

Colossians 1:15-23 — Who Is Jesus?

October 22, 2017

Welcome to CrossWinds. Today we talking about the most important person in the history of the world. His name is Jesus Christ. You may have heard of him. Jesus comes from the Hebrew Joshua which means “God saves.” Christ comes from the Hebrew into Greek and means God’s anointed one or chosen one. Jesus’ last name is not Christ. Technically it is Jesus, who is the Christ.

Jesus lived about 2,000 years ago. He spent the first 30 years of his life as a blue collar carpenter working for his father. He never traveled far from home. Contrary to some messed up books, he didn’t marry and father children that now live in Europe. He didn’t make a lot of money or write a book, but he is, without doubt, the most significant person in the history of the world.

We divide our calendar into B.C. and A.D. based on his birth. Our major holidays are Christmas and Easter, which are based on key events in his life. More books are written about him, more paintings are painted for him, more songs are sung to him and more songs are written about him than anyone else in the history of the world. He is the most important person in the history of the world.

That means the most important question that everyone needs to answer this morning is the same question Jesus asked his disciples, “Who do you say I am?”

Today, there is no shortage of answers.

Jehovah’s Witnesses say Jesus is the first created being. He is the archangel Michael. Mormons say he is the polygamist half brother of Lucifer. We

can become like him and be gods, get our own planets, and keep our wives eternally pregnant with spirit babies (I am not sure why that is heaven for her) if we can be like him. Christian Scientists — which is a contradiction in terms because they are neither Christians nor scientists — tell you Jesus is not God. Muslims tell us Jesus was just a prophet but an inferior prophet to their prophet Mohammed. Hindus say Jesus was one of many enlightened holy men.

No matter what other people say about Jesus, the big question is what we say about Jesus. “Who do you say I am?” This morning, we are going to answer that question by turning to the Bible and getting a little help from the apostle Paul.

As a church, we are studying our way through the book of Colossians. In the last two weeks, we covered the background of the book. In the introduction of the book, we learned the signs of genuine saving faith in Jesus. We also learned what Jesus did for us. Paul told us Jesus qualified us for the inheritance of the saints, which is heaven and the new creation. We saw that Jesus transferred us from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of his son. Instead of being controlled by sin, Jesus freed us from the power of sin. Jesus also forgave all our sin so before God we are completely pure and clean, no matter what we have done. As we continue our study, Paul now shows us Jesus’ resume. He tells us the true identity of the Jesus that saves us. He gives us the correct answer to the question, “Who do you say I am?”

Paul will answer that question under three headings.

1. Jesus is No. 1 in this creation. 2. Jesus is No. 1 in the new creation. 3.

Jesus and me

Jesus is No. 1 in this creation.

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.
Colossians 1:15–17 (ESV)

Jesus is the image of the invisible God.

The Bible tells us God is invisible. Nobody has seen God or can see God. Jesus is the image of God. Jesus makes the invisible God visible. The word image in Greek is the word icon. It means a picture representing reality so we can see it. When we look in the mirror in the morning, we see an accurate icon of ourselves. We may not like what we see, but the mirror flawlessly represents us as we truly are. Jesus is the perfect image of God the Father so we can see him as he is.

Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? John 14:9 (ESV)

I and the Father are one. John 10:30 (ESV)

Paul’s point was not that Jesus is just a picture of the father, Jesus and God the Father are two different people but they are so closely connected that to see Jesus is to see God. They walk in lockstep with one another. There is no gap between them. Everything we couldn’t see about God the Father is now made visible by Jesus.

The word image carries the idea of seeing God much deeper than visual sight. It carries with it the idea of character. Jesus’ character also flawlessly reveals God’s character, a perfect copy of God’s true character.

(Jesus) He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature... Hebrews 1:3 (ESV)

If we want to see how God the Father would act, look at Jesus. If we want to see how God the Father feels about something, look at Jesus.

Jesus being the image of God doesn't just tell us about Jesus. It tells us about ourselves. In Genesis 1:26-27, we see that man was created in the image of God. That means we were also designed to reflect an image of God with our intellect, emotions and desires. The problem is the image of God in us was bent because of sin. We are still in the image of God in some ways but not in all ways. Now, instead of reflecting God's character, we lie, cheat, steal and cuss as part of our innate character.

