

# (Colossians) 04 Who Is Jesus Christ

by Bob Utley

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*Jesus Christ is fully God, fully man, the image of the invisible God, and the agent of creation, both in heaven and on earth, and through him, God reconciles all things to himself.*

**Duration:** 32:04

**Scripture:** Exodus 33:18-23, Matthew 5:8, Colossians 1:15-20

**Topics:** "Colossians"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the role of Jesus as the head of the universal church. He emphasizes that Jesus is only referred to as the head of the church in the books of Ephesians and Colossians. The speaker also highlights the doctrine of providence, explaining that Jesus not only created the world but also sustains it. He gives examples of how God allows humans to live their lives, even in sin, with the hope that they will eventually find Christ. The speaker also mentions the importance of understanding the two major names for God in the Old Testament and addresses the presence of disturbing passages in scripture.

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## Transcript

Those songs have such wonderful messages, wonderful messages. Well, when I felt like the Lord wanted me to preach through Colossians with you, I must admit that the text for today was in my mind. When I said to you, it's a real honor to get to share with you the message of this book, that the text today was on my mind.

And I'm looking at chapter 1, verses 15 through 20. I think it's one of the most marvelous Christological passages in the entire New Testament. It answers the question, who is Jesus of Nazareth? I mean, our calendar is dated by his birth.

There are people around the world gathered in his name, in buildings like this, in much humbler buildings. In every corner of this world, people are getting together today to pray to him, talk about him. Who is he? As a theologian, there are just several key, crucial Christological passages.

John 1, from the very beginning of the gospel, Jesus is fully God, fully man. Many of us are familiar with that wonderful hymn, I think, in Philippians 2, verses 6 through 11. Colossians 1 and Hebrews 1 have a lot in common.

In one sense, they talk about the cosmic aspect of Jesus Christ's lordship, as well as the redemptive aspect of Jesus Christ's lordship. I mean, he is the one through whom, to whom, for whom. Slap your mama, that's good repetition.

I mean, he's the one. It's all about him. And this text, it just puts this together.

I think this may be another early church hymn. When you start getting balance lines, and these connectors that look like they're balanced, it may have been the liturgy or the hymnal of the early church. Whichever it is, I'm just so glad to have this.

Because in a day of post-modernity, a day where there's such skepticism, we need to have clearly in our mind who is the one that we claim is lord of all. Who is he? And what does he want us to understand about himself? So I hope you'll follow me in your Bible. I'm going to use my, this is the New American Standard 1995 update.

I'm going to try to deal with each one of these topics and lines. And many of them are balanced. It's going to seem a little repetitious to you, but it's for the purpose of the poetry, I think.

Before I get into this dealing with words and phrases, I want to remind you this was written to a group of churches that were experiencing false teachers. These false teachers are what we know today from the movie The Da Vinci Code. Because they were the false teachers behind the Gospel of Thomas, which was a second century heretical gospel that we found in Coptic.

And only in Coptic, not in Greek. And these Gnostic false teachers had some key words. Now I've talked to you often about these because when I went through Ephesians, that also reflects these Gnostic false teachers.

As a matter of fact, Colossians and Ephesians are based on the same outline. So the same, I would say almost exactly the same outline, except this wonderful hymn to Christ for some reason does not occur in Ephesians. This is the place in Ephesians where the great hymn to the Trinity occurs.

Chapter 1, 3 through 4. But here it's this wonderful, I think, poem or liturgy to Jesus Christ. So we're going to have some Gnostic words in here. And either the hymn writer or Paul, or maybe they're synonymous, is going to pick up on some of this vocabulary that was being misused and put it in a proper framework.

And boy, it's exciting to see how it uniquely historically fit this situation. And I think may very well fit our historical situation with all the confusion surrounding the person of Christ in our day. He is the image of the invisible God.

Now I mentioned to you when I was going through the real parallel in Hebrews 1 verses 2 and 3, there are two words in Greek that could be translated form or image. One of them is the word icon. Now you may know that from the statuary, the worship statuary.

But the other word is the word character that means the exact imprint of a family seal. This is the word icon, the same word used in 1 Corinthians 4, 4. This is the term that means that to see the invisible God. And remember, no one can see God and live.

The Old Testament is very clear. God is holy. We are unholy.

