

Brightest and Best

Colossians 1.15-18

Have you ever misjudged someone? I've done it many times. I think I have someone figured out, and then they surprise me.

A humorous example happened to me not long after we migrated to Australia. I became friends with a man who was a computer programmer in Newcastle. He was the prototypical geek – glasses, pens in the pocket, half the things he said I had no idea what he was talking about. After we had gotten together a couple times, I learned that he played a little tennis – at least that is how he put it, “Yeah, I used to have a hit or two”. I was excited to hear him say that. At last, I found something we might have in common, so I invited him to have a recreational game the next week.

I drove to the court thinking, “I’ll just take it easy on him. I don’t want to blow him away and destroy any opportunity to witness to him.” I needn’t have worried. In the first set, I didn’t score a single point – never mind that I didn’t win a game; I didn’t even score! After that, he took it easy on me.

I misjudged him.

A lot of people misjudge Jesus. They think they have Him all figured out . . . but someday they’ll discover to their shame and horror that they were wrong. This morning, I want to ensure that you aren’t one of the many people that Jesus will surprise.

Who is Jesus? When Jesus asked his disciples this question, they reported a variety of speculative answers: a prophet . . . Elijah returned from heaven . . . Jeremiah or John the Baptist reincarnated (Matthew 16.14). To those answers, people today add a few others: a great teacher . . . a moral example . . . or even, an avatar.

It is a critical question – more than people realise. Did you know that what you say about Jesus makes the difference between heaven and hell?

Matthew 10:32 (NKJV)

³² “Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven.

Sermon in a Sentence: **Jesus is the name above all names – confess Him.**

So far in our studies through Colossians, we have learned to have a broader perspective and a deeper pursuit. A broader perspective means noticing other believers in order to praise and pray. A deeper pursuit means putting down roots in the Lord and His Word. In our text today, Paul leads us on a brief, but important excurses. Who is this Lord that we are putting roots into?

Jesus is His name, but who exactly is He? And what has He done?

Paul answers these questions with indisputable facts -- proving that **Jesus is the name above all names – we must confess Him.**

1. Who He Is

Do you know that there is a single doctrine that Jews and Muslims, Hindus and Buddhists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons and Atheists all agree on? That one doctrine that unites the bitterest religious enemies is this: Jesus is not the eternal God.

Are they right about this? What does Paul say?

Colossians 1:15 (ESV)

¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

Upon reading that, the Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Mormons and Atheists say, "Aha, just as we said. Jesus is not the eternal God – he's just an image – kind of like God; and he's just human – the firstborn of all other things that are created."

But to interpret this verse in this way is a double error – and one that will lead to eternal regret. It is an error because it incorrectly defines key words. It is also an error because it ignores the context.

As we consider who He is, we are considering the key words image and firstborn – we must have the correct definitions. Once we have this settled, we will consider the context – which is the second point of this message.

Let's begin by making sure verse 15 is about Jesus.

This verse begins with the pronoun 'he'. If you look back to verse 13, you'll find the same pronoun. In that verse, it is God the Father who is the subject – as a glance at verse 12 clearly shows.

Colossians 1:12-13 (ESV)

¹² giving thanks to the **Father**, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in light. ¹³ **He** has **delivered us** from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son,

So it is God the Father who delivers us from the domain of darkness and transfers us to the kingdom of Christ. But on what basis? On the basis of what the Son does in verse 14.

Colossians 1:14 (ESV)

¹⁴ in whom we have **redemption**, the **forgiveness** of sins.

I have pointed this out to you for two reasons. Firstly, because we need to know who the 'he' is in verse 15. It is 'his beloved Son' – who is also the 'whom' in verse 14 – the redeemer. Because Jesus is not named at all in verses 15-18, we must make certain that we are right to interpret these verses as describing Jesus. And we are right. Jesus is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

Secondly, I've pointed this out because the issue of whether or not Jesus is God has always been hotly contested. In fact, it is the reason, humanly speaking, Jesus was given the death sentence in the first place – he claimed to be the Son of God . . . making Himself equal with God.

