

The Core

Living with Jesus at the Center

Mark Vroegop

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 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. And 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, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross (Col. 1:15-20).

When it comes to your life, what's your core? What is the central, innermost, and most essential part of your soul-life? What is the defining center around which the rest of your life orbits? We often discover this in times of crisis. Where do we turn when we need "centering"?

Today we begin a study of the book of Colossians that will address those questions. This New Testament book identifies the core of Christianity like few other books in the Bible. The writer, Paul, writes four chapters to succinctly and powerfully highlight the centrality of Christ and to demonstrate how it applies to life.

Paul wants to bring this church back to the core message of the gospel so that they will know how to live. The singular message of this glorious book: **Jesus is the center of everything**. This book shows us how to live with Jesus at the center.

My aim for this series is to help you see how this centrality should affect every area of your life. In other words, we will learn much about Jesus so that we can be more Jesus-centered.

The book of Colossians was the first book I preached at College Park in 2008, and we thought it would be helpful for us to go back to this historic book in the life of our church.

Why Colossians?

There are four reasons:

1. It contains some of the most glorious passages about Christ in all the Bible.

There are passages in this book that are incomparable in their exaltation of Christ! It is almost as if Paul runs out of adjectives to describe the Jesus whom he loves. Take this example:

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or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And 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, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross (Col. 1:15-20).

The book looks at Christ from multiple angles, calling us to bask in the glory of his person and work. It is like a diamond ring—the more you turn it the more brilliant it looks.

2. It fits with College Park’s Core Values, especially the Pre-eminence of Jesus and the Authority of the Word.

Our mission as a church is to ignite a passion to follow Jesus. Early in our church’s history it was often said, “The main thing is to keep the Main One (Jesus) the main thing.” And that principle could well be the thesis statement for the entire book of Colossians.

All our Core Values are important: Pre-eminence of Jesus, Authority of the Word, Redemptive Community, Extravagant Grace, Biblical Unity in Diversity, and The Call to Go. But the first two serve as the cornerstones.

One of the things that has historically characterized our church is a passion to make Jesus the focal point of this ministry.

3. It applies the centrality of Jesus to every area of life.

You are going to find an elevated view of Christ in this book. The Christology of Colossians soars really high. And at the same time, the book is very practical, and I love that. I love it when I’m able to bask in the light of the greatness of God and then learn how to live it out in real life.

Colossians balances the elevated Christology of chapters 1 and 2 with the practical instructions of chapters 3 and 4. The material in this book is not the stuff of “ivory tower” discussions, nor does it answer questions that no one is asking. No, this book moves from the lofty, exalted, preeminent Christ to issues of moral purity, anger, marriage, child-rearing, and work. It infuses Christ-centeredness into real life.

4. It shows us that Jesus-centered living is a primary battleground.

Jesus-centered living is a real battle that disciples of Jesus face. The beauty of Colossians is the way that Paul calls the followers of Jesus to live in light of the existing centrality of Christ. The Bible is Jesus-centered. Heaven is Jesus-centered. God made it that way, and we have to constantly guard our hearts and our lives from moving from Jesus-centeredness. You see, we often don’t make Jesus the center of life.

Therefore, the real battle is to live in the **light of** the centrality of Jesus—to let the priority of Christ take over. The challenge is to live out Colossians 3:17, “And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything

in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.” Knowing that Jesus is the core is one thing; the real challenge is living in such a way that every area of life is transformed by the centrality of Christ.

I want you to think creatively about how Jesus **could and should** transform every area of your life. How does Christ-centeredness relate to corporate worship, Bible reading, ministry, giving, raising kids, and your job? But more than anything, I want you to ask yourself this question: “What does a Jesus-centered life look like for me in 2025?”

Overview: Jesus Is the Core!

Next week we will dive into the historical and cultural background of the book. We will examine what prompted the apostle Paul to write the book, and we will look very specifically at what is called the “Colossian heresy.” In other words, we will try to figure out the problem that Paul was attempting to address. But today I simply want to help you understand the big picture outline of the book.

The book and our series will be divided up into four parts, or you could think of it as the core and three orbits:

Jesus at the Center (1:1-23)

For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, 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 (Col 1:19-22).

Here are some of the words used to describe Jesus: image of the invisible God, firstborn of all creation, creator of everything in heaven and earth, visible and invisible, physical and spiritual, the preexistent one, the sustainer of everything, the head of the church, the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, preeminent, the full revelation of God, and the great reconciler. Every word and phrase highlights a unique and powerful dimension of who Jesus is and what he has done. Paul looks at Jesus from multiple angles and celebrates the centrality and preeminence of Jesus.

You don’t make Christ the head or preeminent or sovereign. He doesn’t ask your permission to be these. We don’t elect him. He doesn’t run for office. He doesn’t need your vote.

