



Growing up we had two vacation spots my family would visit on a regular basis: one was camping in Yosemite and the other was the Motel 6 in Ventura. One summer when I was about eight years old my mom, grandma, sister and I were down in Ventura playing in the pool. Now as a child I loved playing in the pool. I loved putting on my goggles and diving under the water. We weren't rich growing up so we didn't have any fancy pool toys but my grandma would throw pennies in the pool for me to dive for and I could do that for hours.

As siblings do my sister and I got into a fight one morning in the pool. I was trying to climb out of the pool, using the deep end ladder, when it happened. I don't exactly recall how it happened but the next thing I know my sister was sitting on my head using the deep end ladder to drown me. I really thought that I was going to die. Horrible thoughts started running through my mind. Important things like: I would never have ice cream again or dive for the last penny that was left on the bottom of the pool. I started freaking out when finally my mom came to save my life from the clutches of my evil sister!

That morning my perspective of the water I loved changed in an instant. This morning we're starting a new series and hopefully it changes your perspective of Christmas just like that morning in the pool changed my perspective of water. Many of us have a horizontal perspective of Christmas and you need to see Christmas from a different perspective. We enjoy hearing the story of how Mary traveled to Bethlehem where Jesus was born. It excites us to hear about the shepherds who come to visit baby Jesus as he is lying in the manger. We are accustomed to the manger from a human perspective but today I want to invite you on a journey where we look at the manger from a vertical perspective. What did the manger look like from the viewpoint of God? What did Christmas From Above look like?

Just as Jesus went on a journey from heaven to earth we are going on a journey in Colossians 1:15. This won't be an easy journey like taking a walk around the block. For this journey we need to toss our rain boots aside because we are going to need to put on a wetsuit this morning as we are heading into deep waters! Join me as I read God's word.

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through

him and for him. 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 and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross (Colossians 1:15–20).

What circumstances would warrant a letter this rich in theology to be written to the people of Colossae? The town of Colossae was a relatively small community about 100 miles east of Ephesus. From what we know a man named Epaphras had met Paul in Ephesus while he was preaching there. Epaphras shared the sad truth about believers in Colossae falling away from the Gospel. False teachers had snuck in and pulled the hearts of the believers away from Christ. They had begun worshipping angels and the false teachers began putting special rules in place, hindering them from following Christ.

We will break this passage into two main sections. The first will be verses 15–17 where we will talk about **who** Christ is. The second section will be verses 18–20 where we will talk about **why** Christ came. Paul begins in verse 15 with two key assertions about the person of Christ:

- » Jesus is the visible image of the invisible God
- » Jesus is the firstborn over all creation

We know from reading the Old Testament and the New Testament that no one has seen the face of God. When the Israelites were wandering in the desert God invited Moses to the top of Mount Sinai where Moses was given the Ten Commandments. If you remember the story God spoke to Moses from a cloud because Moses wasn't permitted to see the face of God (Exodus 33:20). Moses wanted to see the face of God but God would not allow Moses to see His face but only his back as He passed by Moses. If you remember from our study on the life of King Solomon, Mark talked about the Glory of The Lord filling the Temple but no one saw the face of God. When Peter, James and John went up to the Mount of Transfiguration with Jesus, God spoke to them from a cloud. So God who veiled His face in the Old Testament has given us Jesus as His visible image.

Not only is Jesus the visible image of God but He is also the firstborn over all creation. It would be easy to interpret this as

sounding like "Jesus was the first person born" but that is not what Paul is writing here. Paul is telling us that Jesus holds a special place. In Hebrew culture there was a special right reserved for the oldest son. There was a special privilege and a birthright to inherit the possessions from the father as the firstborn son. This is exactly what Paul is sharing here; Jesus outranks everyone else in all of creation.

For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him (v. 16).

We can confidently say this because Paul tells us in Jesus all things were created. When Paul writes "all things" he really means all things: things in heaven and on earth; things that are visible and things that are invisible; rulers and authorities were all created through Him. This may be difficult to understand that everything you see, smell, taste, hear and touch was created in Jesus. It can become more confusing when you start talking about things that you cannot see. How that can be if Jesus was born just 2,000 years ago in a manger? In the account of creation, found in Genesis, we see a very interesting statement. When God creates mankind He says: "*Let us create mankind in our image...*" (Genesis 1:26). That statement reveals to us that Jesus was there, with God, when everything was created.

