

Series: *Colossians – Christ Above All*

Title: “Jesus Christ: Fully God, and Nothing Less”

Speaker: Rev. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 10/18/2009

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In our last message, we began our consideration of the tremendous section of teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ that we find in Colossians chapter one, beginning at verse fifteen. This passage tells us more about Jesus in just a few verses, than any other passage in the Bible. And in verse fifteen, we read this: “He [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.” That short statement – just ten words in the original Greek – is the most jam-packed, super-rich statement about the Lord Jesus Christ that you will find anywhere in the Bible. We are truly on holy ground here. We are looking at a tremendous statement.

The Question of All Questions

As I was praying about these messages and preparing to preach on this particular passage, another portion of Scripture kept coming to my mind over, and over again. And actually it’s one event that’s found in three of the Gospel records – it’s in Matthew chapter 16 beginning at verse 13, Mark chapter 8 beginning at verse 27, and also in Luke chapter 9 beginning at verse 18. All three Gospels record the same event.

In those passages, Jesus asked His disciples the question of all questions. The question of the ages. He said to them, “Who do men say that I am?” And the disciples gave him many different answers. Some say you’re John the Baptist come back from the dead. Some say you are Elijah. Others say that you are one of the prophets. And it’s the same today. The world gives many different answers to that question of all questions: Who is Jesus Christ?

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Wrong Answers of Secularists & Religious Liberals

Some skeptics try to deny that Jesus even existed. But those same skeptics have no problem accepting, for example, the fact that the philosopher Plato existed. Now, Plato lived 400 years before Jesus was born. And every college student who's been exposed to even a basic course in philosophy learns about Plato. Plato is a hero among secular philosophers. They have no problem believing that he existed. But did you know that there is far more evidence for the existence of Jesus Christ than there is for the existence of Plato? There is literally a thousand times more documentary evidence for the physical existence of Jesus Christ on earth than there is for the existence of Plato.

There are only seven available manuscripts of the writings of Plato, and the earliest one is from 1,200 years after Plato's death. By contrast, there are over 5,000 early manuscripts of the books of the Greek New Testament in existence today, and some of them are from as early as fifty years after the time of the apostles. Yet postmodern skeptics rarely question the authenticity of the writings of Plato, but they constantly question the authenticity of the New Testament, and the existence of Jesus Christ. And that is what Romans chapter one verse eighteen calls suppressing the truth in unrighteousness, and Romans 1:25 calls it exchanging the truth of God for the lie. But that is the skeptic's answer to Jesus' question, "Who do men say that I am?" The skeptic says, "Jesus didn't even exist." And the skeptic is absolutely wrong.

Some say that Jesus Christ was a great philosopher. During his first campaign for president of the United States, George W. Bush was asked, "Who is your favorite philosopher?" And his answer was, "Jesus Christ." Many scholars, both secular and religious, name Jesus Christ as one of the "great philosophers" of all time. But they

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view Jesus simply as *another* philosopher like Plato or Aristotle. And in this they demonstrate that they view Jesus as a mere man, and not as God.

Some say that Jesus was a prophet. Islam says that Jesus was a prophet. But like all prophets in Islam, the Muslims say that Jesus was a Muslim. And they say that Mohammed, not Jesus, was the greatest of the prophets. And they say that Jesus is not God. They deny that Jesus is the Son of God. They say that God could not have a son. And we’re going to talk about that objection of the Muslims, as we consider Colossians chapter one, verse fifteen.

Some say that Jesus is a great moral example. Harvey Cox, who is a professor at Harvard Divinity School, wrote a book recently called *When Jesus Came to Harvard*, and the subtitle is “Making Moral Choices Today.” He presents Jesus as a great moral example. In fact, he actually teaches a class that’s part of the regular Harvard University curriculum that’s called “Jesus and the Moral Life.” The course focuses on Jesus as a moral example. But for Harvey Cox, and Mahatma Gandhi, and Norman Vincent Peale, and Robert Schuller, and so many others, Jesus is nothing more than a great moral example. And this, once again, falls far, far short – light years short – of the reality of who Jesus is.