Jesus is a man in God's image but Jesus is without sin. Do you want to know what we were supposed to be like before sin twisted the image of God inside of us? Look at Jesus. Jesus is what we were originally created to be. That is why Jesus is called the second Adam. Jesus is the perfect realization of humanity without sin.

In Jesus, not only do we see who we are supposed to be, but God in his grace is restoring us to our original sin-free image of God. He is doing this through Jesus.

For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. Romans 8:29 (ESV)

So Jesus is the image of God, which means he is the way to see God in the flesh because God the Father and God the Son are in such lockstep that to see one is to see the other. Jesus doesn't just allow us to see God visually, but he allows us to see God's character and choices. Jesus also shows us what we

were supposed to be like without sin. As we trust in him, we will become more like him.

Jesus is the firstborn of all creation.

When we read this, it sounds like Jesus is the first created being in the universe because our firstborn child is our first created child. The Jehovah's Witnesses love to use this verse to try and prove Jesus is not God, but he is the first created being, possibly the archangel Michael. In a moment, we will see that calling Jesus the first created being in the universe is impossible because Paul said Jesus existed before anything was created. What was Paul talking about when he called Jesus the firstborn of all creation?

We need to understand that the biblical term, *firstborn* does not necessarily mean the one first born. Firstborn can also be used to describe the position of highest rank and honor. For instance, the firstborn son in the Old Testament times had the position of highest rank and honor in the family. He was given double the inheritance and the position of leadership in the family line. But if that firstborn son dishonored his father, the son could lose the title of firstborn in the family and it was given to one of his younger brothers.

The title firstborn may mean someone is born first but it doesn't always mean someone is born first. Often it is used to describe someone who holds the position of highest rank and honor. To show you what I mean, let me show you how the title firstborn is used in the Psalms, speaking prophetically about Jesus.

And I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth. Psalm 89:27 (ESV)

Jesus was not the first king to be born. His is the highest and greatest king to have been born. When Paul said Jesus is the firstborn, Paul was saying Jesus is the one who holds the position of the highest rank and honor in all of creation. How did Paul support this claim? That is what Paul gave us in the rest of the verse.

1. **By him all things were created in heaven and on earth.** In Genesis, we read of God the Father speaking and things coming into existence. Let there be light and there was light. John 1 describes Jesus as the Word of God which created the universe. God the Father spoke things into existence. Jesus made what his father spoke into creation. Hebrews 1 also tells us Jesus is the one who created the universe. Everything that God the Father spoke into existence was carried out by Jesus, who is so closely connected to his father that he is described as his father's powerful word. All 800,000 insects on our planet were made by Jesus. One day I want to ask him why he had to listen to his father and create the mosquito. Every tree, every animal, every fish, every bird, every grain in the field was made by Jesus. Every cell in our bodies was designed by Jesus. DNA was created by Jesus. Not just everything on this planet was made by Jesus, but the universe around our planet was made by Jesus. For instance, the sun was made by Jesus. The sun is 864,000 miles across, which is 100 times larger than the Earth. The sun is so large, 1.3 million Earths fit inside of it. Jesus made the Earth and the sun. Every planet orbiting around our sun was made by Jesus. Every star in the sky was made by Jesus. Stars look small but they are actually large big.

The star Betelgeuse has a diameter of 100 million miles. That is larger than the size of the earth's orbit around the sun. That is just one star. Jesus made it. The size of the universe where the other stars reside is staggering. Light travels at 186,000 miles per second — which is faster than my wife drives. It takes light from our sun eight minutes and 20 seconds to reach the earth. That same light takes four years to reach the nearest star known as Alpha Centauri, which is a mere 24 trillion miles from earth. Jesus made the light, and he made Alpha Centauri, our nearest star. Our galaxy, known as the Milky Way had hundreds of billions of stars just like Alpha Centauri, and Jesus made every one. Scientists now say there are billions of other galaxies beside the Milky Way and each galaxy has billions of stars; all of this was made by Jesus. Scientists says the number of stars in the sky is the equivalent to the number of grains of sand on planet earth. According to the Bible, Jesus made all of this.

