

**Dan Crowe. Sunday 13<sup>th</sup> January 2008.**

## Having a Christ centred vision

### Introduction

This morning I want to consider again our vision for the coming year.

Last week Martin looked at the big picture for us as a church and was looking at how *God's* compassion is revealed in the book of Jonah, and was encouraging us to be a church that is full of compassion for the city we live in, because it is a city that *God* is full of compassion for as he sees its great needs.

This morning I want to be thinking about the big picture again and I want to remind us this morning is that in considering our plans for this year, *God's* desire is that we remain *Christ* centred in them all, both for our lives as individuals and for our life as a church.

I've been re-reading a book recently called 'The glory of Christ' by a *Christian* writer named Peter Lewis, which is an excellent, excellent book that focuses on the many different aspects of who *Jesus* is and what he has done and will do in the future.

Right at the beginning, in the introduction, Peter Lewis tells a story which I am going to summarise this morning also as an introduction to what I am going to say today.

The story is about a time when Peter Lewis was on holiday and he decided to find a place where he could go and meet with a church on a Sunday morning.

The service was coming to an end, but to end the morning the preacher told a story from his own life.

The book quotes what the preacher says, it reads

'When I was a boy of about twelve I had a great hero. My hero was a local sportsman who achieved the rare distinction of having played rugby for his country, and who played cricket to county standard. I so admired this man that I papered the walls of my bedroom with press-cuttings and photographs of him, and loved to talk and hear about his exploits on the field. He was my great hero.

Then, when I was in my fourteenth year, I actually got to know my hero personally! He was a keen angler and I used to go fishing with him. On these occasions I was able to observe him

from an entirely different viewpoint, and got to know the man and not merely the image.'

Peter Lewis then described what happened next. He writes 'At this point the preacher paused, looked closely at his congregation, shook his head slowly from side to side, and with an air of considerable authority, said in emphatic tones, '*and the nearer I got, the smaller he became!*'

No doubt everyone in the congregation that morning recognised the experience and sympathised with the preacher. But attentive as we now were, we were hardly prepared for what followed.

Suddenly, in a rising voice and with arms outstretched, voice breaking with emotion, he cried out: 'But God eventually led that downcast schoolboy to a new hero. And I have walked with my Jesus for thirty-five years now. In that time I have often disappointed him, but he has never disappointed me. I have got to know him better, *and the nearer I got the bigger he became.*'

I want to encourage us this morning not just for this year but for our own lives and our life a church, to have our vision that is a filled with Jesus Christ.

I believe this is a genuinely real area of battle for us in our lives as Christians. There is a battle that is ongoing in our lives regarding what things are central to our vision in life and what things are more peripheral. Clearly in life there are things in life other than Jesus Christ that we quite rightly need to consider in life like our money and our family and our leisure time and maybe our job. The question I want to consider this morning is to ask how central a place these things take in our hearts and lives.

Now clearly even amongst these things other than Jesus some of them will take more of a central place than others, so my wife and children will be more central in my life than my mobile phone, but I want to always aim to make Jesus Christ the most central object in my vision.

The book of Hebrews says in chapter 12 verse 2

"Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

We will always have different things happening to us in different times in our lives and will have different plans at different part of our lives. All of us here today will have different things we are focused on at the moment, it might be

something that is happening at the moment, and it might be something that is going to happen in the future.

Whatever those things are, *God's call on our lives as Christians and as a church is to be a people who have Jesus always at the centre of their vision.*

I want to encourage us all this morning to be a people who do this, as a church to be a family who have their eyes fixed on Jesus. We may all be at different stages of life and have different plans and visions for our futures but we are all called by *God to fix our eyes on Jesus in whatever our situation may be.*

I want to look at some verses from the book of *Colossians* to help us to think this through in more depth.

### Context

The book of *Colossians* was written by Paul to the church in *Colossae*, which at the time was a small town in the area which is known as Turkey today.

If you read through the book you can see that in some ways Paul was encouraged by what was happening in the church there. He thanks God for their faith in Jesus and for their love for other Christians. He also says he rejoices in their good order and of the firmness, of the stability of their faith in Christ.

So this is a church that Paul is rejoicing over, he is grateful to God for what is happening there. However he also wants to encourage them in an area where he has some concerns.

It would seem from the letter that although Paul describes the people there as people who do have a firm faith in Jesus Christ, that there are certain things that are drawing them away from having their focus on Jesus, and the teaching that is based on Jesus. He has become aware of dangers that they face of allowing things other than Jesus become too important in their lives, and that they are in danger of losing sight of the greatness of Jesus Christ and the true gospel that comes through him.

