

Who Jesus Is

Colossians 1:15-20

I. A word about hymns.

A. Why hymns?

1. They are “theocentric”—God centered.
2. Hymns connect head and heart in corporate worship.
3. The classic old hymns are time tested.
4. Hymns admonish us when we need it most.

B. Colossians 1:15-20 a hymn?

1. Hymns were important in New Testament times. There are at least eight passages in the New Testament that are hymns.
2. Paul uses this hymn to grab the attention of this church and recenter them on Jesus.
3. Paul uses this hymn to reveal who Jesus is.

II. Why is it so important to know who Jesus is?

- A. Only through Jesus is there eternal salvation.
- B. Knowing who Jesus is gives us confidence of our future.
- C. By knowing who Jesus is we can stand firm in the world.
- D. All of the Christian faith rests on who Jesus is.
- E. Knowing who Jesus is let’s us know God personally.

III. Who Jesus is.

A. Jesus is the image of God (1:15).

1. “Image”= *Eikon* = The exact, perfect representation, manifestation of God.
2. Jesus is the “visible” image of the “invisible” God: When you see Jesus you see God
 - a. Hebrews 1:3.
 - b. John 14:7-9.

- c. John 10:22-32
 - d. John 5:18
- B. Jesus is the Creator of all things (1:16).
 - 1. Genesis 1:1 – God = Elohim = Plural form of God—the godhead.
 - 2. Hebrews 1:1-2.
 - 3. John 1:1-3.
 - 4. Why did Jesus create all things?
 - a. For His good pleasure and glory.
- C. Jesus is the One who is before all things (1:17).
 - 1. He is *above* all things = His supremacy over all things.
 - 2. He is *before* all things = His pre-existence.
 - a. John 8:56-59
 - 3. He holds all things together.
 - a. Perfect tense verb = continuously and ongoing.
 - b. Not just *creator* but also *sustainer*.
- D. Jesus is the Head of the body—the church (1:18a).
 - 1. 1 Corinthians 12:12-27.
 - 2. Ephesians 1:22-23.
- E. Jesus is the Firstborn of the dead (1:18b).
 - 1. Jesus was the first to die, live again, and never die again.
 - 2. 1 Corinthians 15—Jesus is the *first fruits*.
 - a. Jewish first fruits—the first of the harvest would be an offering in the temple to God in expectation that much fruit was to follow.
 - b. Jesus was the first to die, raise again and live eternally and the promise of many others to follow (all believers).
 - c. Christ was the first fruit, all believers are the following harvest.
 - d. Philippians 3:20-21.

Who Jesus Is

Colossians 1:15-20

It seems appropriate to begin this morning with a word about hymns...we mostly sing hymns... mostly from this hymnal...often I get inquiries as to why...legitimate questions... Up front... there are some wonderful contemporary worship songs...new songs that glorify God...elevate God as high as any ancient hymn... they are not outlawed here at Trinity... they just have to pass our screening department...

But we mostly sing hymns... there are some good reasons to sing hymns in a worship service...first what is a hymn?... *Hymns are songs specifically composed to offer praise, worship, and devotion to God... The English term “hymn” is derived from the Greek word (hymnos), historically reflecting formal expressions of adoration and thanksgiving.*

The main purpose of a hymn is not to manipulate the emotions...but to elevate God... the trinitarian God to the highest... the subject is Him... they are for His glory not just for our enjoyment...

1, Hymns... the ones we choose to sing are **“theocentric”**... God centered... not “Me” centered...

*All hail the power of Jesus name
Let angels prostrate fall
Bring forth the royal diadem,
And crown Him Lord of all,
Bring forth the royal diadem
And crown Him Lord above all.*

2. Hymns Connect Head and Heart in Corporate Worship (Designed for us to sing together)

One of the recurring critiques of contemporary worship is that it leans toward emotional experience at the expense of theological content. One of the recurring critiques of traditional hymn-singing is the opposite: all doctrine, no feeling. The great hymns solve both problems at once.

If you're having a problem enjoying the hymns we sing... listen to the words... let the meaning of them sink in...

