

The Awe-inspiring Christ of Christmas: Colossians 1:15-20

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Read Passage:

[15] He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. [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. [17] And 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. [19] For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, [20] and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

Let's Pray

Introduction:

The Christmas season is a busy time of year isn't it? For many this season is marked by family gatherings and traditions, office parties, shopping extravaganzas, wrapping parties, and of course, lots of food. It's a time to connect with old friends and family that we haven't seen in a while, and it's a time to enjoy the tradition of giving and receiving gifts.

Yet, at this moment, despite all the other holiday events that are happening, millions and millions of people, whether it is because they actually believe in Jesus or because they want to make their families happy or because they feel a sense of duty, are in a church somewhere listening to a message and singing songs about the birth of Christ.

But my question is do these millions and millions of people, including us, really understand and grasp, if even a little bit, the magnitude of what it meant for Jesus to come to earth? Do we actually grasp who this little baby in a manger was and is, and what he came to earth to do?

Now many of us, who have been in church for a long time, might easily brush this question aside and say, "**well of course we know that Jesus is the son of God, and is God, and that he came to earth to save sinners.**"

And you would be right. Jesus is the Son of God, and is God, and he did come to the earth, at least in part, to save sinners. But what I think that answer is missing is the grandeur and the splendor of who Jesus is as God, what he has actually done in creation, and it's missing the grandeur and cosmic scope of what he actually did when he came to earth.

So my hope this morning through Colossians 1:15-20 is to give you a grand picture of Jesus. A grand picture of who he is as God, why he came to earth, and a grand picture of his purposes for everything that he has done.

1. Who is Jesus?

Listen to the words of Colossians 1:15 when it says:

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

Now this doesn't just mean that Jesus is just reflection of who God is or that he is merely like God, but it points us to the fact that Jesus has the same essence and nature of God. In fact other words that could be used here is that Jesus is the "form" or the "glory" of the invisible God.

He is God in every way, and on earth, as the Son of God, is the visible manifestation of the perfect triune God of heaven. The writer of the book of Hebrews echoes this idea when he says in Hebrews 1:3:

"He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature,"

Jesus is everything that God is, and the same nature and essence that God has, Jesus has. This is why Paul says that ***he is the firstborn of all creation.***

Not because Jesus was the first thing created by God, but in those days the first born son had all the same power and authority that the father had.

So Paul is trying to re-emphasis the fact that Jesus has all the same authority and power as God. He wants the Colossians to know that Jesus is the living and breathing manifestation of all that God is, because he was, is, and always will be God.

This means that in Jesus we see the full force of who God is: his perfection, power, brilliance, holiness, love, grace, justice...

As Colossians 1:19 says:

[19] For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell,

Paul is also making it clear in this passage that Jesus did not just become God when he came to earth. He has been God forever, from eternity past, before anything was created, he was God. As the first part of Colossians 1:17 says:

"And he is before all things,"

He has always existed as part of the triune God and he has always been fully God in all of his perfection, power, might, and glory. Jesus even said this about himself in John 8:58 when he said:

"Truly, Truly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I am."

This statement from Jesus is so staggering and bold that the Jews picked up rocks and were ready to stone him for it.

He not only was saying that he existed before Abraham, but he is claiming to be God by saying “I am,” because that is how God identifies himself to Moses in Exodus 3:14.

Like Paul, Jesus is telling us that he is God and has always been God from before the foundations of the world.

And yet there is more! Not only did Jesus exist before the foundations of the world as God, but he is the power of God that created those foundations and everything we see. Colossians 1:16 says:

[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.

This verse is so important to the book of Colossians because there were false teachers trying to tell the Colossian church that they can worship Jesus, but they also need to worship angels because Jesus wasn’t enough.

Yet Paul smashes that argument to pieces by showing them, in verse 16, that Jesus is the one who created everything including the angels. He created everything in heaven and on earth, the visible things and the invisible things.

And these invisible things include: thrones, dominions, rulers, and authorities.

Now these terms are actually words that the Jews use to refer to angels. So Paul is not talking about earthly thrones and dominions, but he is talking about angels in heaven. **Jesus created everything on earth and in heaven including all the angels.**

This means that Jesus was and is our powerful creator, and was present and active when the foundations of heaven and the universe were laid. John confirms Paul’s words in John 1:1-3 when he writes of Jesus:

“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.”

John says that Jesus is the Word of God, that he is God, and that he made everything.

That is utterly mind blowing and awe-inspiring.

The little baby in the manger that we celebrate on Christmas, was and is the Son of God—the full force of God’s nature in human form—and he is the one who existed from before the foundations of the world, and he is the one who created everything we see and everything we don’t see.

And despite being God, he humbled himself by coming to earth in human form so he could die on a cross and pay the penalty for our sins, so that you and I could be given everlasting life with him and could experience the full force of the living God within us, now and forever. As Jesus says John 14:23:

"If anyone loves me, he will keep my word, and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him."

So Jesus, the powerful creator God, has come to dwell with us and in us.

But there is more. He also at this very moment he is the one who is holding everything on earth, in the universe, and in heaven together. As Colossians 1:17 says:

[17] And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together."

The only reason that the planets turn in their orbits and the universe works the way it does is because Jesus is the one making it happen. The only reason that cars don't crash into each other more, and the reason that this whole world doesn't just devolve into chaos or even disintegrate is because Jesus is holding it all together at this very moment.