To see him meant death for us. That's why when God said to Moses, I think it's Exodus 32, what can I do for you? And Moses says, I want to see you. And God says, you can't, but I'll hide you in the cleft of the rock.

And when my glory passes by, I'll remove my hand and let you see my afterglory. It's amazing how the Bible tries to protect the holiness of God. Yet I also know the Sermon on the Mount where it says the pure in heart will see God.

One day we will see him with the spiritual eyes that are able to see an eternal, holy, ever present in the universe being. But what is God like? I must admit to you, there are some passages in scripture that make me afraid. Right now, our culture is very sensitive to some of the passages in the Koran that talk about killing the infidel.

But I want you to know there are equally disturbing and radical passages in the Old Testament. Where in the Holy War text, the people of Israel are told to kill everything that breathes in the city. I mean, animals and humans and children and pregnant women.

If it breathes, it dies. That's in the Old Testament. And that's scary to us.

And so we say, well, what is God like? Is he that fearful? Is he that judgmental? I guess, I don't know why in my own personality I've been so afraid of God much of my life. I think I am spiritually sensitive and I recognize I'm a sinner. And I can remember as a child being afraid to go to sleep because I was afraid I'd die and wake up in front of God.

And he had a list he wanted to talk to me about. But as I became older and began to do my own Bible study and begin to read about Jesus and suddenly it became clear to me that the one who loved all the social outcast, the one who cares uniquely about women and children and lepers and tax collectors. That if he is the image of the invisible God, if he is the representation of God's character that even though I don't understand, I can trust my life to a God like that.

He is the image. Now, the other thing that kind of plays on here is this ought to remind you something of Genesis 1 because much of these phrases are going to go back to Genesis. Genesis 1, 26 and 27, that he made male and female in his image.

In his image. But in Genesis 3, when humans rebelled against God, that image was damaged. It wasn't totally destroyed, but it was damaged.

It's become my understanding of New Testament truth that salvation in Jesus Christ can be understood as the restoration of the damaged image of God in mankind that has now been restored by faith in Christ so that we can have intimate, moment by moment, fellowship with God analogous to the Garden of Eden except for the physical presence. And one day in our lives, we will have the physical presence. He is the image of the invisible God and we're talking about a carpenter from Nazareth who was killed for treason.

Now something's up here. This is true revelation or this is folk story, legend, lies, trickery. There ain't no middle ground here.

The boy is a peasant carpenter or the boy is the incarnate son of God. Now you've got to decide because our world forces us to make that decision. A lot of people want to say wonderful things about Jesus but it's not a wonderful thing to say something about the one who's fully God unless you admit he's fully God.

Can't be a nice guy, great teacher, great neighbor. Fix your chair if it breaks down. No, he is the image of the invisible God.

I cannot see the invisible God but through word pictures, through the text of scripture, I can see the life of Jesus of Nazareth. I can trust my life to the God that Jesus of Nazareth reveals. Look at the second one.

He is the firstborn of creation. Now we've got to take a minute here because this is an Old Testament metaphor but it's used in several different ways and that's what's always confusing. The question is what Old Testament passage do we go back to? Now in the Hebrew home, the firstborn child had a place of double inheritance and normally the firstborn child is the one who is the manager, the patriarch, the leader of the family.

It might surprise you that none of the firstborn children of the patriarchs ever were the leaders of the family because it's God's way of saying just like all the beautiful women that they married, none of them could have a child naturally. They were all barren, beautiful women and God had to step in to show he's in control and God stepped in to show the firstborn never was the leader of the family. But in Jewish culture, the firstborn has this ideal of preeminence, double inheritance, managership.

There's also some places, it's surprising, where in Psalm 89.27, firstborn becomes a messianic symbol, a messianic symbol, the firstborn. Now some, and I think rightly so and wrongly so, go to Proverbs 8.22 where wisdom is the firstborn of creation and all else is created through wisdom. Well, wisdom in Hebrew and in Greek is feminine.

This is not an attempt to put a feminine person in the Trinity. This is again a metaphor of preeminence. He is the first of creation.

He is the first in the sense of that agent of God that dealt with the creation and organization of matter. I hope you'll look at this again and it just parallels through here. Notice all the use of the word hymns while I'm in this.

