

**Sunday 16<sup>th</sup> January 2022**  
**Colossians 1:15-23**  
**Mr.Donald Meek**  
**Brightons Parish Church**

I am a bit of an expert in physical vision or so I think.

I've had my eyes tested more times than I care to count and when I go to the optician almost inevitably the optician will put up a great big card and asks me to read the letters on the card and I start off very well, I can do the top lines, and I'm very pleased with myself, then we get to the middle and I can do some of them and then when I get to the little bottom lines and the letters begin to get smaller, I start guessing and eventually I run out of guesses. That's physical vision, and I've had to go regularly to have my eyes tested, and one of the things that strikes me is how subtly I can lose my vision. I wonder what I'll be like in another 10 years' time. Wonderfully my sight is stable at the moment but I've got to be careful.

As I said to the children, there are more ways than one of seeing. The apostle Paul reminded the Ephesians that they had eyes in their hearts. 'I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which He has called you, the riches of His glorious inheritance in the saints.' We have different kinds of vision. I'm well aware of it when I'm working on an academic problem and it's very difficult and then, suddenly, there comes a moment and from my brain and my mind these simple words 'I see!' We've got vision inside ourselves, we've got spiritual vision too, and I would just like to ask you how often do you have a spiritual vision check?

It's very easy just to avoid that and our spiritual vision can sometimes certainly go away. As Eric was saying in his moving prayer, we're bombarded with so many things. The world around us and we're looking this way and that and we lose the central focus. So many things compete for our attention and we can lose our focus on Jesus Christ, our Lord, very easily. I was reminded of this even in preparing this sermon. I was pulling out books and commentaries that I hadn't looked at in years and suddenly I realized that I'd been losing my spiritual vision. And I was reading about the person and work of The Lord Jesus Christ, reading very deep books and I don't intend to go into their depths with you today. I'll spare you that. But it made me aware of just how easily and how subtly we can lose our spiritual vision.

William Cooper, the hymn writer, put it like this 'Where is the blessedness I knew when once I saw The Lord. When first I saw The Lord. Where is the soul refreshing view of Jesus and His word.' It's just so easy to lose our spiritual vision. Things happen in life. Sadness, disappointments and all that. I'm just covered and we're so glued to that and worried and sometimes we really redefine our faith. We even redefine the person of Jesus to suit ourselves, to make Him non-threatening, to make Him just somebody that we can refer to when we want, rather than when He wants to talk to us. Oh, it's so subtle, certainly the essence of modernity corrode us.

But you know, the consolation is, as we come to God's word and to the epistle to the Colossians and also to the Laodiceans, they were to read it too, it wasn't just Colossae that had the problem, this is an old problem. Vision of Jesus was becoming fuzzy and colossal and the Colossians and evidently the Laodiceans too, were losing their focus.

It was happening for a variety of reasons. Different teachings around, different philosophies, and they were seeping into their souls and some were probably listening to the teachers and enjoying the different messages without being aware that they were gradually drifting away from the bedrock of their salvation. It happens so subtly folks and it's an old, old problem, and Paul is tackling it in Colossians and what he does here is something quite dramatic, in a way, as he speaks to the Colossians telling them of how Jesus has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves. He then gives us this amazing picture of that very Son and it occupies most of the passage that we have read together.

It's a very complicated passage in many ways. As I was preparing myself over the last six weeks to speak to you, I became aware of how scholars tussle with it and if we were to go round down their particular road we could be in here for weeks. I'll try to avoid that.

But he puts it before them straight, a big picture of Jesus a big, big picture

The heights and depths of this passage are truly amazing, and the passage acts as the cornerstone for the rest of the letter. As I was reading through it I noted the number of times that the sections in this chapter were taken through like little blocks and built on again with implications for what the Colossians did in their own lives.

But what Paul does primarily is that he makes them look up. He says, come away from these teachers and the philosophies for a minute and start doing that, looking up and see the salvation that has been prepared for you in Jesus Christ. He puts this picture right at the center of the letter or at the beginning really, but it is central to it all and he asks them to look at it and what I want to do today is to take you and make you look up to Jesus.