3. Even though there are new hymns, the old hymns that were written hundreds of years ago and are still being sung are time tested... they are as relevant to day as they were when they were first sung... all the hymns we sang today are such hymns...

3. Hymns Admonish Us When We Need It Most

Colossians 3:16 tells us to *admonish one another in all wisdom*...then it tells us to sing!

After six days of work and dealing with things of life... we come to church and need to be admonished...The sense of *admonish* here is the idea of a strong encouragement which might include a correction of thinking.

Singing hymns of God's character confronts our small, circumstantial view of him... Hymns of confession break the silence around sin... Hymns of the atonement preach the sufficiency of Christ's work at the exact moment someone in the congregation is wondering whether grace is still available to them.... Hymns of consecration remind believers that the Christian life runs on borrowed strength, not personal willpower.

So many more reasons...

The reason it was appropriate to talk about this now is that most Bible scholars agree that this passage for us this morning... Colossians 1:15-20 is a hymn... Either the apostle Paul wrote it as a hymn or more likely, he adapted this from a hymn previously written from another apostle or some church leader...

Hymns were important in New Testament times... There are at least eight passages in the New Testament that are hymns... in fact not many years after Colossian 1 was written... the Roman governor Pliny the Younger wrote a letter to the emperor Tragen...

Describing how *these Christians met regularly before dawn to chant verses alternately among themselves*... and he confirmed that Christological hymns we sung and recited in the early church...

Like the great hymns of the faith...Paul's hymn in Colossians 1 centers on the person and work of Jesus Christ... this passage is one of the single greatest statements in all of Scripture regarding the authority...supremacy...headship and sufficiency of Jesus Christ.

Paul uses this hymn to grab the attention of this church that was struggling with some false teaching which was moving Jesus Christ off the center of the church and replacing Him with other things... the mythical, mystical, mysterious speculations...

Through this hymn... Paul shifts the focus...all eyes on Jesus... Christ is the center and source of EVERYTHING!...Paul's hymn here in Colossians is a magnum opus of who Jesus is...

Why is it so important to know who Jesus is?

- Only through Jesus is there salvation
- By knowing who Jesus is... we can stand firm in a world that has nothing firm to stand on!... we can stand on truth...absolute truth,
- Knowing who Jesus is gives us confidence of our future... not just tomorrow but through all of eternity!
- All of the Christian faith rests on who Jesus is.

- Knowing who Jesus is let's us know God personally.... the Christian faith is not an ideology... a system of ideas and values... it is a relationship with the Holy!
- **A question to reflect on:** If someone asked you why Jesus is more than just a good teacher or prophet, would you be able to explain who He is and why that matters to your faith? Knowing the answer strengthens both your personal walk with God and your ability to share your faith with others.

Who Jesus is...between verses 15 and 18 we can see a minimum of five things... at least five things that tell us who Jesus is...the first point needs to be the first point... if you don't get the first point...all the others won't make sense...

1. Jesus is the image of God (1:15)

Read verse 15

Why did Paul write this?... Remember that there was false teaching surfacing in the church at Colossae...one of the false teachings was that angels were necessary mediators between God and man... angels according to this teaching were the go between man and God...

Angels of course are real beings... God created creatures made for specific purposes... According to the Bible... which is the only place we should go to for angel information... angels serve as God's messengers, protectors of His people, worshipers around His throne, warriors executing His judgment, and ministers who assist believers (e.g., Hebrews 1:14; Psalm 91:11–12; Luke 1:26–38)...nowhere in the Bible are angels mediators between God and man...we'll talk about angels more later...

But Scripture affirms that Jesus Christ is the only mediator between God and humanity... 1 Timothy 2:5 explicitly states: **“For there is one God, and one mediator between God and mankind, the man Christ Jesus”**

So what was going on in Colossae which led Paul to make his first argument that Jesus is the image of the invisible God...they were worshipping angels...we'll see that when we get to chapter 2...

Interesting how many religions today began by some mediation of an angel... Islam started because Mohamed said he got revelations from an angel...the Quran was said to be revealed by the angel Gabriel... Mormonism started because Joseph Smith claimed he got visions from an angel...

Jehovah Witnesses claim that Jesus IS the arch angel Michael...For thousands of years, angels have been a part of heretical religions... these of course would be fallen angels...doing the work of Satan.

