

The Fullness of God Dwelt Bodily

Colossians 1:15-20

Series: “Christmas in the Epistles” (Christmas Series 2020)

Preaching Date: December 27, 2020

Worship: “He Who is Mighty”

Key Sentence: In the incarnation of Christ the God of all held nothing back.

Outline:

I. The image of God. (Colossians 1:15)

II. The pre-existing creator (Colossians 1:16-17)

III. The head and firstborn of the church (Colossians 1:18)

IV. The fullness of God in reconciliation (Colossians 1:19-20)

Colossians 1:15-20 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation.

¹⁶For 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. ¹⁷And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

¹⁸And 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.

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

Colossians 2:9 For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily,

The Fullness of God Dwelt Bodily Colossians 1:15-20

It's become one of the more famous scenes in recent sports movie history. The 2003 film *Facing the Giants* was about a losing football team with a losing coach that manages an unlikely turnaround through faith and grit. Early in the film one of Coach Taylor's key players is giving him half-hearted performance laced with pessimism. Taylor wants to show him just how much he can really do if he gives his all. Thus the famous death crawl scene. I wish I could play the whole thing, but here's the beginning, a bit of the beginning and the end.

"So, Coach, how strong is Westview this year?" "A lot stronger than we are." "You already written Friday night down as a loss, Brock?" "Well, not if I know we could beat them." "Come here, Brock. You too, Jeremy." "What? Am I in trouble now?" "Not yet. I wanna see you do the death crawl again except I wanna see your absolute best." "What? You want me to go to the 30?" "I think you can go to 50." "The 50? I can go to 50 if nobody's on my back." "I think you can do it with Jeremy on your back, but even if you can't I want you to promise me that you're gonna do your best." "All right." "Your best." "OK." "You're gonna give me your best?" "I'm gonna give you my best." "All right, one more thing. I want you to do it blindfolded." "Why?" "I don't want you giving up at a certain point when you can go further. Get down. Jeremy, get on his back. Now, get a good tight hold, Jeremy. All right. Let's go Brock. Keep your knees off the ground. Use your hands and feet. There you go. A little bit left. A little bit left. There you go. Show me good effort. Ataway, Brock. You keep coming."

"Keep driving it. Keep your knees off the ground. That's it. Your very best. Don't quit on me. Your very best. Keep driving. Keep driving. There you go. There you go. That's it. You keep driving. Keep your knees off the ground. Keep driving it. Don't quit till you got nothing left. Keep moving, Brock. That's it. That's it. That's it. Keep going. I want everything you got. Come on, keep going." "It hurts." "Don't quit on me. Your very best. Keep driving. Keep driving. There you go. There you go."

"Don't quit. Don't quit. Don't quit. Brock Kelley, you don't quit. Keep going. Keep going. Go, Brock Kelley. You don't quit on me. No, you keep going. You keep going. Go, Brock. 10 more steps. 10 more. 10 more. 10 more. Keep going. Don't quit. Give me your heart." "I can't do it." "You can. You can. Five more. Five more. Come on, Brock. Come on. Don't quit. Don't quit. Come on Brock. Two more. One more."

“That’s gotta be 50. That’s gotta be 50. I don’t have any more.” “Look up, Brock. You’re in the end zone. Brock, you are the most influential player on this team. If you walk around defeated, so will they. Now tell me you can’t give me more than what I’ve been seeing. You just carried a 140-pound man across this whole field on your arms. Brock, I need you. God’s gifted you with the ability of leadership. Don’t waste it.” “Coach.” “Can I count on you?” “Yes.” “Coach.” “What is it, Jeremy?” “I weigh 160.”