I'm beginning in verse 16. Notice these pronouns, by him, in him, for him, through him, unto him. He is both the agent of and the object of creation.

Now again, this can't be a peasant carpenter we're being lied to. Is it possible in your mind that Jesus of Nazareth is not a baby in a hay cradle, but the incarnate son of God sent to fully reveal God, sent to fully redeem man and show us what we could have been and should have been before Genesis 3. An example that we should follow. For by him, all things were created.

He is God's agent in creation. Now that's true in so many texts. That's true in John 1, 3, and 10.

That's true in Hebrews 1, 2, and 3, 1 Corinthians 8, 6. It's over and over. It was not God the Father that spoke is the metaphor of Genesis 1. Genesis 2, it is not God the Father that knelt down in the red clay of the Tigris Euphrates, formed man from clay and breathed in him the breath of life. The New Testament completely, fully, unambiguously asserts that that agent of creation was the preexistent Christ.

For by him, all things. By the way, have you noticed through here, just look for a minute in verses 15 through 20, the Greek word all that's translated everything one time, but everywhere else in mind, it's all. It's the word *pos* or *pon*.

Seven things about all and about Jesus. I've written these down. Let me just listen to this.

By him, all things were created. All things have been created through him. He is before all things.

In him, all things hold together. He himself will come to have first place in everything. All the fullness to dwell in him.

Through him to reconcile all things to himself. Holy moly, this is some peasant carpenter. He is the agent of creation, both in heaven and on earth.

He not only is the creator of the physical. Look at this text. He is the creator of the spiritual, the angelic realms.

Now these words through here, where he talks about thrones, dominions, rulers, authorities. If I was in Romans 13, this would be civic leaders, governmental leaders. Do these words mean that? But in Colossians and Ephesians and Romans, think of Romans 8, that last little text.

All those angelic things, height and depth and principalities and power. Those are all angelic realms. The Gnostics believe there was a holy God and somewhere through lesser gods, a God that can form matter.

And they use the word for all those levels. They called it the pleroma of God. Which is the Greek word for fullness.

This text is going to call Jesus the fullness of God. It's a direct refutation of the Gnostics and a wonderful affirmation that nothing exists in the spiritual realm or the physical realm that was not created by and for and through and unto him. And he's my big brother.

All things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things. That's got to be pre-existence.

There never has been a time when Jesus Christ was not. Now we are not tritheists. We do not believe in a father, a son and a Holy Spirit as separate individuals.

We believe in one divine essence. And the mystery is that the New Testament forces us to say Jesus is fully God and the Holy Spirit is a full personality. Now whether we like it or not, we have monotheism with three eternal personal manifestations.

It's difficult, but I have no option to change that because it's so recurrent in Scripture text. He is the pre-existent one. He is the creator.

In him all things hold together. Now I don't know if you remember the sermon I did. I guess it's been months ago now out of Hebrews 1, 2 and 3. This is the doctrine of providence.

Not only did he create it, he sustains it. He's the one that allows humans in the midst of their sin to go through days of their life. You saw that guy named Bob on that video.

How old was that dude? He didn't find Christ till the end. God let that man live decades not knowing him so that one day the spirit of God could touch his heart and mind. He is the one that lets the rain fall on the just and the unjust.

He's the one that brings the seasons. Natural science only developed in the West because only in the West does God keep the systems of nature going so that we can test that and find out the rhythms and patterns and chemical compounds that make our world. This is the one who holds it together.

Now if you let me go back to the Old Testament just a minute. Two major names for God. Genesis 1, 1. In the beginning, God created.

That's the word Elohim. In Genesis 4, 2, the word Elohim is combined with the word Yahweh. And this is the one that acted in the garden of Eden to form man and breathe into him the breath of life.

It is Yahweh that is the savior, the covenant-making God. But it is Elohim that creates, sustains, provides. Provides life for all on this planet.

There's gonna be a wonderful series tonight on television about life. I believe from my understanding of the Bible that all the richness of creation is because of the sustaining power of the second person of the Trinity. Holds all things together.

Now then look in verse 18. This we're switching from the cosmic lordship. And boy, this is cosmic.

Now to the redemptive aspect. And notice where it says, and he is head of the body of the church. Now it is only, only, only in Ephesians and Colossians where Jesus is the head of the church.