So much of this letter is written in order to point people back to Christ and to the teaching that is based on him and not on teaching that leads them away from him.

Paul starts by introducing himself and then spends time writing prayers regarding the people in the church at Colossae. He

shows that he is not just writing to them with a set of ideas to help them out, this is not just Paul's ten top tips on how the church can grow but this is a man who has genuine love and concern for this church. He is grateful for what God has done for them and he prays for them prayers that are well thought out and full of deep desire for God to work in the church. They are not prayers that are general 'God bless you' type of prayers but they are very specific prayers where Paul prays for particular spiritual needs that the Colossians have.

Then having done that we really start to see Paul addressing the concerns he has for this particular church family.

What he does is to bring to the church's attention just how great Jesus Christ is.

At this point I want to encourage us to really start to think about our response to what Paul is writing here. He is writing to a particular church at a particular time in history, but also this is part of God's word, part of the bible so as with any part of the bible we need to be thinking about what we need to learn from this today in the crown church.

If we are going to be a church with our eyes fixed on Jesus it's important for us to grow in our knowledge of what a great person he is. We need to get to know him better, and to keep learning what the bible has to say about him.

For each one of us in the crown today there will be things that have the potential to distract from Jesus and from the teaching that is based on him. They may be things that are

quite similar to the things that Paul is concerned about in this letter or they might be different things. Whatever they are, the message to each of us is the same - that Jesus Christ is great so we are to live our lives in a way that recognizes how great Jesus is.

Paul spends verses 15-20 describing different aspects of who Jesus is, at this stage, to begin with he doesn't get into specific arguments about the things that are distracting them but he presents Jesus Christ to the Colossians. He reminds them who it is that has made their whole salvation possible in the first place.

I could spend all morning just looking at these verses as they are so powerful in getting our attention and pointing us to how great Jesus is but I also want to spend time looking at how we apply this in our lives, on how we respond to the knowledge that this Jesus is the most amazing person who we are called to fix our eyes on as we live out our lives, who we are to always have in our vision.

### **Image of the invisible God**

So Paul starts by telling us that Jesus is the image of the invisible God. So he starts with this powerful statement, that Jesus has the very nature of God, he is in fact God himself. He is the invisible God who takes on a visible image of a man, yet he does not stop being God, still carrying the very nature of God.

Paul talks about this a number of times in the bible, for example in Philipians where he tells us that Jesus, although in his nature was God also took the form of a man and humbled himself to the point of death on a cross.

So the first thing about this man Jesus who we are to fill our vision with, who we are to fix our eyes upon, is both fully man, fully human, was able to get bruises and scars like we can, ate in the same we do, but is also fully God, the most powerful person for the whole of eternity, utterly sinless and completely true.

For me that in itself seems a good reason to live my life with my focus on him but Paul then goes on.

### **Firstborn over all creation**

This doesn't mean that there was a time when Jesus did not exist, but it tells us something about Jesus, it tells us about his position in creation. In the history of Israel in the bible, the first born had particular rights and privileges and so was worthy of dignity and honour so here we are being shown that Jesus is one worthy of particular dignity and honour but not just within one particular family but over the whole of creation.

### **By him all things are created**

Again, these are not just minor points about Jesus but this again points towards how worthy Jesus is to have our attention, to have our eyes fixed on him. Jesus is the creator

of all things. That's a huge claim. We live in a society where there are large numbers of people who do not believe that that it was a person who brought the universe into existence, yet the bible clearly tells us that there is a person behind it and his name is Jesus Christ. Paul tells us that Jesus is the creator of all things, and then to emphasize that it really is *all things* he tells us what all things means. It means *all things* in heaven and on earth, *all visible and invisible things, all thrones, dominions, rulers and authorities.*

Then Paul points out that is not just all created by him but it is for him, because ultimately it is for his glory, ultimately the whole of creation is subject to him, to his rule and authority. He is the one who rules over all of creation where no one will ever be able to go outside of his rule.

### **Before all things, and in him all things hold together**

So Paul then continues to expand on this and points out that Jesus is before all things. He existed before all things even before the beginning of the universe. The gospel of John also tells us this when it says in the beginning was the word, by which John means Jesus as he goes on to describe how the word became flesh and lived amongst us.

And here Paul also declares that in him all things hold together.

I think that's such a great phrase, to say that in Jesus all things hold together. He is actively ruling and sustaining all things. It's such a great truth in terms of helping us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus when we are finding life hard is to

remember that in whatever your situation is it all holds together in Jesus, that life is not just random but Jesus is ruling and sustaining us in all situations.