...but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom also he made the universe. Hebrews 1:2 (NIV)

2. **Jesus created the visible and invisible world.** We are only slightly in tune with the grandeur of our visible world using telescopes. There is another vast world only visible to us with microscopes. There is great complexity on the cellular level, on the DNA level, on the molecular level and the subatomic level. Scientists say the intricacies of the subatomic world, which are visible only by powerful microscopes, rivals the grandeur of what we see with telescopes in the skies. All of this was intricately created by Jesus when his father willed it to happen. In addition to this visible world we can study with

powerful optics, there is another invisible world of angels and demons, which are interacting with our physical universe on a daily basis. A few years ago, when we studied the book of Daniel, we learned the Bible hints that the invisible created angelic world that we can't see is vaster and more complex than the visible world which we can see. All of the visible and invisible world was made by Jesus. Jesus is not a powerful angel. Jesus made the angels. That is clearly stated in Hebrews 1. Paul said Jesus is over all thrones, rulers, dominions and authorities. What are these titles? The best way to understand them is to look at Jewish literature at the time of Christ. The Jews believed that just as the visible world is ordered by ranks and leaders, like we have mayors, governors and presidents, the invisible angelic world is also ordered. There are higher ranking angels with more power and authority than others, no different than what we have in our country today. The dominions and authority angels were considered to be the highest and most powerful angelic being in the universe. Guess who is above them and who created them.

Jesus!

3. **All things were not just created by Jesus but they will end with Jesus.**

Just as everything began with Jesus, all things will end with Jesus. Jesus created everything. Everything will come back to Jesus and be wrapped up in Jesus because all things were created by him and for him. This is why, in Revelation, Jesus says, "I am the alpha and the omega." I am both the beginning and the end. Right now we don't see everything created by Jesus submitting to him as the rightful creator and ruler. Right now most things are

in rebellion against Jesus, but it will not always be that way. One day Jesus will assert his authority as the creator of the universe and everything and everyone will bow before him.

...so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Philippians 2:10–11 (ESV)

For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen. Romans 11:36 (ESV)

Everyone and everything will bow the knee to Jesus either willingly and joyfully or unwillingly and in torment while in the lake of fire. Everyone and everything will bow to Jesus because Jesus created everything.

Remember who Paul was speaking about. He was talking about Jesus — the man that was just executed 30 years before on a Roman cross and who rose from the dead, then appeared to him on the road to Damascus. The idea of Jesus as God was not dreamed up hundreds of years later. It was in existence at the beginning of our faith.

The people of the city of Colossae were saying, “Jesus isn’t a big deal. We have options. You have your God. We have our god.” The only reason the people of Colossae could see Jesus as just another god is because they didn’t understand what Paul told us about him. To take any other course in our lives other than living to please Jesus is completely irrational.

4. **Jesus is before all things and in him all things hold together.** I told you earlier about the Jehovah’s Witnesses who say Jesus is the first created being. The way to defeat these heresies is simply to read things in context. Here we see Jesus existed before all things. He cannot be the first created

being. He existed before any created being. Jesus is also the one who holds this universe together for every moment of its existence. Jesus is the one who is involved in this world, keeping it from spinning out of control. Years ago there was a belief popular at the time our country was founded called deism. It is the belief that God built this world, set it in motion and he spun it like a top, then he walked away to watch and see what would happen. Like a top eventually spins completely out of control, deists thought life on this planet was spinning out of control, and God was sitting back to see what would happen. These verses says that is not true. This world isn't spinning out of control. Jesus is the one who holds this world together every day so it doesn't spin completely out of control. For example, today, everyone is nervous because of the tension between President Trump and Kim Jung-Un. Are they in charge of this planet's future? According to the Bible, they think they are in control of their hearts but actually Jesus is in control of their hearts.

The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will. Proverbs 21:1 (ESV)

Do you know why we just took another breath? It was a gift from Jesus. Do you know you didn't die of a heart attack last night? It was a gift from Jesus. Do you know why you survived that close call in traffic and avoided a head-on collision? Jesus. This means when things are falling apart in life, we go to the one who holds things together and plead for his grace and mercy to help in our times of need. When our health is falling apart, we go to Jesus and plead for mercy. When our marriages are falling apart, we go to Jesus and plead for mercy.

When our lives are falling apart, we go to him and plead for grace and mercy. He specializes in holding things together.

