grave of Jesus aren't just enough for *you*: they're enough for *everyone* who believes.

So **every week after the teaching**, we go to the tables and we take communion. And what we're celebrating there, really, are the words of Colossians 1. That through Jesus, God is reconciling *all things* to himself. And the way he's doing that is by making peace, by his blood, shed on the cross. So we go to the tables and we remember that through that, we have been brought into understanding the one true story of the world. And that we have *Jesus* to thank for that. So if you're a follower of Jesus this morning, you're invited to respond with us.

Let's pray.