When Brent Haywood spoke to us at the very beginning, he used the image of balancing that broom on its handle and, you know, I've almost been going around with that, almost trying to do it because it's such a good image. So often, when our vision fails, we start looking down and we can't anymore balance the broom on our fingers. It's a great image. And that's just what was happening here so Paul's antidote to that is to just give them straight, a picture, a great picture of Jesus Christ.

Now, there are various views about this passage. One of them is that it may well be an earlier statement of belief that Christians had been wrestling with this, before Paul wrote this letter. As I said, it's not a new problem that they had formulated. What mattered, what really mattered, and it was a crucial statement of some kind and there's a lot to be said for that because, if you note at verse 21, he changes a little and he says here's the picture in verses 15 to 20, here's the picture and here are the consequences of that picture, what you have to do and what you have to remember. Now, all I want to do today, very simply, is to take you through the main points as they seem to be to me, of the picture of Jesus that Paul gives. As I say, it's very complicated at one level but I

want to draw out just the simple points so that you take them away and perhaps will be encouraged to look at them further when you leave here, look at the picture as we go. What a picture.

As I was preparing, I was thinking of Rio de Janeiro and I'm sure you will know why because as you go into Rio de Janeiro there's a huge statue sitting above it of Christ the Redeemer but even that's inadequate, very inadequate. It lifts our eyes but it doesn't take us much beyond stone and concrete. Here we have a wonderful picture in which Jesus is lifted up first of all. Paul says through this passage guided by the Holy Spirit Jesus is supreme in and over all creation.

First point - Jesus is not simply a spiritual being, He is spiritual, deeply so because He is very God of very God, He is the very image of God as well, but He is also supreme over creation, He's not separated from creation, He's not divorced from it, but at the same time, He's over it. He's come into this creation in the incarnation but the amazing thing is that He has been there from the beginning of time. He is before all things. He's not simply being born for the first time at Christmas Day. He takes on our flesh but He's there from the very beginning. It's a complex thought but you know we acknowledge Jesus, The Lord Jesus' role in creation. In our hymns don't we and I'm going to put in a wee hymn, a verse from a hymn with each point so that you can think about it – 'Jesus is Lord, creation's voice proclaims it, for by his power each tree and flower was planned and made. Jesus is Lord, the universe declares it, sun, moon and stars in heaven cry, Jesus is Lord.' I often hear that verse going through my head.

Jesus, the supreme Son of God, coexistent with the Father, is the agent of creation. The process of creation is a different matter to me. I don't fully understand it and I will leave it gladly to the scientists to work out all of it, but I know, on the basis of the scriptures, who has been the creator and for whom it was all created. So, that's the first point.

Second, Paul points out that Jesus is supreme over all thrones and powers, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities. All things were created by Him and for Him. He's not just another king and He made that point Himself on this earth. He is integral, as we said, to the making and sustaining of the physical world but even its greatest rulers were created by Him and fought them in heaven and on earth and also in the supernatural realm because these principalities and powers often refer to the supernatural and it may well be that the Colossians were having a wee listen to all sorts of supernatural ideas and Paul brings them back and says, look here, there's one that's greater than all these powers, all thrones and powers. What did Isaac Watts say these many years ago 'Jesus shall reign where the sun doth his successive journeys run. His kingdom stretch from shore to shore, till moon shall wax and wane no more.' He's over all of that.

Third, Jesus is supreme over the church and He is the head of the body the church. He is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead. We have funny ideas of the church sometimes, don't we. We think of it sometimes as a building, sometimes as a denomination, and then we think who's at the head of the denomination, is it the pope,

is it the Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland, and is it the Queen. And each of the structures has its own physical head but beyond that and over the church, as we know it, as we meet together as believers, with our fellow believers throughout the world, Jesus is Lord and He's head of the church. We sing it as in these other hymns so we've got a hymn for this 'The church's one foundation is Jesus Christ her Lord. She is His new creation by water and the word. From heaven he came and sought us, to be His holy bride, and with His blood He bought us and for her life He died.' We actually know these things. That's what I'm telling you, but there are times in life when we need to come back and reinforce them and hear them again because of the seepage into our souls of modernity and our loss of focus and vision.