The problem in Colossae was people began with Jesus but with the pressure of the culture around them, they left Jesus in the dust. They became Christians who lost sight of Christ. They thought Jesus wasn't that big of a deal, when in reality, just like us, they need him every day.

The same problem happened for us this morning. It is so easy for us to become Christians who have moved on from Christ that we forget what we have in him. For example, sometimes you are depressed because you didn't get a varsity spot in your favorite sport. I understand why that hurts. Keep things in perspective. We have Jesus. He loves us. He died for us. He chose us to save us. So often you are crying over the penny you lost in the Wal-Mart parking lot when you are holding the winning \$100 million dollar lottery ticket in your hand given to you by God. When we lose some things on earth, remember we have the best of all things in the universe. We have the one who created all things in the universe who loves us. He died for us. He completely saves us from our sin. He calls us the most blessed being in the universe. That is what we have in Jesus.

Jesus is No. 1 in the new creation.

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.
Colossians 1:18–20 (ESV)

This is interesting. Paul went from talking about Jesus as head of the entire universe to the head of the church. Most of us don't think of the church as

a big deal. Church is an optional activity for the weekend if we have time. Jesus thinks of the church as a big deal because he died to create it. He is the head of it. When it says Jesus is head of the church, it is not like Jesus is the CEO of the corporation called Church. The term head in this context implies a living organism that is inseparably connected together. Just as our head controls every part of our body and is inseparably connected to it, Jesus controls his church and is inseparably connected to it. He gives life to the members of his church. He is inseparably connected to us. Just as my left and right hand work together because they are both controlled by my head, so people in the church work together in a complementary, not contradictory way, because they are controlled and directed by Jesus who is our head. Just as I can run only by putting a left and right foot together as they are directed by my head, so Jesus needs to guide the members of his church so we work together in unity. This is why Paul said in 1 Corinthians 12 that we are all connected to Christ. When there is disunity in the church, it is because some have lost connection to Christ, the head. Jesus, our head, creates unity in our diversity.

Just as Jesus is the source and the rightful head of this old creation. Jesus is also the source and the rightful head of the new creation. Today the new creation order is breaking into this world. We see this new creation order in the church.

The death and resurrection of Jesus created a new Genesis moment where a new creation order began unfolding where Satan and sin no longer reign because Jesus defeated them on the cross. Just as Jesus is the head of this

current creation because he made it, Jesus is also the head of the new resurrection creation order because he created it through his resurrection from the dead.

That is why Paul said Jesus is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead. He holds the title of firstborn in the old creation order because he made it. He also holds the title of firstborn in the new resurrection creation order because he created it.

Paul said that in everything, Christ is preeminent. That means that in everything, Christ has first place. Nothing comes before Jesus or is higher than Jesus. Jesus is first place in our current fallen creation since he made it, sustains it and ultimately will wrap it all up. Jesus is first place in the new creation as the first to rise from the dead.

The only proper way to respond to Jesus is to place him first in our lives because he is first in everything else in this world. We must make him first in our families, in our marriages, in our jobs, in our thought lives, in the way we spend our time, in our eating habits, in our sports, in our television, in our music, in what we watch on the Internet. Since Jesus is first place in the old creation and the new creation, we must respond by giving him first place in our hearts and lives. That is the only reasonable response to Jesus.

Paul also said that in Jesus, all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. This is super important to understand. Jesus is not 50 percent man and 50 percent God. Jesus is 100 percent man and 100 percent God. The only time God the son doesn't do something or know something that God the father knows or

does is because Jesus has chosen to voluntarily limit the free exercise of his full rights as God.

The good news of Jesus' resurrection from the dead is the new creation order — which is from the power of Satan, sin and death — doesn't just apply to the resurrection of Christ from the dead. It doesn't just apply to our resurrection from the dead. The resurrection of Christ from the dead will ultimately have cosmic implications which will free the entire universe from its bondage to sin and death.

Let me explain. Sin doesn't just affect us; it infects the fabric of the universe.

...that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. Romans 8:21 (ESV)

The reason we have natural disasters and rampant death in this creation is because of sin. Jesus' resurrection from the dead was the beginning of a new creation order where sin and death do not reign, not just in our lives but in this universe. One day Jesus will extend the power of his resurrection from the dead to the ultimate re-creation of the entire universe to be free from sin.

