

Title: The Son of God
Biblical Text: Colossians 1:15-20
Teaching Series: Being Human
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Colossians 1:15-20

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. 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.

Christians hold in tension Christ's humanity and Christ's divinity. This is perhaps the most foundational idea of our faith. Jesus isn't simply the Nazarene boy born to Mary and Joseph, but he's also the cosmic second member of the Trinity of whom the writer of Hebrews says "*is the same yesterday and today and forever*" (Hebrews 13:8). It's a mysterious union. Many of us have been perplexed by Jesus' identity for the entirety of our spiritual lives. If so, you're in good company. Theologian J.I. Packer says, "*Nothing in fiction is so fantastic as is this*

truth of the Incarnation" (53). The incarnation is Christ's embodiment; it's Jesus fully human and fully God. And, it's a mystery we hold in tension.

Jesus isn't a mystery that we shrug off in ignorance and uncertainty. Jesus isn't unknowable. He's not unreasonable. The Bible tells us Jesus is the Word of God made visible. He's the unknowable God made known (see John 1:18). Jesus told us, *Read John 14:6 ... "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father."* So, when we say Jesus is a mystery, we're saying knowing him requires cultivating a spiritual imagination. Our spiritual imagination is about learning to see with the eyes of faith. The great British writer and scholar C.S. Lewis explained in his paper *Is Theology Poetry?* that *"I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else"* (1944). Knowing Jesus requires faith. It requires a healthy spiritual imagination. That's what empowers us to hold two apparent contradictions with dignity and intelligence. Faith enables us to see Christ as he is and ourselves as we are.

Today, Paul is going to hold us in tension. He's going to celebrate the cosmic Christ. He will tell us about Jesus' nature, authority, and position. However, everything Paul is going to say to us in vv.15-20 is rooted in v.13. So, before we dive headlong into our passage, look back with me at v.13. *Read Colossians 1:13 ... He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.* Okay, so all of vv.15-20 uses the pronoun *he*. Paul doesn't write Jesus' proper

name in the passage. Every reference point and indication of Christ through the passage points us back to the one named in v.13 ... *the Beloved Son*.

What's this tell us? Why is this so important? Well, because there's our tension. Jesus' divine nature is the *nature* of a Beloved Son. Jesus' cosmic *authority* is the authority of a Beloved Son. Jesus' majestic *position* is the position of a Beloved Son. Before, he was the boy born in Bethlehem or the savior who died in our place and for our sins, even before he spoke the world into existence ... the second member of the Trinity was the Beloved Son. And so all he is, and all he does is as the Beloved Son. That's why Jesus says the Father "*loved me before the foundation of the world*" (John 17:24). Why's that important? Well, because the same is true for us. The mysterious tension within Jesus persists in us—those who bear his image. That's what I'd like to talk about today. I want to talk about the Beloved Son of the Father. I want to talk about how seeing his nature, authority, and position as the Son opens our eyes to our nature, power, and position as children of God.

Here's how we'll organize our time ...

- The *nature* of the Son. *Who he is.*
- The *authority* of the Son. *What he can and gets to do.*
- The *position* of the Son. *Where he is.*

[Prayer]

Movement 1: The Nature of the Son (vv.15;19,

Hebrews 1:3, Psalm 89:27, Luke 1:46-49)

Today's passage is the most well-known passage in Colossians. Many scholars and Bible teachers debate whether or not the words are original to Paul. Some argue that he's simply quoting a familiar hymn the early church adopted to summarize Jesus' identity and story—something regularly recited during meals, gatherings, and worship services. I think that's probably right. Either way, what lies before us is one of the richest passages of Christology we can find anywhere in the Bible. It's a centering and grounding text that points us to the overwhelming supremacy of Jesus Christ.

Notice how the hymn begins by helping us hold the divinity and humanity of Jesus in tension in our spiritual imagination. Paul says, *Read Colossians 1:15 ... He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.* Two things here speak to the *nature* of the Son. Both embrace the tension. Each embraces that fantastic truth better than any fiction: *the eternally Beloved Son became human.*

First, Jesus is "*the image of the invisible God.*" God is unknowable. He's invisible. God isn't a subject to be studied and investigated. We don't become experts in God through research or effort. He's altogether separate and beyond human conception. And so, A.W. Tozer says, "*Left to ourselves, we tend immediately to reduce God to manageable terms*" (*Knowledge of the Holy*, 10).