Mark 14:64 (ESV)

⁶⁴You have heard his **blasphemy**. What is your decision?" And **they all condemned him** as deserving death.

In the days that Jesus walked on earth, there was no misunderstanding who He said He was. He outright claimed to be the eternal God – “before Abraham was, I Am,” He said (John 8.58).

John 10:33 (ESV)

³³The Jews answered him, “It is not for a good work that we are going to stone you but for **blasphemy**, because you, being a man, **make yourself God.**”

John 5:18 (ESV)

¹⁸This was why the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, **making himself equal with God.**

Now let’s look closely at Colossians 1.15. The issue of Jesus’ divinity is central to this passage.

Who is Jesus?

a. Image of the Invisible

The word ‘image’ is in common use today. We talk about imaging and images, and what we mean by that word is pictures – two-dimensional resemblances of the original.

But Paul means something more. The original Greek word is actually another common term in use today – icon. An icon is more than a resemblance. When we click on an icon on our computer, the computer program opens up – it is not merely a picture to look at; it is functional – the real thing.

W. E. Vine tells us this word ‘image’ must have the dual idea of manifestation and representation.

Let’s think about manifestation. Is Jesus the manifestation of the invisible God?

John 14:9 (ESV)

⁹Jesus said to him, “**Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Philip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, ‘Show us the Father’?**”

He most certainly is! Anyone who sees Jesus, sees God. Anyone who encounters Jesus, encounters God. Anyone who receives Jesus, receives God. He does more than resemble God; He manifests God – which means He is God.

So when Paul writes, “He is the image of the invisible God”, he is not saying Jesus is a living photo – if he did have that in mind, that would be an odd photo, wouldn’t it? Let’s see . . . to snap a picture of someone invisible, do you use the flash or not? No. It is not ‘photo’; it is ‘icon’ – the real thing.

Now let’s think about representation.

The Believer's Bible Commentary explains: "Whoever has seen Him has seen the Father (see John 14:9). But the word **image** also conveys the idea of "representative." God had originally placed Adam on the earth to represent His interests, but Adam failed. Therefore, God sent His only begotten Son into the world as His Representative to care for His interests and to reveal His heart of love to man. In that sense, He is the image of God."¹

Because Jesus is representative, He functions as God – again, just like an icon on our computers. He does the works of God. He speaks the words of God. He is, in fact, God.

Now that we've defined the key word 'image', let's turn our attention to the key word 'firstborn'. Does this mean that Jesus is a created being? No, it actually means Jesus is the . . .

b. Image for the Creation

The word 'firstborn' is used in the Bible in three different ways. It is used literally – Manasseh was Joseph's firstborn son (Genesis 41:51). It is used figuratively – the nation of Israel is called God's firstborn (Exodus 4:22) even though there are many nations that have been around longer than Israel (Egypt is one). Lastly, it is used to designate superiority.

That is how it is used here. Jesus possesses all the authority and inheritance of the firstborn. He is superior.

Notice the wording of this prophecy from the Old Testament that looked forward to Jesus:

Psalm 89:27 (ESV)

²⁷ And I will **make him the firstborn**, the **highest of the kings** of the earth.

This isn't literal – it refers to Jesus as already existing – and being designated, not created, as the firstborn. This is a statement of superiority – the highest of the kings. We get the same sense from this Revelation that looks back to Jesus . . .

Revelation 1:5 (ESV)

⁵ and from Jesus Christ the faithful witness, the **firstborn of the dead**, and the ruler of kings on earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood.

Again, this is clearly not a literal statement. Jesus was not born from being dead. It is a statement of superiority. Because He is the resurrection and the life, all who follow Him in resurrection are partaking in His superior victory.

And so this superior Jesus is now the image all creation must be conformed to. We are to become by His grace an icon of His perfect truth and righteousness.

¹MacDonald, W., & Farstad, A. (1997, c1995). *Believer's Bible Commentary : Old and New Testaments* (Col 1:15). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

Romans 8:29 (ESV)

²⁹For 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.

Jesus is superior.