But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. 2 Peter 3:13 (ESV)

The new heavens and new earth is this heaven and earth completely restored free from sin and vastly improved, just as Jesus' body was restored free from sin and vastly improved.

Now let me clarify something. Some people have misunderstood this to mean everyone will go to heaven or that Satan and his demons will be restored

to God. That isn't true. This is what the Bible says about Satan and those who die apart from Christ.

...and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. Revelation 20:10 (ESV)

And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. Daniel 12:2 (ESV)

Their state is everlasting torment. The Bible is clear that not everything and everyone will be reconciled and restored to God.

Paul's point was that everything which is possible to be reconciled to God will be reconciled to God. That includes Christians, this earth and this universe. Jesus is first in the new creation order and the only way to the new creation order for eternity. Since Jesus is the source of the new creation, first in the new creation and the only way to the new creation, the question becomes, what have you done with Jesus? Who is Jesus in your life?

Jesus and Me

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..., Colossians 1:21–22 (ESV)

Paul told us who we once were, who we now are and who through Jesus we will be on the most important day of our lives.

Paul said we were once alienated. The word alienated in the Greek is a particularly strong word. It means a permanent consistent condition of being cut off. We were completely separate from God. We expressed our separation from God with hostile minds. Our attitudes and thinking were against Christ and God's plan for us. It was not just our minds that hated God and rebelled against him but

the hallmark of our lives was evil deeds. We did evil all the time. That may sound harsh, but it is true. The Bible tells us in John 3:19 that our problem is not ignorance of God but that we are in rebellion against God. Men love darkness and not light.

While we were hopeless, God took the initiative to save us through Jesus. He reconciled us. Bringing us back to God was Jesus' initiative, his idea, his plan. Our being brought back to God is a gift from God, not a great achievement of ourselves.

Notice what Paul said is Jesus' goal: It is to present us holy, blameless and above reproach before him. One day, everyone will stand before Jesus. You will stand before Jesus and give an account of your life. Jesus will have a perfect record of every sinful word, action and lustful thought. We will be judged by Jesus. Look inside your heart. Each one of us knows this is true.

The difference is for those who have trusted in Christ, our sin is paid for by Jesus. On the day we stand before Jesus to be judged. Instead of a bucket of sin, we are seen as holy and pure because Jesus took all our sin. Instead of worthy of blame, we are seen as innocent, completely blameless. We are seen as above reproach.

Satan, our great accuser, will need to stand there, and when he looks at our lives, he will say nothing. His mouth will be shut because no matter what we have done, when we stand before Jesus on the day of judgment we will be completely blameless through Jesus' death for our sin having been applied to our sin so we are completely pure and clean.

My first question is, since we will all stand before Jesus on that day of judgment, have you trusted in what Jesus did on the cross to reconcile you to God or will you stand there on your own merit? Have you become part of the new Jesus order through the resurrection of Jesus? If you haven't trusted in Jesus, today, I beg you to run from your sin and run to the arms of Jesus and be forgiven. 2 Corinthians 5:17 says if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. That literally means that trusting in Christ makes you part of his new creation order. The only way to be part of the new creation order that is free from the power of sin is Jesus.

What about the rest of us who already know Jesus, like the Christians in Colossae?

...if indeed you continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard, which has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, became a minister. Colossians 1:23 (ESV)

We will stand before God on the day of judgment with confidence because of Jesus, as long as we stay stable and steadfast in him. All of our hope for the day of judgment rests in Jesus. Whatever happens in life, don't let anything shift you away from him. The word shift literally means pressure trying to push or pull something away from the base where it should stay.

In Luke 8, Jesus told the parable of the sower. The sower sowed seed and the seed in the parable represents the Word of God. Jesus is the Word of God. In the parable, some seed fell on the thorns. It grew up but was choked out. This represented those who let the cares, riches and pleasures of life choke out their spiritual lives. The business of life and the good things in life shifted them away from Jesus.

My friends, life is busy. Life is hard. There are lots of distractions. But the only thing that matters is that Jesus is first place in this world. Jesus is first place in the new creation. Jesus must stay in first place in our lives. We can't let anything put Jesus out of the place he deserves in our lives. He is the only way we can stand before God with confidence on the day of judgment.



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