

The Person of Jesus Christ

SCOTT HOEZEE

Every few years, usually around the time of Easter, it happens. Some major magazine like *Time* or *Newsweek* or *The Atlantic* will feature a picture of Christ on the magazine cover, along with the headline question: Who is Jesus? Or the *History Channel* on cable TV will air a documentary: Who is Jesus? For almost two millennia now people have been asking that question. Who was that mysterious man who lived in Palestine 20 centuries ago and whose name has gone on to become the most famous in the world? Who is this man whom billions have honored as divine, who was executed but then reported to come back from the grave? Today on *Groundwork*, we will begin a brief series on Christology, or the theology of Christ. Who do Christians say Jesus was and is? Who does the New Testament say he is? Stay tuned.

DAVE BAST

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee; and Dave, we are going to spend four programs—a relatively brief series—but four programs here on *Groundwork* talking about the theology of Jesus—the theology of Jesus Christ—Christology, as it is known in theological parlance; and the second half of this series, the third and fourth programs, we are going to be joined by Han-luen Kantzer Komline, who teaches Christology at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan.

DAVE BAST

Right; so, we are going to bring in a theology professor to do some of the heavy lifting...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

In this series, but we also want to focus on scripture because, as we say, that is our business at *Groundwork*. So we have chosen one of the really significant paragraphs; it is just five verses long...five or six verses...from Colossians chapter 1; verses 15 through 20; where the Apostle unpacks the full reality of the identity of Jesus Christ. As you said, Scott, we are talking about Christology, which is the branch of theology as a whole that focuses on the person and also the work of Jesus, but especially his identity: Just who was this mystery man, as you said in the introduction? He still fascinates the world, both Christians and non-Christians.

SCOTT HOEZEE

But before we get to Colossians 1, and some of the big claims that the New Testament and Paul in that passage make about Christ, we need to start, really, where all Christology begins, and that is the fact that once upon a time there was a baby born in Bethlehem of Judea and he was laid in a manger and his name was Jesus; and he was a human child born from a human mother; and no one who knew that baby...and later that boy...and later that young man...and then later that adult man...nobody thought he was anything other than just a real human being.

DAVE BAST

Right. The ancient world was filled with myths about the gods, and many of the stories involved the gods or a god somehow coming down to earth and assuming a human body, but it was just a fake—it was just a disguise...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

It was like a costume that they put on, usually so they could have their way with people in some form or other; and that is the opposite of anything that we know about Jesus Christ. He didn't start out necessarily and come down and pretend to be a person. He began his life, Jesus of Nazareth, like a human baby...like any other baby, he came into the world. Nobody ever came up to Jesus and poked him and said: Hey, You're not really human, are you? You are not really a person. You are some kind of phantom.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; ten fingers, ten toes. He needed haircuts now and then. His fingernails had to be trimmed. He ate meals. He got sleepy and had to go to bed. So, if you ran into him on the street or if you had gone to the synagogue on the Sabbath and sat by him, you would not later say: You know, that person I bumped into in the market, I think that was God.

DAVE BAST

Yes, right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

No; that didn't happen at all.

DAVE BAST

And a lot of times I think we as Evangelical Christians or conservative Christians have a little bit of trouble imagining or picturing the true humanity of Jesus of Nazareth; that he really did get tired; he really did get hungry. He may not, in his human nature, have known everything that there was to know in the world. In fact, he himself says there were things he didn't know; that only the Father knew; the time of his own return, most famously. For us that is a little bit hard because deep down we want to think that, you know, he had some mojo going that enabled him to avoid the kinds of human experiences that we have; but we see it in the pages of the Gospels; how he wept, he felt sorrow, he felt weariness, he felt anger at times—all these things; in all these ways he was human.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and indeed, seemed like an ordinary human, and it looked like he was going to do what ordinary human males back in those days did: Learn a trade from his father, carpentry in this case; and then work as a carpenter himself and maybe raise his own family someday; and that all went along normally and fine until one day...we are not quite sure when...maybe when he was around 30 or so, we are not sure; but he left the carpenter shop, hung up his carpentry apron, and launched into his preaching career, which took off very, very quickly. All of a sudden, very, very soon, he became known as a wonderworker, a miracle worker, and a teacher who had some sort of authority that nobody had ever encountered before.