Not only was everything created in Him but it was also created through Him and for Him. Paul gives us a huge glimpse into some of the life questions that can plague us. "In Him" answers the question of how all things were created. They were all created in Him. The "through Him" answers the question of where everything was created. Everything was created through Him. The "for Him" answers the why question in life. You were created for God. But it doesn't stop there; it gets better!

In Him, Through Him, For Him

» I was created in Him

» I was created through Him

» I was created for Him

If your mind isn't reeling after that, hold on to your Bible because it's about to get better!

He is before all things, and in him all things hold together (v. 17).

Wow, this is a big statement. I grew up in a small mountain town called Big Bear Lake in Southern California and growing up I loved the snow. I have many fond memories of making snow angels, sledding, throwing snowballs, skiing and snowboarding. But something that sticks out to me more than anything **about** the snow **is** the snow. When I was younger I loved to go out while it was snowing and catch snowflakes on my gloves. I was fascinated by the structure of snowflakes and perplexed at how

they stayed intact. I would stand outside catching snowflakes to examine them; taking note how they were different.

When I read this passage as an adult I start to grasp how those snowflakes remained intact. If Jesus holds everything together then He must hold the ground those snowflakes fell on together. If He holds the ground together He must hold the trees together that grow out of that ground. He also must hold the entire ground together that those trees grow in meaning He holds the entire earth together.

Have you ever thought about what that means? The expanse of our creation is staggering! If that doesn't give you an idea of how majestic God is then you probably haven't really considered it much. Think about this: scientists estimate that Earth weighs about 13,170,000,000,000,000,000,000 pounds. If we took a hollow ball the size of our sun it would hold 1.2 million planets the size our earth with room for 4.3 million globes the size of our moon! The nearest star to us is called Alpha Centauri and it's five times larger than the sun. That is not even the biggest star out there. There is a star named Betelgeuse that is one of the stars visible in the constellation Orion that is 248 times larger than our sun. It gets better! There is another star that scientists have named Arcturus that is more than ten times larger than that!

You may already know that a ray of light travels at 186,000 miles per second. A ray of light from here will reach the moon in a second and a half. Imagine if you could travel that fast. You could reach Mercury in four-and-a-half minutes. Traveling to Jupiter would take you a mere 35 minutes; that is shorter than some of your morning commutes. If you wanted to go visit Saturn it's going to take a little longer but it's still only an hour. To get to the closest star to planet Earth will take four years and four months to get there. If you wanted to reach the edge of the Milky Way Galaxy you are looking at 100,000 years to get there. You may want to take a few aspirin trying to wrap your head around that!

We can allow ourselves to become consumed with Christmas presents and forget that if not for Christ none of this would exist. When Neil Armstrong spoke of the first time he saw the earth from space he said: "It suddenly struck me that that tiny pea, pretty and blue, was the Earth. I put up my thumb and shut one eye, and my thumb blotted out the planet Earth. I didn't feel like a giant. I felt very, very small."

The size of our universe is incomprehensible but we have to remember the baby born in a manger is the same Jesus who holds all of this together. Now that we have talked about **who** Christ is we are going to move on to **why** Christ came. Just as in verse 15 Paul gave us two statements about who Christ is, here in verse 18 Paul gives two more statements.

And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead,

so that in everything he might have the supremacy (v. 18).

Two Statements About Christ as Redeemer

» Christ is the head of the Church

» He is the beginning

As the head of the church He begins celebrating Christ's work in redemption by claiming He is head of His body, the church. The church is not a religious organization; it's a living organism. Not only are we inter-connected as members of one another, we're all connected to and dependent on Christ as the Head. To be "the head of the body" means He is supreme over a new creation called the church and He is the source of its life. He sustains, governs and directs us. We need Christ to be the head of the Church; we need Christ to be the leader of the Church.

As the firstborn He is the beginning of the church as we know it. He is the firstborn from the dead. If He is the firstborn from among the dead that means that we can trust Him with our salvation, knowing that followers of Christ will one day rise from the dead just as Christ did. His resurrection is the source of eternal life for all who trust Him, and that life starts now. This is what sets authentic Christianity apart from every religion or moral code.

If you've been a follower of Christ for any period of time you may have found yourself in, or near, a conversation where people think of Jesus as one way to God. Maybe you have heard people talking about Jesus being one of the many paths to heaven. Some people think that you can follow Jesus, Mohammed, Buddha, Joseph Smith or the various gods of Hindu and all of these paths will lead to heaven. This very well could have been similar to what the false teachers at Colossae were preaching and caused the writing of this letter. This passage of Scripture would negate Jesus being "one" of the ways to heaven but we can clearly see Jesus is the supreme being over all creation.