In the incarnation of Christ the God of all held nothing back. Nothing. He gave his all, for us, so that we need not walk through life defeated. This is the final message in our “Christmas in the Epistles” series, and in today’s text, Colossians 1:15-20, we see that in Christ God gave his very best to us. *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. ¹⁶For 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. ¹⁷And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸And 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. ¹⁹For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, ²⁰and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.*

These verses, the main focus of Colossians 1, show that Jesus Christ is exalted and pre-eminent. The Colossians, like all believers, needed a high view of Christ. Otherwise he would be just another of the false gods they once worshipped or they would fall into Jewish legalism or into empty philosophy or mysticism. So Paul tells them about Jesus who, when he came to Bethlehem as a baby, was all of God all-in for all of us. Paul shows the pre-eminence of God the Son and then tells us that all this pre-eminence was in Christ as he rescued us.

He begins by telling us that Christ is the image of the invisible. God. “He”, in verse 15 refers back to the Father’s beloved Son in verse 13, “in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” He is the image of the invisible God. Just as the first man, Adam, was made in the image of God, so the perfect man, Jesus was entirely made in his image. When Jesus came, God who had always been invisible became visible. John’s gospel says “No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father’s side, he has made him known.” Jesus himself said “anyone who has seen me has seen the Father.” This means two things. First, everything great and wonderful about God is true of Jesus. God is infinitely powerful; so is Jesus. God knows all things. So does Jesus. God is eternal, existing from eternity past to eternity future. So is Jesus. God is perfectly just. So is Jesus. God is infinitely wise. So is Jesus.

But this also means that everything you see in Jesus reveals God. When Jesus shows compassion, he is showing the heart of God. When Jesus sees the people as lost sheep, he is showing that the Lord is our Shepherd. When Jesus invites his followers to come unto him and find rest, he is making God's offer. When Jesus asks us to believe and receive eternal life, he is holding out God's own plan of salvation. Everything about Jesus reveals God's heart.

Paul's main point is that Jesus is the image of God. We saw this at the start of the series when we studied the humility of the incarnation in Philippians 2. He is all of God, all-in, for all of us. He supports this by pointing to Jesus' relationship to creation. He is firstborn over all creation. The word 'firstborn' can mean the first in time or first in sequence, but it often means first place. Jesus is not the first thing God created, as some say, but he is in first place over creation. He is first in priority. Just as a conductor does not play an instrument, but is first over all the players, so Jesus is first over all creation. In fact, far from being a created thing, Jesus is the creator. Paul says "For by him all things were created." Remember, Paul is a tremendously educated Jew. He knows Genesis 1, knows that God created the heavens and the earth. He also knows that the distinctive of the Jewish religion was its belief in the one true God. Yet now he attributes creation to another, to Jesus. This can only mean that Jesus and the creator God are one and the same. Two persons but one being, one God. This is the revolutionary faith Paul had embraced.

"By him all things were created." This includes all things in heaven and on earth, all things that we can see with our eyes or our senses, and all things that we cannot see, including all things in the spirit realm. The next four words, 'thrones or power or rulers or authorities' indicate that all the spiritual beings who either support or oppose God's mission in creation were made by Jesus at creation. Therefore none of them can compare to him. None of them was firstborn, none of them pre-existed his creative act. He made them all, and they cannot continue to even exist, whether for him or against him, unless he allows them to do so. As Paul says in Romans 8: "For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, ³⁹nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." Jesus is Lord over Creation

But we also rejoice because everything we see is the result of his creative power. The stars that fill the heavens when the sky is clear show his awesome power. The beautiful mountains are the work of his hands. The rain which waters the earth is his creation. The plants the rain nourishes are his. The animals the earth sustains are his.

And we are his. We are fearfully and wonderfully made. Even now scientists understand only a little about how we are designed. The more they learn about the life of a single cell the more amazing and baffling it is to them. All things were created through him, and all things were created for him. Creation does not bring glory to us but to its creator. God, speaking through the prophet Isaiah, and foreseeing the work of Christ announces: “I will say to the north, Give up, and to the south, Do not withhold; bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the end of the earth, ⁷everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made.” When God says this, according to Paul, Jesus. And he says it of us. We are his for his glory.