This was a widespread problem in the early churches founded by Paul... that's why Paul wrote in Galatians 1:8 **But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should proclaim to you a gospel contrary to the gospel we have proclaimed to you, let him be accursed!**

So here in Colossians... Paul wants us to understand that Jesus is infinitely superior to any angelic being...and to do that... he elevates Jesus to the highest elevation... **He is the image of God...**

This confuses some... Jesus is only the image of God... that doesn't mean He is God...It's like I am in some ways the image of my dad.....but I'm not my dad!

Image is from the Greek word *eikon*...you may now the English word *icon*... it means likeness or a copy of...but *eikon* the Greek word is more than just a copy it is an EXACT, PERFECT COPY...Exact likeness...it can be translated as the *manifestation* of... Jesus is not just the likeness of God...He is the EXACT, PERFECT likeness, manifestation of God...

Hebrews 1:3 says the same thing... [Jesus] **who is the radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His nature, and upholds all things by the word of His power; who, having accomplished cleansing for sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.**

There's this great conversation between Jesus, His disciples and Philip over in John 14...Jesus just finished telling His disciples He's going to leave them to go and prepare a place for them in heaven...**I am the way truth and life...**

7“If you have come to know Me, you will know My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him.” (You couldn't say that about me and my dad!)

8Philip *said to Him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.”

9Jesus *said to him, “Have I been with you all so long and have you not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen _____? The Father... how can you say “*show us the Father?*”

So Jesus is the exact visible manifestation of the invisible God... When you see Jesus... you see God... *“Do you see Me?... then you see the Father”*.

We've got to see this... one more place in the Gospel of John.. chapter 10... Jesus shows up at a Jewish feast in Jerusalem... things are getting ramped up between the Jews and Jesus.... Listen to this:

²²At that time the Feast of the Dedication took place at Jerusalem;²³it was winter, and Jesus was walking in the temple in the Portico of Solomon.²⁴The Jews then gathered around Him, and were saying to Him, “How long will You keep us in suspense? If You are the Christ, tell us openly.”

²⁵Jesus answered them, “I told you, and you do not believe; the works that I do in My Father’s name, these bear witness of Me.”²⁶“But you do not believe because you are not of My sheep.”²⁷“My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me;”²⁸and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish—ever; and no one will snatch them out of My hand.”²⁹“My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of the Father’s hand.”³⁰“**I and the Father are one.**”

Then what happened?

³¹**The Jews picked up stones *again* to stone Him.** This is the third time they picked up stones to stone Jesus... they didn’t pick up stones to stone Jesus because He claimed to be the Messiah... The savior and liberator figure who is believed to be the future redeemer of the Jews...they picked up stones because Jesus claimed to be God!... “**I and the Father are one.**”

³²Jesus answered them, “I showed you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you stoning Me?”³³The Jews answered Him, “For a good work we do not stone You, but **for blasphemy; and because You, being a man, make Yourself God.**”

If you think Jesus never claimed deity in the Bible think again!... back in John 5:18 right after Jesus healed the paralytic man on the Sabbath...infuriating the Jews... John writes:

¹⁸**For this reason therefore the Jews were seeking all the more to kill Him, because He not only was breaking the Sabbath, but also was calling **God His own Father, making Himself equal with God.****

We can’t slide past the last part of verse 15 in Colossians 1... that says that Jesus **is the firstborn of all creation**...some of your Bibles say that He is **supreme over all creation**... which is less confusing than the firstborn of creation... some think that means that Jesus was the first being created by God... the firstborn.

In the Bible “**firstborn**” has two meanings... it could mean a parents eldest child...As in Jesus was Mary’s firstborn (Luke 2:7—first in order of time)... or it could mean *the chief heir of a father’s legacy... preeminent in rank... above all others*... Here the meaning is Jesus is the firstborn OVER all creation... nothing in creation is above Jesus.

Again...Why is all this so important?... Belief in Jesus’ deity is crucial for salvation. Only God could bear the infinite penalty for human sin; a created being could not suffice. As God incarnate, Jesus was sinless and able to take on the sins of the world, die, and rise again, demonstrating victory over sin and death... Without acknowledging Jesus as God, the atonement would be insufficient, and reconciliation with God would be impossible...no man can reconcile you to God!