Wrong Answers in Evangelicalism

There’s a lot of this sloppy, worldly, un-biblical thinking about Jesus in the Evangelical church today. The Purpose-Driven Church movement and the Emergent Church movement are both promoting a false Jesus who is a political and social reformer. When they speak of Jesus as the “savior” they are speaking of saving society, saving the economy, saving the world-system, trying to make this sin-cursed,

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dying world a better place. Not the kind of salvation man really needs – salvation from eternal damnation in Hell because of our sins, through the shedding of Christ's blood.

Much of contemporary Evangelical teaching about Jesus emphasizes the idea of Jesus being your friend. In fact, people are actually invited to come forward in many so-called Evangelical churches, not to learn more about receiving Jesus Christ as their Savior from sin and wrath, but to "receive Jesus as your friend" – a friend who will help you to have success in this life, without any real thought about your eternal destination, Heaven or Hell. In our last message we talked about the empty little praise songs that are used in so many churches today – "seven-eleven songs" I called them – seven words sung eleven times and then repeated over and over again, mindlessly. Many of those songs focus on having Jesus as your "friend" – but as nothing else.

Now, the Bible does speak of Jesus being the Friend of the believer. But the point is, you have to receive Jesus Christ as your Savior, you have to place your faith in Him, and in His perfect atoning work as the Substitute who died the death you deserved – you have to receive Him as your Savior from sin, confessing that he is Lord (Romans 10:9 and 10), before He becomes your Friend. But if you have not first come to Jesus on that basis, it doesn't matter how often you go to church, it doesn't matter how many of those praise songs you sing, it doesn't matter how much of an emotional high you get – Jesus is not your Friend. The Bible says that you are His enemy. It was while we were enemies of God, Paul says here in Colossians chapter one, verse 21 – it was while we were enemies of Christ, that He died for sinners.

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“Who Do *You* Say That I Am?”

We could say much more about this, but we need to move on. Jesus asked His disciples, “Who do men say that I am?” And they gave him the kinds of different – but wrong – answers that you hear in the world, and that you hear in the church. But then Jesus asked the question of all questions once again. And He asked it in a different and far more personal way. He said, “But who do *you* say that I am?” The world says all these things about Me. False religion says all these things about Me. But who do *you* men say that I am?

Now, we need to understand that Jesus wasn’t merely asking His disciples for their opinion. Not just another opinion to pile on top of the other opinions. He wasn’t asking for an opinion. He was asking for a *testimony*. Here is the basis on which He was asking the question: “You men have been with Me for some time now. I’ve been explaining the Old Testament to you. And I’ve begun revealing New Testament truth to you. Now, on the basis of what I have taught you – on the basis of My Word, and on the basis of what you have seen of Me – who do you say that I am?”

And Peter gave the answer, without hesitation: “You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God.” You are the Christ, the Son of the living God. And on another occasion, in John chapter six beginning at verse 67, when a large number of Jesus’ followers had deserted Him, Jesus said to His disciples, “ ‘Do you also want to go away?’ But Simon Peter answered Him, ‘Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. Also we have come to believe and know’ – we know it for a fact – ‘that You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.’ ” They had come to know it because they were

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relying upon the Word of God – the written Word, and also the preached Word – preached to them by Jesus Christ himself, the living Word, God made flesh.

Two Propositional Statements – And More

And so Paul says this, in the passage that is presently before us, Colossians chapter one, verse fifteen: "He [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation." Now as we look at this verse in this message and the next one, we'll be focusing on the two propositional statements that we find in this verse. First, what does it mean when Paul under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit says that Jesus Christ "is the image of the invisible God"? And secondly, what does Paul mean when he says that Jesus is "the firstborn over all creation"?

And these two questions are going to lead us into four other related questions. First: What is the Trinity, and why is the Trinity important? Second: How do we know that Jesus Christ is God? Third: How could God have a Son? And fourth: When Jesus came into the world as a man, did He remain fully God?

Those are all vital questions today. And there are a lot of wrong answers to those questions, even in the church today. We need to know the right answers. And Colossians chapter one, verse fifteen – these few short words – are the basis on which we can know the right answers. Of course, our consideration of this verse is going to lead us into many other passages that bear upon these questions. And that is because the Word of God alone, not the opinions of sinful men, is our authority in answering these questions.