The last thing Paul says of creation is that Jesus was before all things, and in him all things hold together. This helps explain what ‘firstborn of creation’ means. Jesus is before all things, uncreated, living in eternity with the Father and the Spirit. And he holds all things together; I love that. Scientists, with their instruments and experiments, have explored deep inside atoms. They have found many amazing particles and forces. But in many ways they still don’t know what holds it together. They can’t even explain how the atomic strong force binds the nucleus of the atom. But we know who holds it together. Hebrews 1:3 teaches that Jesus “is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power.” We know Jesus. We can trust him to hold us together as well.

All of this just amplifies the wonder of Christmas. The paradoxes are wonderful. The uncreated creator of all things was conceived in a single cell in the womb of one whom he had created. The one who holds together the entire universe was held in his mother’s arms. The one who sustains everything was sustained from her body. The one whose will was supreme over all things submitted to the Father’s will and thus to the cruel will of sinful men, from Herod at his birth to Caiaphas and Pilate at this death. When God chose to rescue us he was all-in. He held nothing back. His uncreated co-eternal omnipotent beloved creator Son came for us, that we might be to the praise of his glory.

Next, Paul says, this one who came for us is the head of the Body. Verse 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.” Besides being Lord of the universe Jesus Christ is also the church’s Head. His followers are scattered from America to Nepal, from Siberia to South Africa, but there is only one true church and only one true head. It’s interesting that Paul thought this truth was just as amazing as all the others. It’s just as important that Jesus is the head of the church as it is that he is the image of God, firstborn of creation and creator of all things. So the church must learn to obey the head, Jesus.

Next week we'll be starting a study of the Sermon on the Mount, which is his own manifesto for his followers. From it we will find his heart for our hearts, and hear his own take on what obeying him looks like.

One of the reasons he is the head of the church is that he is its beginning and the firstborn from among the dead. We've already seen that Jesus is the source of all things and the ruler of all things. Everything comes from him. And as firstborn from the dead, he is first in all creation to rise in an immortal body. Again, this is not so much about sequence in time, though he was first born of the resurrection in that sense. But he is really first in rank. Paul says in Romans that he was "declared with power to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead." He doesn't just rise, he is the one who defeated death so that he and all his followers could rise. Again, Paul says in 1st Corinthians that "in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. ²¹For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. ²²For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. ²³But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ." His resurrection is the prototype of ours.

But notice the implication: firstborn from among the dead means not only that he rose for us but that he died for us. God gave his all. In Christ all of God came to serve us, to go all-into give his life for us. In Romans 5 Paul says "For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die—⁸but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." In Christ the God of all held nothing back, not even his life. Peter says "He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness." In 1st Corinthians Paul says "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us." God held nothing back.

Finally, Paul says that all of this is so that in everything he might be preeminent. Don't you love that word? The Greek word is quite simple, an amplification of the word first: first of the first. It's also the same root from which we get firstborn, the word used earlier in the verse. He is firstborn so that he might be first of the first. Merriam-Webster says "having paramount rank, dignity, or importance: outstanding, supreme." Having poured it all out for us, he now reigns at the right hand of the Father receiving even more glory because of his sacrifice. "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!". When the universe and all rescued souls gather before the throne of God it is Christ who stands first as Creator and as Redeemer. He made us and he rescues us.

What is amazing is that though we know these things about Jesus, we often don't give him first place. We allow other things or even other people or other gods to have supremacy. But Jesus was all in for us. Verse 19 says this plainly "For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell." In Colossians chapter 2 when Paul is specifically warning the Colossians against paying attention to these elemental spirits of the world he come back to this theme. "In Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form." In a real body. In human flesh. These are powerful descriptions of Christ's deity. The word fullness means completeness. God completely lives in Jesus. He is not part god and part man. He is fully God as well as fully man. This full and complete Deity dwells lastingly, permanently, eternally in Christ. If that's not all-in for all of us, I don't know what is. The womb and the manger held God in human flesh.