Jesus is free! Free from our approval, consent, or validation. So, we don’t make him Lord. He is Lord. You don’t make him the center; he is the center. The question is not whether or not he is the center—that is an established fact. The real question is whether your life orbits around him and whether the various parts of your life orbit around him. In other words, you don’t make Jesus the center; you submit your life to the **reality** of Jesus being the center.

And as you do that (submit your life to the centrality of Jesus), you come to realize how off-center your life was before him, how meaningless life would be without him, and how grateful you are for his love and grace. Jesus doesn’t need you in his orbit, but you need him!

You see the beauty of the centrality of Jesus is the way in which God is bringing back the entire creation through the person and work of Christ. The grand plan of redemption is to reconcile the created with the Creator, and Jesus is *the* central figure in this divine drama.

Therefore, Jesus is the center of creation, redemption, and worship. The goal of Colossians is to help us fully understand and appreciate the superiority of Jesus in all things, and that is the focus of the first twenty-three verses.

Jesus-centered Ministry (1:24-2:7)

We are introduced to the first orbit of Jesus-centeredness in 1:24. Paul, in very pastoral tones, shares his heart for the church. He moves quickly from the exaltation of Christ to his deep love for those to whom he is writing. His words are filled with love and concern:

Now I rejoice in my sufferings for your sake, and in my flesh I am filling up what is lacking in Christ's afflictions for the sake of his body, that is, the church, of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. Him we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone with all wisdom, that we may present everyone mature in Christ. For this I toil, struggling with all his energy that he powerfully works within me (Col. 1:24-29).

We see that getting Jesus at the core creates the motivation that is at the heart of all ministry. Jesus-centered ministry looks like joyful and intentional suffering, loving correction, deep and personal pain, laboring in prayer, rejoicing in growth, and a relentless passion to see people learn to walk like Jesus. All of it flows from Jesus-centeredness.

As you received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in him (Col. 2:6).

You cannot do ministry without Jesus at the center.

Jesus-centered Thinking (2:8-3:4)

As we will see next week, the church was exposed to heretical teaching, and Paul was concerned that they were getting caught up in it (2:8). The solution was not merely an apologetic attack on the heresy, but a call for them to think rightly about Jesus. In the second section or orbit, Paul identifies truth upon truth:

- “In him the fullness of deity dwells bodily” (2:9)
- “you have been filled in him” (2:10)
- “you were circumcised . . . by the circumcision of Christ” (2:11)
- “having been buried with him . . . you were also raised with him through faith” (2:12)
- “you, who were dead . . . God made alive . . . having forgiven us” (2:13)
- “canceling the record of debt that stood against us” (2:14)

He points them to Christ with a clarion call:

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God (Col 3:1-3).

Think about Christ. Celebrate the truths of Christ. Live on the promises of God. Don't allow yourself to be deluded or pressured into trusting in anything. Set your mind on Christ because your life is hidden with Christ. Jesus is the core!

Jesus-Centered Living (3:5-4:18)

The third and final orbit is where Paul gets very practical. His argument sounds like this: If Jesus is the supreme core of everything, put away anything that doesn't fit with him and put on everything that does fit, integrating Jesus into every area of life. Jesus at the center repels some things, creates other things, and transforms all relationships.

We see first what Jesus-centered living repels sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, covetousness (3:5), anger, wrath, malice, slander, obscene talk, and lying (3:8-9). This stuff just doesn't fit with Jesus-centered living. These are the sins for which he died. These sins indicate that self and the flesh are in control, not Jesus.

Second, we see what is created: compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience, bearing with one another, forgiveness, and the peace of Christ (3:12-15). These are the things that only make sense because Jesus is creating them.

Third, we see the effect of Jesus on the relationships of life:

- Wives are to submit to husbands (3:18)
- Husbands are to love their wives (3:19)
- Children should obey their parents (3:20)
- Fathers should not provoke their children (3:21)
- Servants should obey their masters (3:22)
- Masters should be fair to servants (4:1)
- Our speech should always be gracious (4:6)

Do you see it? Orbiting around the core are all these relationships, and every one of them is different because of what is at the center. Jesus is powerful enough to transform any and every area of life!

And that is why this book can be so powerful. Living with Jesus at the center can literally transform every area of life.

Listen carefully to me! Jesus is the core. He's the core of everything, of real ministry, of biblical thinking, and of practical living.

Jesus is not some add-on or upgrade to your life. He is not just something you believe in or some spiritual lucky charm. He's not your co-pilot, your buddy, or your life coach.

He is the image of the invisible God, firstborn of all creation, creator of everything, the preexistent one, the sustainer of everything, the head of the church, the firstborn from the dead, the *preeminent* one.

In other words, Jesus is not your lackey—he is LORD! Jesus is the core, and everything in life revolves around him.

And the message of Colossians is the call of God to us today: We need to learn how to live with Jesus at the center.

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