DAVE BAST

Yes; in fact, there is a verse in Mark chapter 1, verse 27, that says:

They were all amazed...(meaning the whole crowd of onlookers, originally in Galilee, Jesus' home territory) they were all amazed and they kept on asking one another, "What is this, a new teaching with authority? He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him."²⁸ And at once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

So, there it is. He kind of launches, and there is apparently nothing to prepare people for this. There are certain writings much later than the New Testament called the Apocryphal Gospels...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

And many of them have ridiculous stories about Jesus as a boy cursing his playmates and striking them dead and making little clay birds come to life and doing these various tricks—miracle tricks—but there is nothing about that in the authentic Gospels...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

In fact, there is only one story in all the Gospels from Jesus' boyhood, and that is the story when he famously went to the Temple to listen to the word of God. So, suddenly, kind of out of the blue, this ordinary, unassuming carpenter—he is called that in one place in the Gospels—so he did work that trade for a while—turns into a rabbi and an exorcist—casting out demons—and a miracle worker—a healer.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And as time goes on...and we have to remember Jesus was Jewish. He was raised in a Jewish household as a member of the Household of Israel, a descendent of David; and all of his disciples were Jewish men and women, and the one thing that always distinguished Israelites and the Jews from all other religions is that they were monotheists; they worshipped one God only; and idolatry was a sin that you feared. If you ever worshipped something that was not true God, that was idolatry, and the penalties for that were a little on the stiff side in Israel; and yet, these disciples—these people who began following Jesus—over time began to honor Jesus and worship Jesus as though he were God, and they didn't seem to think they were guilty of idolatry in so doing. So, that is sort of the beginning of the idea that there is more going on inside this carpenter from Nazareth than meets the eye.

DAVE BAST

Right; and in fact, Jesus himself predicted something like this because he said shortly before he died that he would send another, and he was referring to the Holy Spirit, who would lead his disciples into the full truth, including the full truth about who he was...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

So, it was under the inspiration of the Spirit that these apostles, who had unique authority, began to write some things about Jesus' nature and identity that became mind-blowing and really led the Church later to embrace the full identity of Jesus Christ: Not just a man, not just a wonderworker, not just a teacher, but God in the flesh; and a passage like Colossians is one of the first spots where that begins to happen in the New Testament. We are going to turn there next.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And Dave, you just mentioned at the end of the first segment, that we are going to go to Colossians Chapter 1, and we are going to get right to it, where the Apostle Paul makes some amazing claims, and this is Colossians 1, starting at the 9th verse. Paul writes:

⁹For this reason, since the day we heard it, we have not ceased praying for you and asking that you may be filled with the knowledge of God's will in all spiritual wisdom and understanding; ¹⁰so that you may lead lives worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing to him as you bear fruit in every good work and as you grow in the knowledge of God; ¹¹may you be made strong with all the strength that comes from his glorious power, and may you be prepared to endure everything with patience ¹²while joyfully giving thanks to the Father who has enabled you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the light. ¹³He has rescued us from the power of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of his beloved Son, ¹⁴in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

DAVE BAST

So, here is Paul, and he is talking...writing this small church in the city of Colossae; a church, incidentally, that he had never visited; so, in that sense this is like Romans. It is a letter to a group of strange Christians, but Paul assumes that he can teach them, too, because he has this authority from the Lord; and immediately in these opening verses of the first chapter you see him talking about the Father and the Son, and God and the Lord; and you realize that that term Lord and Son refers to the man, Jesus of Nazareth; and right off the bat we are getting into kind of mind-blowing ideas.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, particularly when you realize the epistles—the letters in the New Testament—were written *before* the Gospels; so, there was no Matthew, Mark, Luke or John in written form yet. There was the oral tradition that they would later set into writing, but the letters came first. So, the account of the human Jesus has not...born in Bethlehem and all that, raised in Nazareth...that hasn't come yet; but now, Paul is saying that by the...as you said in the previous segment, Dave...by the inspiration and the illumination of the Holy Spirit of Pentecost, they have been, as Paul says here twice, they are growing in the knowledge of God; and one of the pieces of knowledge that they are growing in is the fact that this Jesus was fully human, but he was no ordinary human. He possessed all of the power of God within himself, and Paul also now says here he has created a kingdom—a brand new realm—which is the opposite of the kingdom of darkness and death and suffering. It is a kingdom of light and of life.