Now Jesus has the body is in several other texts. But only as the head is it here. And I submit to you, this has got to be the universal church, not the local church.

Although Colossians was written the three individual churches in the Lycus river valley. He's talking about Jesus's head, not of a few churches in one little river valley. He is head over the church that was established at Caesarea Philippi in his promise to Peter.

Upon this rock, I'll build my church. There ain't no local church at Caesarea Philippi. That's the universal church.

Now, 90% of the time, the word church in the New Testament, it refers to an individual church. But this does not fit. This is the universal church.

Man, that's some powerful text. Notice where it says next, I mean, verse 18. He is the beginning.

Now that sounds like Genesis 1, 1. I grant you that sounds like Genesis 1, 1. Or John, 1 John 1. But friends, because of the context, this is not in the cosmic creator section. That's been earlier. This is in the church section.

He is the organizer and farmer and starter of the church. And that's got to be what it's referring to here. The firstborn of the dead.

What's that talking about? Are we back to preeminence? Well, I think here it means firstborn. And by the way, if you look at your... And you should have a study Bible when you come to church. Amen? That's pitiful.

You've got to run these parallels because the Bible is the best interpreter of the Bible. Amen? You don't... No preacher can touch the Bible interpreting the Bible. This firstfruits is parallel to firstborn.

Firstborn, firstfruits. Now, what are we talking about? We're talking about the great passage on the resurrection is 1 Corinthians 15. And what it is saying to us is that he is the first to have a new body.

Now, there have been people who went to heaven without dying. Enoch, Elijah. They were translated to heaven.

There had been people who were dead and brought back to physical life, but they're going to have to die again. Old Testament and new. There's only been one resurrection where the new body will never die.

Where the new body is both physical and spiritual. He is the first one to have a new body. But what it says is he's the first of many.

He's the firstfruits of all of those who trust in him. He is the one, the firstfruits, the ones that very earliest to ripen, but they're the promise of the harvest to come. You and I who have trusted him are the harvest to come.

He is the firstborn of the dead. And that he himself will come to have first place in everything. We say in the church over and over, it's all about him.

I'm not sure we live that way, but I guarantee you the scripture thinks that. He will have first place in all. It's what it says.

For it was the father's good pleasure for all the fullness. There's that Gnostic word again, Pleroma. What this author is doing is showing the humanity of Jesus, showing the ridiculousness of the Gnostic false system.

Jesus Christ is the focus of our faith, not some secret passwords through the angelic spheres. Yuck. It was the father's good pleasure to put all, the fullness to dwell in him and through him to reconcile, bring peace together to things that are in odds, to reconcile all things.

Now think about that in the midst of a church torn up by false teachers to reconcile all things to himself. Now, how's he going to do that? Having made peace through the blood of his cross. And I want to take just a minute to kind of run a couple of references on this cross thing.

Um, first of all, I would say to you that Jesus came to die. He didn't come to live a great life and just die an old day. He came to die.

Mark 10 45, who can quote that? I did not come to be served, but to serve and to give my life a ransom for many. Jesus came to die. And why did he come to die? Way back in the old Testament, beginning in Deuteronomy, I believe it's 21 31.

I believe it's 21 23. I have dyslexia. It may be 23 21.

It's one of those two. Look it up. Basically, what we have here is the deal that when someone was already dead, if you want to really embarrass somebody, you took their dead, they're dead now, took their dead body and stuck it on a pole, impale them publicly.

The way the Philistines did to Saul as they hung him from the gate of the city. To a Jew being improperly buried affected your afterlife. Now, what it means here by the time of Jesus' life, the rabbis of the first century, because they had seen so many Roman crucifixions, believe that that passage in Deuteronomy

referred to Roman crucifixion.

I really believe this is why that the Sanhedrin took Jesus to Pilate, even though it made them ceremonially unclean for the Passover. They wanted Jesus crucified. Now, if he was a blasphemer, he should have been stoned.

They don't want him stoned. They want him crucified because they want the Old Testament curse of God, that Deuteronomy text said, cursed is he who hangs on the tree. They want God to curse this messianic pretender.