This means that there is nothing out of his control, and there is nothing happens that isn't part of his plan. Now, I realize that for many of you this may have been a hard year, and I can say for sure that on a national and global scale it has been marked by tragedy and much uncertainty.

But praise be to God, in Christ, that this Christmas we can rejoice and celebrate because we know that Jesus sees all that happens, is in control of all that happens, and is at this very moment orchestrating our lives according to his good purposes and plans for us as his people.

As God, Jesus is holding it all together.

But if this is who Jesus is, as God, then we also have to answer the question: What did Jesus come to do?

2. What did Jesus come to do?

Let's look at Colossians 1:18-20 for the answer:

[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. [19] For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, [20] and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

If we work backwards in this passage we can make a few observations about the text.

1. In verse 20 we see that Jesus came to make peace by his blood on the cross.
2. In the second half of verse 18 it says that he came to be the firstborn from the dead.
3. And in the first part of verse 18 it says that he is the head (ruler/governor) of the church.

Now, we should rightly deduce from this passage that Jesus came to earth to die on the cross, so that we can have peace with God (verse 20), and he came to be the first born of a new people, the church (Christians), that he is the head or ruler of.

All of that can rightly be seen in this passage. Jesus came to reconcile sinners to himself and in so doing created a new people, the church. This is confirmed by what Paul says immediately after in Colossians 1:21-22:

And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him,

Jesus came to take each of us, who were separated and alienated from him, hostile toward him, doing all sorts of evil, and make right with God so that we could be holy and blameless before him.

This truth in and of itself is breath taking and humbling as we realize that the eternal creator God can to save us by dying for us.

But if this is all we take away from these verses then we will miss the full force of what actually happened when God came to earth and died on the cross.

Look with me at Colossians 1:19-20:

[19] For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, [20] and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.

Jesus, as God, did not just come to reconcile individual sinners to himself, he came to reconcile **all things** to himself.

Now, some have used this verse to make the claim that every person on earth will be saved, but that's not what Paul is talking about here.

The reconciliation and peace that Paul is talking about is a cosmic reconciliation and peace. Jesus came and died on the cross to take back his creation and restore it to the proper relationship that it had with God before sin came into the world.

As Paul writes in Romans 8:18-22

“For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God.”

Because of the sin of Adam creation was cursed and can't function properly as God intended it to. However, because Jesus died on the cross his creation can now be reconciled to him, and can be freed from the corruption of sin; a freedom that will be fully realized at the 2nd coming of Christ.

But there is more. Not only is Jesus setting creation free from the corruption of sin, but through his shed blood on the cross he is destroying all rebellion against God and his purposes.

For believers this means reconciliation to God as friends, but for unbelievers and demonic powers this reconciliation and reign of peace will be forced upon them as Christ defeats them and judges them as the conquering king when he returns.

Look with me at 1 Corinthians 15:21-28:

For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death. For “God has put all things in subjection under his feet.”

Jesus is the one who now rules and reigns over his creation, and although we don't see everything perfectly under the rule of Christ yet, one day everything will be under his feet, and everything will be in subjection to him either by the reconciliation of his people who will be made alive, or by force as he defeats his enemies.

Again, this is a cosmic reconciliation and peace that Jesus brings. So when people ask you why Jesus came to earth, you can say that Jesus, as God, came down to earth in the form of a little baby to do battle through the cross.

This is what Christmas is about. It's about Jesus, who is the exact essence and nature of God, and is himself fully God and the creator of all things, coming to earth so that he could win a cosmic battle over sin and death and his enemies by his shed blood on the cross, and by his glorious resurrection from the dead.

And as a result of this cosmic battle, you and I are set free from sin, are reconciled to God, and get to live in the hope that one day we will be with Him forever.

This makes the magnitude of Christmas so big that it should inspire an awe within us that literally takes our breath away. **Jesus came to take back heaven and earth.**

But then there is the final question of why: Why did Jesus do all of this? What was the purpose?

3. What was the purpose behind all that Jesus did?

We find the answer in two places in Colossians 1; verses 16 and 18.

[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.

[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.

Paul tells us in verse 16 that Jesus created everything for himself. This means that he created everything, in heaven and on the earth to bring him the fullest, praise, honor, and glory that it could. This is why verse 18 says, “that in everything he might be preeminent or the chief.”

Jesus made everything, including us, to reflect his glory and to make much of him, to praise him, and to worship him. **This makes the glory of God the goal of creation.**

However, because sin came into the world, and his people and creation stopped perfectly reflecting his glory, Jesus had to come back and wage a cosmic war so that he could and will be the chief and king of his creation once again.

So Jesus came to restore his creation to a place where it is perfectly reflecting his glory once again, and if this seems like a very selfish reason to create everything and to wage a huge war then listen to the words of John 15:10-11:

If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

Jesus, our cosmic creator God, came to earth and waged war so that his creation would not only rightly bring him glory, but that his people would find their greatest joy in living out that purpose. So as Jesus is working in us to make us people that bring him his greatest possible glory, he is also working to give us our greatest possible joy.

And my hope for you is that this Christmas morning, and every morning after, is that you will stand in awe of and worship the God who became flesh and took back his creation for his glory, and in him may you find your fullest and most everlasting joy. **Let's Pray.**