And then, at the end Paul of the first passage, Paul makes clear to us and to the Colossians that Jesus is supreme in the resurrection. The first born from among the dead. When the phrase first born is used here it generally means that He's got the position of the first son in a primogeniture context and has everything, the authority and He has this that in all things He may have the preeminence. He was the one who conquered death. There were other resurrections through His power before He went to the grave. Lazarus, for example, but Jesus did not die a second time, He went into heaven and there He is and He has and all of that, the preeminence, We need to remind ourselves of that. It's a glorious truth put before us in the New Testament and we sing that too. there's an Easter hymn that I just love 'Thine be the glory, risen conquering Son. Endless is the victory thou o'er death has won.' It's not just an Easter hymn, it's a hymn for every day. Birch Hoyle's wonderful translation of it. I often hear it going through my head and the music lifting me heavenwards.

And then finally, at least in my little interpretation, Jesus is supreme in reconciliation. He's bringing us to God. He's bringing many sons and daughters to glory and Paul emphasizes that there's no need for any add-on. He's complete. He's got the pleroma the fullness of God within and He is the one who has the authority, solely Jesus, to bring us into God's presence and that is profound as well. So many doctrines there are that tell us that we need something else, that we can't really depend on the reconciling power of Jesus. These ideas have been around for a long time, as I've said, they were there in Colossae.

'My hope is built' said the hymn writer 'on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness. I dare not trust the sweetest frame but holy trust on Jesus' name. On Christ this solid rock I stand, all other ground is sinking sand.' I don't know what hymns will be sung the day I go at my funeral but I'll tell you this, I want that one sung because it really sums up the totality of where, as Christians, we ought to stand.

And then there's the next section here, the consequences for us. We could just admire the wonderful work of Jesus but we've got to make it ours and we've got to persevere with it as the reverend George Macdonald reminded us last week. 'But now He has reconciled you by Christ's physical body, if you continue in your faith established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel.' Brent mentioned the Christian hope when he was opening up this passage, this epistle to us and it's a wonderful thing

the Christian hope. The writer to the Hebrews says 'we have this hope as an anchor for the soul' and as somebody who was brought up in the Hebrides with boats I just love that. I see the times when we brought in the boat of an evening and we pulled up the anchor chain and we put it on it on the bow and we knew the ship was holding fast but we had to lift that chain put it on and do our bit and the same is through here.

See, when we lose the big vision, the up vision, we become very earthly, we start to look down. It's the Brent's brush again. Powerful image. And our eyes go down and we wobble and this was happening with the Colossians. I'm sure Reverend Scott Burton and others will cover these points better than I possibly could, but just at the beginning of chapter three Paul says this to the Colossians 'Since then you have been, since then you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not earthly things, for you died and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.' Wonderful words and it's only by looking up, as I'm trying to encourage you to do today, that we can escape the down-drag the gravity of earth which is all around us and tries to seep into us and shape our spiritual vision and gradually we lose it.

So, my friends, this morning, the question as I conclude 'How is your spiritual vision?

Often the optician will ask when he or she puts in a lens or adjusts the modern thing 'Better or worse?' and I would ask you this morning how's your spiritual vision to come to this passage of scripture 'Better or worse?'

I do hope that it will be just a little better for having been here today and you've been able to look up and not be pulled down as we so often are by the suction and gravity of this world. Paul has given us an eye-test here with a great picture, a great bit of writing on a book reading it.

How's your spiritual vision? I trust this morning as you go out it will be just a little better. Mine certainly is a lot better for having had the great privilege of preparing for this service. Amen.

We are going to conclude now by singing a hymn, another modern one. Michael Soward's lovely hymn 'Christ triumphant, ever reigning. Master, Savior, King.' A truly wonderful hymn. I love this one because it does exactly what I've been saying we should do, and Colossians encourages us to do - look up to Christ triumphant ever reigning.