Many of you know that as a family we are hoping to move to India but we currently can't go there due to a visa problem but I know that Jesus is not fazed by that. He's not sitting there at the right hand of the father saying - oh, I didn't see that one coming! He's holding everything together.

### **Head of the church**

So although Jesus is supreme over all things he wants us to know in particular that he is the head of the church, he always has been and he always will be - so in particular when we look at the church the bible declares that Jesus is the head, he is in charge of the church.

Then because of time I'm going to move to the last way in which Jesus is described in this passage. I've had to really skim through this passage as I want to also give time to applying this in our lives but I'd encourage you to spend time reading it later on.

**Through Jesus, God reconciles to himself all things,  
whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the power  
of his cross**

So finally Paul brings us to the wonderful truth, that this amazing Jesus is not just the God who is all powerful and

existed before the creation of the universe but Jesus is also the one through whom peace with God is made, through whom we are reconciled with God, through whom even creation is redeemed, because he chose to live as both God and man amongst us and chose to die on a cross, giving his blood for us because that was the only way in which we could be reconciled.

Just this brief race through just some of what the bible has to say on Jesus gives us some powerful reasons why he is the one we are to keep in our vision and to fix our eyes upon.

So having made these statements Paul then later on teaches on how to respond to the great truths about who Jesus is. In particular I want to look at 2 verses in chapter 2 where he is doing this

### **Colossians 2:6-7**

**6**So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, **7**rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

He starts off by reminding them that they started out their Christian lives through receiving Jesus Christ as Lord.

As Christians I believe it is good to remind ourselves of that from time to time. In some ways it seems quite obvious but it is good to remember it was through Christ that we became a

Christian. Our Christian lives today will hopefully involve activity that we rightly get involved in because we love Jesus. So we might be involved in background support on a Sunday mornings, we might be involved in praying for a particular friend to become a Christian, we might be going to different meetings that help us to grow as Christians or we might be making a stand for Jesus at work.

Now it is right and important for us to get involved in these things as Christians, we can see from the bible that God calls us for purposes that he has prepared for us since the foundation of the earth, but it is good to remind ourselves that the way in which we became a Christian was because the Holy Spirit worked in our lives and we chose to submit our lives to Jesus Christ. It is through him and through him alone that we were able to enter into this Christian life that we now live. The reason we have a relationship with God today is not because of what we have done to live out God's purposes for our lives but because of Jesus Christ dying for us so that we could be reconciled with God.

If you are not a Christian here this morning I would like to point this out to you also. If you are starting to consider who Jesus is and what relevance he has to your own life the bible says here that the only way you can truly find salvation in life is through Jesus Christ, and that part of the process of becoming a Christian is to receive Jesus Christ as Lord. It is to recognise that Jesus is who he is as written in the bible verses that I was going through earlier, that he is the ruler over all

creation. So if he is the ruler over all creation what he is calling you to do this morning if you are not a Christian is to submit yourself to him, to literally trust him with your life, because in doing that you are acknowledging the truth of who Jesus is in the decision you make. It is a big decision, but it is part of what we are called to do in becoming a Christian.

So now I want to look at the next part of these verses which is really about the nitty gritty of how we are to live our lives in a way that keeps Jesus Christ central to our vision, that keeps our eyes fixed on him once we have become a Christian.

I can remember when I became a Christian it happened at the beginning of the school holidays. I was 17 and I had been away on a Christian holiday where God met with me and changed my life. Looking back I can see how God was working in my life before that week but with my great perceptive abilities I hadn't realised it at the time so when it did happen it all seemed very quick, very sudden but also extremely exciting.

I can remember going off after that week into various different holiday-type activities during the summer holiday and being on such a high, and then after a number of weeks the inevitable happened and I had to go back to school. At that time I was at boarding school and I can remember my parents dropping me off, and I was sitting on my own in this room where I would be living for the next term.

I can remember sitting there, and having had a whirlwind few weeks I sat there and really thought 'what next'. I realised

that I now needed to get on with my life and found myself asking myself what came next. I had clearly become a Christian but I now had in some way come back to the reality of everyday life and I wanted to know what happened next in my life as a Christian.

It's a good question to ask and to some extent it is a question that we will always be working out throughout our lives. However, what we can say for certain is that God has called us for a purpose, both in our individual lives and as a church. If we want to know what those purposes are the place to go to is to go to the bible, and here in Colossians one purpose God lays out for us here is that we will not just receive Jesus Christ but that we will continue to fix our gaze, our vision upon him as we live out our lives.