Colossians 1.15 tells us who Jesus is. He is the image of the invisible God; the firstborn of all creation. Manifestation and representation. When we use the correct definitions of the key terms, there is no missing the message: Jesus was, is and always will be God.

Jesus, name above all names – confess Him.

Jesus, name above all names, beautiful Saviour, glorious Lord.

Emmanuel – God is with us; blessed Redeemer, living Word.

We've looked at the correct definitions. Now let's note the correct context. If those who say Jesus is not God would only read beyond verse 15, they would see He is indeed God according to ...

2. What He's Done

Colossians 1:16-18 (ESV)

¹⁶**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**.
¹⁷And he is **before all things**, and in him all things hold together.¹⁸ 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**.

Verse 15 is the confession: Jesus is God. Verses 16-18 are the evidence. That is why these verses begin with the word 'for'. You can also read that as 'because' – as in Jesus is God because by him all things were created, etc.

There are seven indisputable marks of deity named in these three verses. Jesus God because He:

a. Produced all things

You notice that Paul repeats the phrase 'all things'. Let me ask you, if Jesus were Himself created, could He create all things? Of course not. He could only create some things because some of creation (namely, Himself) would predate whatever He made.

So in emphasising 'all things', Paul is making it clear that Jesus is uncreated. He is in fact the Divine Creator of everything in heaven; everything on earth; everything that is material – the stars, planets, land, water, plants, fish, birds, animals and mankind – and immaterial – the angels right from Michael and Lucifer down to the nameless legion in the angelic army.

Jesus produced all things.

b. Purposed all things

Creation was not only by Jesus, it was for Jesus (see the end of verse 16). Why do the stars and the planets exist? Why do the plants and animals exist? Why do we exist?

For Him. For His pleasure. For His glory.

Jesus purposed all things.

c. Preceded all things

He is also before all things. This is true both in chronology and in importance. He predates all because He has existed for eternity – having no beginning or end. He is also more important than all simply because He is God.

Jesus preceded all things.

d. Providential over all things

This is the phrase ‘in Him all things hold together’.

Listen to what the Believer’s Bible Commentary says about this:

This means that He is the Sustainer of the universe and the Source of its perpetual motion. He controls the stars and the sun and the moon. Even while He was here on earth He was the One who was controlling the laws by which our universe functions in an orderly manner.²

Jesus is providential over all things.

e. President over the church

Verse 18 tells us He is the head of the church. This is true in every dimension – He is the head in that He is the originator – He started the church. He is the head in that He is the protector – He gives security to the church. And He is the head in that He is the leader – He guides the church.

This is something for us to confess today . . . since we are voting on calling a pastor. Jesus is the head of this church. It is His Will that we seek . . . and it is His continued presence that gives us the secure expectation that Cornerstone Baptist Church can and will go on to be faithful and fruitful until Christ comes again.

Jesus presides over the church.

f. Precedent for resurrected life

²MacDonald, W., & Farstad, A. (1997, c1995). *Believer's Bible Commentary : Old and New Testaments* (Col 1:17). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

There were a few people in biblical history who were raised from the dead before Jesus – such as Lazarus. But all of those people died again. They were actually resuscitated, not resurrected.

Jesus was resurrected. He came alive never to die again. All who trust in Him will be resurrected in the last day – never to die again – along with Him.

Jesus is the precedent for resurrected life.

g. Preeminent for eternity

When you add all that together, there is only one conclusion that can be reached: Jesus is God. He is the icon – fully functional as God in creation and redemption. He also possesses all the rights and privileges of the firstborn – superior in every way.

Jesus is preeminent for eternity.

Jesus is the name above all names – do you confess Him?

Let me conclude by taking you back to the Christmas story – the place where Jews, Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Atheists and others mistakenly think Jesus began. Do you remember what Isaiah said about Jesus' birth?

Isaiah 9:6 (ESV)

⁶For to us **a child is born**, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and **his name shall be called** Wonderful Counselor, **Mighty God**, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Jesus, name above all names. He is the image of the invisible God; the firstborn of all creation.

Do you confess Him?