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“The Image of the Invisible God”

So first of all: What does it mean for Jesus to be “the image of the invisible God”? The word that is used here for “image” is a very rich word in the original language. It means that something is the exact representation of something else. It is the exact revelation of something else. It is precisely and exactly true to the prototype in every detail. Nothing is left out. An exact reproduction – so exact, that it is impossible to distinguish between the original and the representation of the original. All of these thoughts are in this word “image.”

And, Paul says, Jesus is literally “the image of God the invisible.” The image of God the invisible. Jesus Christ is the exact representation of God the Father. He is the exact and complete revelation of the God the Father. He is exactly like God the Father in every detail. An exact reproduction – so exact that it is impossible to distinguish between the Father and the Son. They are exactly the same in essence.

We read this in John chapter fourteen, beginning at verse six:

Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also; and from now on you know Him and have seen Him.”

Philip said to Him, “Lord, show us the Father, and it is sufficient for us.” Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; so how can you say, ‘Show us the Father’? Do you not believe that I am in the Father,

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and the Father in Me? The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works. Believe Me that I am in the Father and the Father in Me..."

In John chapter ten, beginning at verse thirty, we read that Jesus said:

"I and My Father are one." Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him. Jesus answered them, "Many good works I have shown you from My Father. For which of those works do you stone Me?" The Jews answered Him, saying, "For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God."

Jesus answered them, "Is it not written in your law, 'I said, 'You are gods''? If He called them gods, to whom the word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), do you say of Him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, 'You are blaspheming,' because I said, 'I am the Son of God'? If I do not do the works of My Father, do not believe Me; but if I do, though you do not believe Me, believe the works, that you may know and believe that the Father is in Me, and I in Him."

The unbelieving Jews understood that Jesus claimed to be one with God the Father. It was for this reason that they hated Him and sought to kill Him. And in John 15:23, Jesus said to them, "He who hates Me hates my Father also."

Why Did Jesus Come?

What was God the Father's purpose in sending Jesus into the world, as the exact representation of the Father? We find the answer in the first chapter of John:

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Verse one: "In the beginning was the Word [Jesus Christ], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God."

Verse fourteen: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us [literally, pitched His tent among us], and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

John chapter one, verse eighteen: "No one has seen God [that is, God the Father] at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him." And that word "declared" literally means, "He has exegeted Him." Jesus Christ, by coming in the flesh, coming as the exact representation, the express image of God the Father, He revealed and carefully explained God the Father to us. He unfolded God the Father before us. He is the perfect and complete manifestation and explanation of the invisible God. The very nature and character of God are perfectly revealed in Jesus Christ. In Him the invisible God became visible.

That is why Jesus came into the world. Jesus came to reveal and explain the holiness of God. Jesus came to explain the true nature of the law of God, which the Jewish leaders had obscured under a mountain of man-made rules and regulations. Jesus came to reveal and explain the sinfulness of man – that man in his sinful state could not stand before a holy God and live. Jesus came to reveal and explain the wrath of God the Father against sin.

But Jesus also came to reveal and explain the love of God the Father. Jesus came to reveal and explain the mercy of God the Father. And Jesus came to reveal and explain the plan of God – the plan of redemption. And Jesus came not only to reveal and explain the heart of God, His heart to provide a way to redeem sinful man, but Jesus

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came as the visible manifestation of the invisible God in order to *be* that Way. “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life,” Jesus declares. “No man comes to the Father” – no man is reconciled to the invisible God – “except through Me” – the exact visible representation of the invisible God.

And the exact representation of the invisible God suffered the humiliation and the agony of death on behalf of sinners, shedding His own blood in order that sinners might be redeemed, rescued, set free from bondage, and reconciled to God the Father.

What About You?

Have you been freed from the bondage of sin today? Are you trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ and His finished work alone, for your salvation from sin and wrath? If you are, it is my prayer that these studies in Colossians chapter one will help to give you a greater appreciation for who the Lord Jesus Christ is, and what it means when Paul says that Jesus “is the image of the invisible God.”

But perhaps you’re listening today and you’re not a believer on Jesus Christ. Perhaps you are one of those people who have an opinion about who Jesus is, that is not based upon the Word of God. If you are in that condition today, it is my prayer that you will bow the knee before God right now, submit to His Word, acknowledge that Jesus Christ is indeed God Himself, and call upon Him, trusting in His death as the atonement for your sins, and in His resurrection from the dead as the guarantee of deliverance from the wrath to come.

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