We talk about him in ways that help our minds wrap around his majesty. But we can't. God is too vast and incredible, and our minds too limited. That's what makes the incarnation so compelling. What Paul is saying is that, in the incarnation, God has wrapped himself around us. God makes himself known in Christ. But not by making himself more manageable. He remains God, though he embodies the flesh. Majesty persists in humility. The writer of Hebrews insists ***Read Hebrews 1:3 ... He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature.*** Jesus, as some say, is the spitting image of his Father. He's the invisible God made visible.

Similarly, Jesus is also "*the firstborn of all creation.*" Again, this is about Jesus' *nature*. This doesn't suggest that he's part of the created order like any other human being born. Instead, this ancient hymn celebrates Jesus' natural preeminence. God told King David, ***Read Psalm 89:27 ... And I will make him the firstborn, the highest of the kings of the earth.*** As we celebrate during Advent, Jesus is born king (see John 18:37). Jesus isn't king because we recognize him as king. Jesus isn't king because he won his kingdom, took his kingdom, or built his kingdom. Jesus is king because he's his Father's firstborn. He was and will always be king because he's the Beloved Son.

Theologians have used words like *transcendence* and *immanence* to describe this duality of Jesus' nature. In Christ, God is transcendent. He's above us. In Christ, God is immanent. He's close to us. No moment captures the beauty and power of this tension than the incarnation, specifically Jesus' mother, Mary's reflections upon

hearing the news that the Son of God was entering creation. *Read Luke 1:46-49 ...*

“My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant. For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name.”

From birth, Mary knows Jesus is her Lord and King because he is *the* Son of God. But she also knows Jesus is her boy because he's *her* son. You see, the lens that holds the eyes of faith in proper focus on Christ's nature is Sonship.

Jesus is the *image of the invisible God* because he's with his Heavenly Father. Jesus is the *firstborn of all creation* because he's sent by his Heavenly Father. Jesus' *nature* flows from his Sonship. His identity isn't forged in isolation. It's deeply rooted in his relationship with his Father.

Movement 2: The Authority of the Son (vv.16-18, John 1:1-3; 17:6, Philippians 2:9-11)

From his *nature* as the Son, we see Christ's *authority* as the Son. Paul continues the hymn, *Read Colossians 1:16-18 ... 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. 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.* Okay, so when we talk about Jesus' *authority*,

we're talking about what he *can* do and what he *gets* to do. In other words, we're talking about his abilities and responsibilities (his rights or ownership, and so on).

According to our hymn, the first thing we see Jesus can do and gets to do is create everything. ***By him, all things were created*** (v.16a). Now, we don't often think about Jesus as the Creator, *do we?* That feels like a God the Father job, *right?* But let's keep in mind that everything about his nature is connected to his Father and that everything about Jesus' *authority* is centered on his Father. And so, creation isn't a work of isolation. It's part of the family business. The Apostle John demonstrates the communal creative act when he says, ***Read John 1:1-3 ... In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made.*** Jesus is the Word. Jesus is the divine self-disclosure which was present and active in the beginning. He made the visible (or physical) and invisible (or spiritual) universe. That's what he can do. That's what he gets to do. He creates.

The next thing we see that Jesus can do and gets to do is rule everything. ***All things were created through him and for him*** (v.16b). Creation wasn't just created *through* Jesus (that's ability). Everything was created *for* him, too (that's ownership). Many people believe that God created the world and then let go of it. This idea is called *Deism*. Essentially, Deists believe that God set the world in motion, invented the natural order, and then, in essence, let go and let it run itself. But our passage directly refutes this idea. Instead, like a loving son who works on a

project with his dad, the Beloved Son cherishes, takes care of, and even holds the project together out of love and honor. This is true of creation and the Church. Jesus' rule isn't simply over the natural world. Jesus rules the people whom the Father has given him, too. When he prayed to his Father, Jesus said, ***Read John 17:6 ... "I have manifested your name to the people whom you gave me out of the world. Yours they were, and you gave them to me, and they have kept your word."*** Like anything and everything else in creation, the Church, the people of God are created by and for Jesus. That's what Jesus can do and gets to do. He rules.

Lastly, we see that Jesus' **authority** is expressed by the fact that he's greater than everything. **He is before all things** (v.17). The hymn tells us that Jesus is the beginning, the firstborn (again), and he's preeminent. It's three different ways of telling us that Jesus is *first* among all created things. He's greater because he existed first. He's greater because he rose from the dead first. He's greater because, in everything, he's first. It's easy to miss the majestic power and authority of Jesus because of his common humanity. Because he lived with integrity. He became last, first. But let's not get it twisted. Jesus is greater still. In Philippians, Paul explains that even though Christ was in the form of God, he humbled himself. And because he did, ***Read Philippians 2:9-11 ... God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, 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.*** Notice, even this is the preeminent act of the Beloved Son. His Father gave this all to him. It's all for the glory of his Father. What he can do. What he gets to do. He's great.