So Paul writes

'So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.'

So Paul writes that the answer to that question 'what happens next' will continue to revolve around Jesus Christ for the rest of our lives.

There can be a real temptation to allow things other than Christ, things that are created, to take a larger place in our vision than they are created to take.

Sometimes they can be things which really are so insignificant when they are compared to the greatness of Jesus Christ.

Some of you know that this week we have just bought a new computer - nothing wrong with that, it's helped me prepare for this morning, but I've been aware of my need to be a little bit careful not to value it more than is appropriate.

On the face of it, it seems crazy to think that something so mundane as a laptop could be a problem when considering the eternal truths about Jesus, but I believe that where Paul is talking about living in Christ he is talking about a regular recognition, in the things that affect us daily, of the greatness of Christ and submission to him, and to the truth about who he is.

Another way of translating 'live in Christ' here is to say 'walk in Christ', so this emphasizes this point of regular submission to Christ and to truth, that as we walk through life we keep focusing ourselves on Christ.

This isn't the same as becoming a Christian which is a process that will only ever happen once in our life but living out our lives once we have become a Christian is not about a one off event but something that is ongoing and continuous. Once we have received Christ Paul is teaching us on what happens next, which is not to try to keep on receiving Christ again and again and again because we have already received him. The calling on our lives once we have received Christ is to live in him, to walk in him.

For the Colossians the thing that was close to distracting them from Jesus was false teaching that was taking their focus off

Christ and leading them towards trusting in human ideas and traditions that were not based on Christ and teaching about him.

For some of us here today the thing that we might be vulnerable to leading us away from Christ and from biblical teaching is similar to the situation with the Colossians, something that we might believe that come from manmade ideas rather than from the bible, that have come from things we've seen or heard or watched that actually are not just neutral things but they are ideas that lead us away from Christ. One idea that is very strong in society today is the right to choose, that you can choose to do whatever you want as long as it seems OK to you. As Christians we are called to submit ourselves to Jesus and what he wants which goes completely against the idea that you just do what seems right to you without taking into account what Jesus might want.

Another idea that can affect us particularly as Christians is the idea that if we do enough good things in life then God will overlook our sin and we will be acceptable to him but actually this thinking again will distract us from Jesus because we are getting so caught up in trying to prove ourselves to God

For others the thing that might distract us is our own comfort, and our own comfort starts to take more and more a priority over Jesus and what he wants for our life, or for others it might be the opposite of that and going out of our way to make ourselves uncomfortable.

Then something else that can distract us from Jesus is getting caught into sinful patterns of behaviour which again come in conflict with Jesus' desire for our lives.

### Rooted in him

So the next thing Paul writes about to help us to keep Jesus central to our vision is that we are to be people rooted in Christ.

So our roots are to be in Christ, our security is to be in him, we can be confident we do not need to go anywhere else to try and find salvation. Much of society around us is trying to find some kind of saviour, whether it is winning the lottery or another person who can save us or perhaps a greater level of power or fame than they currently have in life fame that they believe will help them to be saved.

That kind of thinking can rub off on us as Christians. However here we are being urged to be rooted in Christ, to make ourselves sure of the truth that our salvation is secure because Jesus Christ is the only person who can truly save us because of who he is, that he alone is both God and man and he died for us so that we could be saved.

### Built up in him

Then the last part of these verses I want to look at this morning is that having been called to live in Christ and to be rooted in Christ, we are also called to be built up in him.

As we build our lives, as we seek to grow in life, we are again called to keep Jesus central to our vision. Growing in power or in possessions can start to become more important to us than growing in Christ because we have started to forget just how great Jesus is compared to other things that we might want to build our life around.

We do need God's help in these things, because many of the things that can distract us from Jesus are good things that he might give to us and that we can thank him for such as good families or material provision that we need.

I believe the place we can keep coming back to is where Paul started here with reminding ourselves of the truth about who Jesus Christ is, that he was not just a good man or a good teacher but that he is fully God, the creator of the universe, and came to live amongst us as fully man and fully God, and died for us so that we could be reconciled to God

### Church with Jesus as its focus

To finish this morning I want to remind us again that Paul was not just writing to a group of individuals but to a church family that he was linked to that met in a place called Colossae.

I want to encourage us as we look together at the coming year ahead as a church to keep our focus and our vision on Jesus Christ. I believe God is going to do many things among us this

year in terms of seeing *God's kingdom* advance through us as a church, and I'm excited about that. Let's also, as we look forward to *God working* in us and through us this year, be a people who keep *Jesus Christ* and his will central to our thinking and central to everything that we do.