

“Why Jesus”

John 1:1-18 • Colossians 1:15-23

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Let's take a little informal survey. Raise your hand if you consider yourself to be a theologian. Go ahead. If you would call yourself a theologian just raise your hand. That's not many. Maybe that's good. You won't know if what I'm telling you is true or not. If you don't think of yourself as a theologian, why not? Here's another question: if *you* are not a theologian, do you think it's important for *other* people to study theology?

Some people today – people who are committed Christians, even – argue that we don't need theology at all. They say that all we need is faith, the Bible, and the Holy Spirit. Ironically, that is a theological statement. So let's clear up why theology is so important and why you should be interested in it.

Words that end in “ology” refer to the study of certain things. For example, biology is the study of living organisms. Cardiology is the study of the human heart. So theology would be the study of God. That's why for many, many years theology was called the queen of the sciences. The way we study God is obviously different from the way we study frogs in biology, but the concept is the same. We study a subject so we can learn more about it. We study and discuss theology in order to understand God better.

The word theology actually comes from the Greek word *theos*, which means God, and *logos*, which means “word.” Theology literally means “words about God.” So any time you say or think anything about God, that's theology. R.C. Sproul, in his book *Everyone's a Theologian*, wrote, “Theology is unavoidable for every Christian. It is our attempt to understand the truth that God has revealed to us — something every Christian does. So it is not a question of whether we are going to engage in theology; it is a question of whether our theology is sound or unsound.” In other words, you are all

theologians. The only question is whether you are a biblically faithful theologian.

The gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record a conversation Jesus had with his disciples. He asked them, “Who do people say that I am?” His disciples replied that they had heard that some people think Jesus was John the Baptist, some thought he was Elijah, or one of the other prophets. Then Jesus asks them, “But who do *you* say that I am?” This may be the most important question in the Bible. It's a question that every one of us needs to think seriously about. And as we will see in the next few minutes, that question *is* theology.

So let me ask you to think about it for a moment. Who do *you* say Jesus is? This question is what was the heart of the matter in Colossae. If you were here last week you hopefully remember that have begun studying together the New Testament book of Colossians. This was a letter that the Apostle Paul sent to the church in the small town of Colossae. This church was started after Epaphras and Philemon had heard Paul preach and teach in Ephesus during his two years there and they were converted. They returned home and started a church.

As that little church grew it attracted attention from some false teachers who were teaching what is known as Gnosticism. The Gnostics believed that you needed some secret inside knowledge about God. That secret knowledge was that there were many spiritual beings that came from God. Jesus was considered one of those spiritual beings and so he was a starting point on the road to God but that you needed more and more “spiritual” knowledge. One of the key teachings of the Gnostics was that only the spiritual was good. The physical world was evil. So to them the idea that the Messiah was human unacceptable and the idea that God could die on a cross was foolishness.

The reason Jesus' question, and really all of theology, is so important is that what you believe about who Jesus is will shape and impact much of your life. What you believe about the way things are will influence your thinking and thinking determines your actions.

So Paul writes this letter to remind the believers in Colossae who Jesus is and why it matters. And I think it's a good reminder for us as well because lots of voices in our culture are trying to convince us of different views of Jesus, just as the Gnostics tried to do nearly 2,000 years ago. What are some of the things you hear about Jesus today? Twenty six percent of Americans believe that Jesus was merely a religious or spiritual leader like Buddha or Mohammad. The way this is expressed is that there are many paths to God and that Jesus is one of them but there are other ways that are just as valid. Many people claim that Jesus was the person who loved God the best and showed us how to do it, that he was a good example.

This is why Colossians 1 is so important. The things that Paul writes about Jesus are found in other parts of the Bible but here Jesus' identity is presented with absolute clarity. In verse 15 Paul says that Jesus "is the image of the invisible God." The word for image is where we get our English word "icon." But it means more than just a picture. The idea is that Jesus reveals what God is really like. To put it plainly, Paul is saying that Jesus is God. This is not an idea unique to Colossians. We find this in a number of places in the New Testament. In verse 18 of our reading from John 1 we are reminded that no one has ever seen God but then John says that Jesus is fully God, that he's at the Father's side, and that he has made God known. Jesus himself tells us the same thing. Thomas says to Jesus, "show us the Father." Jesus replies, "if you've seen me you've seen the Father." It was because Jesus kept claiming to be God that the Jewish leaders wanted him crucified.

In order to make sure nobody misses the point, Paul says it again in another way in verse 19: "in him all the fullness of God was pleased

to dwell." I had a professor in seminary who would take out a dollar bill and turn it to the back where it says, "In God we trust." He would then say, "If that doesn't refer to Jesus of Nazareth it's heresy." If you don't get anything else out of today's message, at least leave here today with the understanding that Jesus *IS* God.

Sometimes you will hear the Trinity described by what God does – people will refer to God the creator, God the redeemer, and God the sustainer. But Paul makes it clear that Jesus is all three. The most startling for many people is the concept that when we say God the creator we are referring to Jesus. Verse 16 clearly says, "For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible...all things were created through him and for him." This echoes almost word-for-word what we heard earlier from John's gospel. Paul adds some details about the things that Jesus created. He says that Jesus created "all things...in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities." Most of the time those words are used in the Bible they refer to spiritual powers. Most likely these were things that the Gnostics were claiming were higher than Jesus. Paul wants to make sure the Colossians know that Jesus has always existed and that he's the one who made all the other spiritual beings.

Paul also goes into great detail about Jesus as our redeemer, reconciling us to God. You don't have to look very hard to see that things aren't always the way they're supposed to be. Our world is "alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds." The Bible is clear that all of us are separated from God because of sin. Another way to understand this is that God requires that we love him with all of our heart, mind, soul, and strength. We owe him 100% all the time. But none of us has loved God 100% all the time. So we have incurred a debt to him that we can never repay. Because Jesus is both fully human and fully God, and because he did love God 100%, he has paid the debt for us. He

has reconciled us to God. You and I can have a relationship with God.

So what do we do with this? Because theology is never just theoretical. The reason we study theology, the reason we learn about God is so that we know what it is he wants from us. What God wants is to “present us before himself holy and blameless and above reproach.” You and I will never achieve that in this life and never on our own. But we should always be working towards that goal. We should make every effort to live up to what God is making us. Second, Paul says that we are to “continue in the faith, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel that you heard.” Continuing in the faith, stable and

steadfast, requires knowing the faith, knowing the hope of the gospel. How do we grow in that faith and assurance? Theology. Studying Jesus. Reading his word and applying it to our lives.

But also participating in his church. We can't overlook the importance of the church to Jesus. Paul says that Jesus is “the head of the body, the church.” We are all members of Christ's body. Just like every part of your body has a function, every member of Christ's body has a role. And just as your head controls all the functions of your body, Jesus as the head of the church should control everything we do. That's why Jesus. And that's good theology.

Amen.