Jesus made everything *as the Beloved Son*, and he rules everything *as the Beloved Son*. Jesus is greater than everything because *he's the Beloved Son*. Jesus' *authority* is entirely rooted in his relationship with his Heavenly Father.

Movement 3: The Position of the Son (vv.19-20, Mark 16:19, John 14:18;17:11, Lamentations 5:3)

That last bit of Jesus' *authority*, along with Paul's words from Philippians, points us to the mysterious tension of Jesus' *position*. It tells us *where he is*. Not just his location but his position. We've already seen that Jesus is above all thrones, dominions, rulers, and authorities (v.16b). We've heard he's the head of the church (v.18a). We've considered that he's preeminent over everything (v.18b). What all this helps us envision is where Jesus is right now. Jesus is at the Father's right hand, where he rules and reigns as fully God and fully man (see Ephesians 1:20-21).

Jesus took this *position* right after his ascension. ***Read Mark 16:19 ... So then the Lord Jesus, after he had spoken to them, was taken up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God.*** That's his position. That's where he is. That's exactly what Jesus asked his Father for before the crucifixion. ***Read John 17:11 ... And I am no longer in the world, but they are in the world, and I am coming to you.*** Jesus was longing to be with his Father. That's his position. His *position* (where he

is) is directly connected to his *nature* (who he is) and *authority* (what he can and get to do). *Why?* Because everything about Jesus is connected to his Father.

He's with his Father.

He's like his Father.

He's blessed by his Father.

Jesus is the Beloved Son.

And so are you.

So am I.

But I think it's hard to see ourselves this way, *isn't it?* As children of the Father. As a beloved daughter. As a beloved son. Perhaps because we don't look at ourselves with the eyes of faith like we should. You see, outside of Christ the Bible describes us as spiritual orphans. In our sin, suffering, and shame, we see ourselves through the lens of individualism. Estranged from the family name. Out of touch with a people of grace and love. Removed from the Father's promises and inheritance. We think about nature, authority, and position like an orphan. In their brokenness, the people of God saw themselves this way in the Book of Lamentations. They said, ***Read Lamentations 5:3 ... "We have become orphans, fatherless; our mothers are like widows."*** An aspect of sin's curse is that the family is broken. We don't see ourselves as sons and daughters. We see ourselves as individuals, isolated from community, family, and, most importantly, the Heavenly Father.

In this spiritual isolation, *what do we do?* Well, I think we learn to determine *who we are* rather than receive our identity from our Heavenly Father. We work hard to earn and fight for *what we can do and get to do*, rather than surrendering to the gifts and provisions of the Father. We hustle for *where we are* rather than resting in the grace of sonship and daughterhood. You see, orphans spend their whole lives chasing after what sons and daughters are born with.

The thing that transforms our situation and refreshes our spiritual self-concept is adoption. Jesus promised, ***Read John 14:18 ... "I will not leave you as orphans."*** The Beloved Son promises to make a way for the spiritually estranged to be made family. That's the good news. And that's why the first-century hymn concludes this way: ***Read Colossians 1:19-20 ... 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.*** You see, when the Beloved Son reconciled orphans like you and me, what he's really doing is bringing us into the family. Salvation is about the Father's overflowing love for his Son, and his Son's overflowing love for him. Scholar Michael Reeves explains, ***"the Father sent the Son because the Father so loved the Son—and wanted to share that love and fellowship. His love for the world is the overflow of his almighty love for his Son"*** (Delighting in the Trinity, 70). The Heavenly Father's love pours out to you and me. Making us his beloved daughters and sons.

My sisters and brothers, *how do you see Christ?*

How do you see yourself?

Seeing ourselves through our vocation, sexuality, or money, any other lens than son or daughter means we never really rest. We have to always achieve and maintain ourselves. But perhaps the most compelling thing about Christ's position is that he is seated. You see, only children get to rest. Only children sit down. Only beloved children can stop trying to prove themselves, earn their keep, and impress their parents. They can rest.

Who you are, what you can and get to do, where you are ... are all secured in your adoption as sons and daughters of the Heavenly Father. So, like our Brother Jesus, you can rest in the love of our Heavenly Father.