DAVE BAST

Right; and he says that his prayer for the Colossian Christians is that they would lead lives that are worthy of the Lord and fully pleasing to him; and again, you think about that. If he is talking about a dead rabbi who was crucified and in disgrace, really, discredited outside of Jerusalem, oh perhaps 15-20 years earlier, in what way could it possibly make sense to say that the purpose of our lives is to please him?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

He is dead if he is just a man; but for Paul, Jesus, of course, is far from dead. He is risen and reigning. He is the one on whom the name Lord has been bestowed; and we make it our aim to please him, as he would say to another church in another one of his letters. The purpose and goal of our lives is to please Jesus Christ. So, he is watching us; he is evaluating us; he is encouraging us; he is strengthening us; all so that we may live in such a way that he is satisfied with who and what we are.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And all of this being written in the Mediterranean basin, like you said, Dave, just a few short years after Jesus was crossed out, literally, by the Romans; and this is a time and this is a realm that is very familiar with the idea of a lord. The Caesar was lord in the Greco-Roman world, right? They knew what authorities the human lords were, and now Paul is saying the real Lord of Lords is not the Caesar, or any human being, it is Jesus Christ; and as we will see when we move on in these verses, the claims are going to mount up even quicker, and we will look at that in the next segment; but for now, this is the true Lord, and the only kingdom that matters isn't Rome or anything else, it is the kingdom that Jesus came to announce—the kingdom that he talked about, as we will eventually read, in the Gospels—that the kingdom of God is at hand—the kingdom of God is here. It is a real realm. It is invisible to our eyes now. It is not a piece of geography in the world like the Roman Empire would be, but it is a real realm; and you are citizens of it now, Paul is saying. You have been brought into that, and now you need to live like you believe that is your true country—that is your true citizenship; and that will be, as you said, in lives that are pleasing to the Lord who rules it.

DAVE BAST

Right; Paul talks here about the realm of darkness and the kingdom of light, and he says: God has rescued us; so, this great rescue mission that God has undertaken, the Father has done this, but he has done it in and through the Son; and in fact, the kingdom belongs to the Son. So, for a devout Jew of the First Century, nothing was more important, including Jesus, than the kingdom of God; the idea of God's reign, God's rule, God's redemption of the world and lost people. God is overcoming the powers of darkness and establishing the kingdom of light; all that is good and true and worthy and just. Shalom is the word that we use; but here Paul says the kingdom of God actually belongs to Jesus. He is the king and he is the one through whom God has brought this to pass. So, now we are living in the light and we need to walk in the light; and it all comes down to Jesus; which is crazy talk, frankly, if Jesus is nothing but a good human being or a decent religious teacher, or even a miracle worker of some kind...some kind of prophet.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; if you are going to talk this way, there is no middle ground here. You cannot say: Well, I agree with you mostly, Paul. I mean, some of that is probably true and some of it is not. No, no, no; this is either a hundred percent right or a hundred percent lunacy. The scandal of all of this is that he is talking about this Jewish carpenter, who had died some years earlier, and to most peoples' minds that was the end of the story; and Paul says no, not the end of the story at all. There was something else going on inside of him that created this new realm—this new kingdom—and none of this is anything you are going to tumble to on your own. You are not going to come to this belief by thinking hard and just using your noggin, right? This has got to be revealed to you. This is the knowledge of God that he is talking about; that has to be revealed to you.

So, these are amazing claims about a man who most people believed had died on a cross, and that was the end of it; but the most amazing claims yet are still coming, and we are going to look at that in just a moment.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*, where today we are beginning a series on Christology; four programs about the person of Jesus Christ; and we have been talking about his real humanity. He was a human being like all others in every apparent respect, but also as Colossians in particular says about him, he was much more than that; and we have begun with some verses from Colossians 1, Scott, about Jesus the Lord and Jesus the Son of the Father, and the one through whom we have been brought out of darkness and transferred into the kingdom of light. God has done all of this wonderful work through Christ, but now Paul goes on to say some even grander things about him.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and he needs to do this because one thing we need to know about the Colossian context, and this is true of a lot of places in the ancient world, there was a real smorgasbord or buffet of religious ideas in the ancient world: beliefs about superior angels, beliefs about various gods and goddesses or sub-divine beings

and in-between beings, and there was a lot of confusion in the religious marketplace; and the Colossians were prey to all of that as well. I mean, they had to figure out what to believe in a marketplace of competing ideas; and so, Paul wants to say: No. The one I am talking about is *the* one. Even if other angels or beings exist, and maybe they do, maybe they don't, but even if they do, they are way, way below this Jesus.