I think this is the text that must have bothered the apostle Paul. How can Jesus bear the curse of God? Friends, this is exactly the redemptive plan we were singing about. And the two texts that grabbed me the most, one's in Colossians 2.14 and the other is in Galatians 3.13. Galatians says, he bore the curse for us.

Colossians 2.14 says, he took that which was against us and nailed it to the cross. Now, what was that? The Old Testament. The Old Testament said, do and live.

All of us have sinned. The Old Testament was a death warrant for every human being made in the image and likeness of God. How does God restore fellowship when he created everything for us to have fellowship with him and then by his own words, the soul that sins, it will surely die.

All of his creation is separated. But what God chose to do is to incarnate himself as a man, live a perfectly sinless life, die on a cross, not for his own sin, but like an Old Testament sacrifice, die for the sins of all who will. Bore the curse for us.

Through him, I say, for the things on earth or things in heaven. Now, you know, you got to come down to a choice about this. Is Jesus a really nice guy? Man, he's a nice guy.

Is he really a great teacher? Is he really the founder of a wonderful religion? Or is he the all things? Is he the to whom, through whom, for whom, unto whom? Now, you got to decide. You can't say, oh, he's really, really nice. He's really wonderful.

Friends, he is the Lord of heaven that died in your place or the New Testament is a lie. Do you know him? It's not going to be enough to believe certain facts. Well, I believe he did this.

I believe he lived there. I believe he went. No, no, no.

This ideal of no is an intimate personal relationship with. Here's the deal. I don't have to convince anybody in this room that you and I have done things that aren't pleasing to God.

I'm not saying you're a bank robber or a murderer. I'm saying this. All of us have done things that we know are unpleasing to God.

If the Bible is true, every one of us are going to stand before him. But the Bible says that God's love was so great for those who were made in his image that he was willing to come in the form of his son and die that you might have intimate eternal fellowship with the father. Now, can you imagine what people must say when they say, well, listen, that's good.

And maybe someday I'll do that. I think I might do that. I think I'm really going to try to live a good life.

And maybe when I get there, if the New Testament's true, all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. If the New Testament's true, one has died on your behalf and God has opened a way for eternal life, complete forgiveness, fellowship with God, a sense of purpose and peace you've never known before. And that door stands open.

But that door swings on double hinges. And the door that opens to eternal life is the door that one day will close to opportunity. I bid you now on a Sunday, snowy Sunday, to be sure you know him, to work out your own salvation with fear and trembling for it's God that works in you to willing to do his good pleasure.

I don't believe you have to say a certain prayer. I don't believe you have to be in a certain building, but I do believe there has to be a time where you recognize you're sinful and you fully consciously accept God's provision in Jesus Christ. That moment is now.

Would you bow your heads with me? Lord, this simple truth has changed the lives of people like Bob who didn't know you for years, has changed young people, has saved marriages, has changed those who look like had no hope of ever finding peace and happiness and victory over the things they were involved in. This name that's above every name, this for whom, through whom, to whom, and by whom is here this morning and holding out his hands to whosoever will. And I pray the spirit of God will have freedom today as it moves up and down each one of these aisles and touches every heart that we might have assurance or we might have fear, that we might sense an invitation of eternal consequences in this moment.

We thank you, Lord, for this kind of a stewardship of the message. We thank you that it is not our message. We thank you that we don't have to manipulate people because your spirit is real and true and here.

And we just pray that open hearts and open minds will think seriously through this issue. Who is Jesus Christ? And we pray today, Lord, that you will have your will and your way in the lives of your people and the lives of those who you want to be your people. Now we give this service to you with the confident assurance of your presence, the confident assurance of your glorified status and the confident assurance of your love for us.

And we ask you now to manifest yourself in the fruit that you produce to your gospel. In Jesus' name we pray, amen. Your staff is here.

We're going to be standing down front. We believe as Baptists, we put the pulpit in the center of the church because we believe the proclamation of the word of God is crucial. And that whosoever will may come, but whosoever will must acknowledge before men who they're trusting in.

Now you can do that by telling your family and friends. You do not have to walk an aisle. There's nothing about that.

But we say that when God touches your heart, it's time to drive that stake down in your experience and say, this is when I felt my need. This is when I trusted him as my only provision. And this is what I'm trusting in when I stand before him.

So as we stand today, I pray that you'll prepare for that day when you stand before him.

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