2. Jesus is the Creator of all things (1:16)

Read verse 16

Jesus is not a part of creation... He is creator.... This puzzles some... because we read in Genesis 1:1 **In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth...** there are several names in the Bible for God...

God in Genesis 1 is *Elohim* which is in the plural... why is it in the plural?... because God is a singular God but He reveals Himself in three persons... Father, Son and Holy Spirit... the Godhead... the Trinity is seen right off the bat in Genesis 1...

As you work your way down through Genesis 1... getting to verses 26 and 27... listen to these words carefully... **26Then God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness, so that they will have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.”** Catch the plural pronouns?... *Us, Our*...and then the next verse

27And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.

(*His* and *He* is not in the original Hebrew)...the point of this is... God is one God but He reveals Himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit... co-eternal...co-equal persons... three different roles but one in essence of nature... understand that?... WONDERFUL!

So, one of the roles of Jesus within the Trinity... was the role of creator... Jesus is the creator of the universe... Hebrews 1:1-2. **God, having spoken long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways,**

2in these last days spoke to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds,

John 1:1-3: **“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being”** who’s the Word?...

14 And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us and we beheld His glory as of the only begotten from the Father, full of grace and truth.

Even in the Old Testament in Psalm 33:6: **“By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and by the breath of His mouth all their host”**

So when Paul says in Colossians 1:16 that **for in Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him.**

So in short... NOTHING.... From subatomic particles to massive galaxies—exist apart from His creative power... this echoes what John wrote in John 1:3 **All things came into being through Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being.**

Why did Jesus created all things?...don't let those last two words in verse 16 slip by... all things were created FOR HIM... *I thought all this was created for me?....no... all this... AND YOU...* were created for Him... His good pleasure and His glory.

3. Jesus is the One who is before all things (1:17)

17 And He is before all things,

This goes along with being **the firstborn of all creation...**

“Before” is the Greek word “*pro*” and it has two possible meaning... this passage could be translated **He is above all things** which points to Christ’s supremacy...by the way... supremacy in the Bible refers to emphasizing Christ’s ultimate authority, power, and preeminence over all creation. Jesus is the highest being, possessing unparalleled sovereignty, wisdom, and majesty.

So it could mean Jesus is *above* all things...which is consistent with verse 18b that says **...so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything...** Nothing is above Jesus... Nothing is greater than He... NOTHING.

Or it could mean He is *literally* “**before**” **all things** which points to Christ’s “*pre-existence*”...In John chapter 8 Jesus is having a conversation with some people who are not really believing that He is the Messiah and that He is God in the flesh... Jesus says to them in John 8:56

56“Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.”

Interesting isn't it?...Abraham was some 2000 years before Christ... and Jesus is in the 1st century... these doubters heard this and responded:

57So the Jews said to Him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?”

You should be at least 2030 years old to have seen Abraham!

58 Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am.” Jesus is claiming His identity... His deity... His eternity... what did they do then? _____?

59Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple.

There they go again... picking up stones to stone Him... for His claim to being what?.....God!....when Jesus said to them **before Abraham was, I am.**” He was using the same words God used in identifying Himself to Moses at the burning bush in Exodus chapter 3...

What did God say to Moses?... after Moses asked “**who shall I say sent me to my people**”... the Lord from the burning bush said “**tell them I AM**”... sent you...which is where we get the name YAHWEH.... A verb that means the “*self existing One*”...it means *I was, I am and I always shall be!*

John 8 Jesus uses that same name... those same two words... **Before Moses existed...I AM...** The Jews knew what He was saying and claiming THAT'S why they picked up stones to kill Him...

Both are true of Jesus Christ... He is above all things and He is literally before all things... He is supreme... but He isn't an absentee God... He's a very involved God... I love this part... verse 17 concludes with **and in Him all things hold together...**

The perfect tense of the verb shows that this holding together is **continuous and ongoing** — not just at creation, but every moment since ...Paul's point is that Jesus is not only the **Creator** but also the **Sustainer** of the universe....