DAVE BAST

Yes; in fact, it is interesting and perhaps informative to know a little something about the context of the city of Colossae. It was situated in the Roman province of Asia, which is to say in our terms what today is western Turkey—southwestern Turkey; and it sat on a major trade route, the Silk Road. So it was a place where East kind of met West, and ideas came into collision. You had the gods of the Greeks and the Romans to the West, and maybe we are somewhat familiar with some of them; but in the East there was a lot of belief in spiritual beings, in forces of darkness, in the occult; and all of that interacted and formed this sort of witches' brew of ideas and theories about cosmic powers; and many people were frightened of these forces and these powers; and Paul wants the Christians in Colossae to know who is really boss. No matter how many powers there may be out there, it is Jesus.

So he writes of Jesus:

Col. 1:15¹⁵He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶For in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers (There are all of those spiritual beings). All things have been created through him and for him. ¹⁷He himself is before all things and in him all things hold together.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Throughout these verses, and this will actually continue in verses 18-20, which we will look at in our next program in this series, Paul is putting the Greek words *ta panta*, which means *all things*, and it comes through the translation: All things, all things, all things. He is hitting us over the head with it. Everything, Paul is saying, A to Z, the whole kit and caboodle, everything from top to bottom and every which way but loose, everything that exists was created by this Jesus; and now he has redeemed all things, and now all things hold together and make sense in him.

History can sometimes look like a booming, buzzing confusion. The world at any given moment can seem chaotic; but Paul says there is a greater meaning, and guess what? It is found in Jesus Christ. Everything comes together and makes final sense in him.

DAVE BAST

Just the language that Paul uses...it almost sounds hymn-like or poetic. It is so exalted. To try to say what words maybe begin to fail to say, or aren't capable of expressing the greatness of Jesus Christ, but he says several things quite clearly about him. He is not a creature, he is the Creator.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

He is the one who made all things. He wasn't himself created. He is the firstborn over the creation, but which Paul means to say he has the status of the firstborn in a family. It is an analogy—it is an argument. Just as the firstborn son was the one who got to inherit everything, Jesus is the firstborn of the creation. It all belongs to him by right. He wasn't the beginning of the creation, He was *before* the creation. All things were made, not only through him or by him, as the agent, but they were made *for* him.

Then this last one, Scott, as you said: All things hold together in him. I love that because in the ancient world they were afraid of these demonic forces and these spiritual beings and how might they hurt me or affect me? Paul says: Don't worry about them. They were created, too, and Jesus rules over them. In the modern world we are more likely to say: Oh, it is all just science and physics and the laws of nature, you know. The universe is held together by these forces of the stars spinning and all that; and Paul says: Well, yes, okay as far as it goes, but really, it is held together by Jesus. Jesus is the one who keeps the universe going, and it is all for him and by him.

SCOTT HOEZEE

My friend the Bible commentator, Frederick Dale Bruner, has often said: I sometimes think of even our very DNA and the cells within our bodies...he said: It is almost as though you could take just the smallest cell, and if you had a really powerful microscope, you could look at that cell and you would see written on it: Made by JC—made by Jesus Christ...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Everything bears the fingerprints of Jesus. So, he is the creator of all things. Now he is the redeemer of all things...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And now the future of all things hold together in him alone; and again, that is a set of claims which is breathtaking to make about anybody, much less somebody, as we said, who most of the world thought was dead and gone 15 years before; but not so, Paul says.

DAVE BAST

Right; and you know, to me it raises a very practical question for each of us. If this is who Jesus is, if everything belongs to him, what about me? Is he the center of my life? Does my life hold together in him? Do I acknowledge him? Is he Lord over me and mine? I want to say yes to that, and I hope you do, too.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Amen. Well, thanks for joining our *Groundwork* conversation. I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast. We always want to know how we can help you to dig into the scriptures. So we have a website: groundworkonline.com. Visit it and suggest topics and passages you would like to dig into next on *Groundwork*.

<https://groundworkonline.com/episodes/the-person-of-jesus-christ>

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