For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him,... (v. 19).

For God to have Christ redeem us He needed to make Himself available to us and that is why God choose to put His fullness in Christ. In the original language we see it written as: $\pi\alpha\varsigma\ \tau\acute{o}\ \pi\lambda\acute{\eta}\rho\omega\mu\alpha$, meaning "all, everything, total of His completeness" or how our English version translates it, "all of His fullness." When you take some time to study it we see that God held nothing back when He dwelt in Jesus. Not only did He hold nothing back but God was also pleased to give all of His fullness or all of His completeness to dwell in Christ. Every attribute, every characteristic, everything that is God can be found in Christ.

... and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross (v. 20).

As we come to the last verse in our text we see the end goal of this entire plan that God has laid out. So far we have looked at who Christ is and we have seen His role in creation. We have studied some deep theological topics that we could never cover in a 40-minute message. We discussed the clear tie between Christ as creator and Christ as redeemer. Finally we find out why God was so pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Christ. God placed all of Himself into Jesus so that God could reconcile mankind back to Himself.

God has a clear plan in sending Christ into the world and that was to redeem all of mankind back to Himself through the blood shed on the cross. God made the first step in the reconciling process. God didn't dig his heels in, start pouting, and force us to run to Him. God took the initiative of sending His son to earth; to be born in a humble manger around filthy animals so that we could know Him personally. God is the mature one in this relationship, He knew in our stubborn, sinful, nature we would never initiate the reconciliation process, so He did.

Today as we change our perspective of the manger from a human viewpoint to looking at Christmas from Above it seems safe that we can conclude that:

Since Jesus is Lord over everything, I can trust Him this Christmas. A passage like this requires a response from every one of us this morning. The first take-away I clearly see in this text is since Jesus is Lord over everything:

Be reconciled to Him

In a room this size I would venture to guess there are some people who have not yet been reconciled to God. God wants to have a personal relationship with you; God wants to be invited into your life. How wonderful is it that God made the initial effort of sending Jesus to save you from your sins? How amazing that the God of the universe, who holds all things together, wants you to be reconciled to Him? This morning if you don't have a personal relationship with Jesus I want to encourage you to make that happen.

Place your trust in Him this Christmas

I am not saying that you have to understand everything we spoke about this morning to put your trust in Christ. You may not understand everything but you believe and that is a good start! It's quite possible you are having a rough time trusting God this Christmas season. Just like the church as Colossae you may be feeling tugged in multiple directions; you may feel like your focus is on anything but Christ this Christmas. You may feel overwhelmed with family coming to visit, your job situation, finals at school, but God is trustworthy.

Being an agent of reconciliation

This is the tough part of the message. This is where our faith turns into action. God sent Jesus to reconcile mankind to Himself. In

the book of 2nd Corinthians Paul now tells us this ministry of reconciliation has been passed onto us. ***“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation”*** (2 Cor. 5:17-19). The ministry of reconciliation has now been passed to those of us in the room that have committed our lives to Christ.

When I was 21 years old I was living in the college area of San Diego, an area known for being a party area. A young couple moved in to the next door apartment. One day I committed to inviting them to go to church with me. I would constantly invite them and generally they would come up with excuses to not come. One Sunday, as I was leaving for church, I stopped by to see if Martin would like to come with me. To my surprise he agreed to come that night. At the end of the message the Pastor gave an opportunity for people who were far from God to give their life to Christ. That night Martin accepted Christ!

The story gets better because shortly after that Martin had to do a three-week training for the Navy so his girlfriend was home

alone. Once again I kept asking Adriane to come to church with me and one night she agreed to come if I would stop inviting her. I thought that was a fair deal. That night at church the Pastor concluded his message with an opportunity for people who were in rebellion to God to give their life to Him. Guess what happened? Yep! Adriane gave her life to Christ that night! Twelve years later Martin and Adriane are happily married with three children and following hard after God. A couple who was far from God and in despair in their dysfunctional relationship has been reconciled to God.

This morning we put an invite card in your bulletin. We want every one of you in the room to take this and invite someone to come to one of our Christmas Eve services next week. It may be a neighbor that you are building a relationship with. It may be a co-worker who has expressed an interest in God. It might be another mom that you have connected with at the park or at your child’s school. This invite could be the catalyst for them starting a life-changing relationship with God this Christmas.

This manuscript represents the bulk of what was preached at CPC. For further detail, please refer to the audio recording of this sermon.