Just as He brought the cosmos into being, He **upholds every atom, force, and law of nature** by His divine power....we need Him!!!Without His ongoing will and power, all things would fall apart.

Paul affirms that **Christ is the “cosmic glue”** — the unbreakable bond that holds the universe in order.

4. Jesus is the Head of the body—the church (1:18a)

We went through this a few months ago in our short series on the church... in the New Testament the church of Jesus Christ is called a body...the body of Jesus Christ... 1 Corinthians 12:12–27 – Paul explains, “**For just as the body is one and has many parts... so also is Christ... Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it**”

Every Christian is a part of the body... we make up the body.. we all have different gifts which are the many parts... functions and responsibilities within the body... arms, hands, feet, toes... put together the church is to function as a body functions... the body WILL NOT function without a head.... A body can still function and exist without toes... or arms... or legs... but it cannot exist and function without the head.... And Jesus Christ is the head.... The head leads the body... cut the head off the body is dead.

This is important... why?... well, for the Colossian church it established who was the ultimate leader... the ultimate authority... Jesus Christ.... When heresies creep into a church... it is vital that Jesus Christ is the ultimate authority...

For the church today... we need to remember Jesus is the number one authority... not the pastor... not some man of any stature... not a pope... Jesus is the head.... The body is to follow the lead of the head... NOTHING ELSE!

Interesting... looking around at the different churches today... we all look different... some bodies dress very formal... others casual... some are very structured in their services... some are very loosely structured... but all should have no differences in who is the head... the head of the church must be Jesus... the same Jesus... or it is not a church....not a body.

Ephesians 1:22-23

22 And He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him as head over all things to the church,

23 which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all.

5. Jesus is the Firstborn of the dead (1:18b)

18 And He is the head of the body, the church;

Who is the beginning, **the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.**

The firstborn of the dead... does NOT mean Jesus was the first person to rise from the dead... there are people in both the Old and New Testaments that died then rose from the dead:

You have the widow's son in 1 Kings 17 ...Elijah prayed for the widow's son who died from an illness... the son came back to life...

In 2 Kings 4 you have the Shunamite woman's son who died... Elisha the prophet prayed over him and he came back to life... In the New Testament: In Luke 7 ***The widow's son at Nain*** – Jesus encountered a funeral procession and raised the young man, the only son of a widow, restoring him to life.

Jairus' daughter – The synagogue leader Jairus' daughter had died, and Jesus brought her back to life (Luke 8:40-56)

Lazarus – Lazarus had been dead for four days, and Jesus raised him from the tomb, demonstrating His authority over death (John 11:1-44).

Several people have been raised from the dead... Jesus was not the first... but He was the first and only One to die, raised, NEVER to die again!...He died, rose and stayed alive forever...He is the firstborn of the dead...

Another place in the New Testament that says it differently...1 Corinthians 15, after that great exposition of the importance of the resurrection of Jesus Christ... the apostle Paul says in verse 20 **But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the **first fruits** of those who have fallen asleep.**

Instead of saying He is the **firstborn** he says He is the **first fruits** of the dead...important distinction between the two... firstfruits was on the Jewish calendar... an event...every springtime, the very *first fruits* of the harvest came... much more fruit would follow through the season... but the very first fruit that appeared in the beginning of the harvest season would be picked and given to the Lord... dedicated in the temple.

The idea is giving the Lord the first off the top... giving of the first fruits...

Paul identifies Christ's resurrection as the "firstfruits" of those who have died, indicating that Jesus' rising from the dead is the first of a greater harvest to come—namely, the resurrection of all believers....you and me... This metaphor underscores the assurance of the future resurrection for those who are in Christ, just as the first sheaf of the harvest was a pledge of the full harvest to follow.

Christ was the first fruit... we are the following harvest...

We will die... but we will be like Jesus... we will pass from life to life... !

Listen to Philippians 3:20-21

20 For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ,

21 who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by His working through which He is able to even subject all things to Himself.

Who is Jesus?

He is the image of God...because He is God in flesh

He is the creator of all things

He is the One before all things...the head of all things

He is the head of the body of the church

He is the firstborn among the dead

JESUS IS LORD!