Verse 20: "and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross." The Father was not only pleased to have all his fullness dwell in Jesus, but pleased through Jesus to reconcile to himself all things. Reconcile is a relationship term, changing hostility to friendship. It is a word like propitiation which we saw last week. But propitiation talks how Jesus turns aside God's wrath, this word talks about restoring the broken relationship. The Father was pleased to send the Son to restore the broken relationship with us. Again, Paul is stretching language to make his point. The word 'allossw' in Greek simply means change. But if you add a prefix 'kata' the word come to mean reconcile, to touch the other again. But Paul adds a second prefix which intensifies it: "to reconcile completely."

What is reconciled? Well, we are. That's implied. God restores people to a right relationship with himself by making peace through the blood of Jesus, shed on the cross. Paul goes on to make that perfectly clear in the next two verses: "And you, who once were alienated and hostile in mind, doing evil deeds, ²²he has now reconciled [same word] in his body of flesh by his death, in order to present you holy and blameless and above reproach before him." This is the reason for Christmas. Just as the words save, two weeks ago, and give life and propitiate, last week, were the why of Christmas, so this word is the why of Christmas. This is one of the reasons "Hark the Herald Angels Sing" may be my favorite traditional Christmas carol. "Hark the Herald Angels Sing glory to the Newborn King; Peace on earth and mercy mild; God and sinners reconciled." God and sinners reconciled. Praise God. God was all-in for us.

But God didn't just reconcile us. God doesn't do things by half measures. He goes all in to reconcile his fallen creation and ultimately to restore it. "through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven."

I believe this points to what Paul talks about in Romans 8 “For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope ²¹that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²²For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.” Not in the first advent, but the second, all creation will finally be reconciled, brought back into relationship with God. God’s dwelling will once again be with mankind, and there will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain. And through our reconciliation the whole of creation will be renewed, a new heaven and a new earth, free from its bondage to corruption. I played a video a few weeks ago called “She Waits,” which sees this truth through the eyes of a personified creation. “Dressed in chains, now she waits; Looking back upon that day; When the dawn first held its gaze; Upon the son and the daughter's face. But strange now it seems; Like some dark and distant dream; Still, she hopes and longs to be; Once again, and finally free

How will this happen? Back to verse 20 “through him to reconcile . . . making peace by the blood of his cross.” Our relationship is changed from hostility to peace by what Jesus did, shedding his blood, pouring out his life on the cross. There was no other way and there is no other way. When God came, all-in, all of God for all of us, he came to die. In Gethsemane Jesus asked the Father, is there no other way for this to be accomplished? And while we don’t hear the Father’s voice, we know his answer, for Jesus says “not my will but yours be done.” And then he goes to the cross. He’s all in. No turning back, no matter how deep the agony. No plan b. On the cross he cries out “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me.” He became sin for us, separated in some unknowable way from the Father and suffering his wrath, the punishment we deserved, until in that final culminating moment he cried “it is finished.” The work of the incarnation, the work of propitiation and reconciliation, the work of salvation and redemption and forgiveness and eternal life was finished.

David Jackson’s “The Angels Came Down” captures all of this perfectly. It shows a God who was all-in for all of us. Who saw how fallen into sin we all were, and who came down from his throne to our rescue. Who faced sin for us and who was tempted, but who refused to give up on his purpose. Who suffered and died for us, but whose purpose was not finished even in death, for he rose and returned to heaven triumphant, having given his all for all of us.

I didn’t have this song in the program, but let’s listen to it as we finish the message, because it captures how in Jesus the God of all was all-in for all of us.

You saw me fall quickly. Your love brought You down from Your throne. You came to my rescue. You took my foe on As Your own.

You faced him; you faced sin, and temptations You had never known. Surrounded by hatred, this world was so unlike Your home.

And the angels came down to take You home. But it was not yet time, so they helped You to go on.

So bravely, so humbly you suffered wounds from Satan's knife. Your pain showed, Your blood flowed Locked in a fight that cost Your life

And the angels came down to take You home. But it was not yet time, so they wept beside the tomb.

So long You lay there broken. My hope was all but gone. I'd forgotten what You'd spoken, till You rolled away the stone.

And the angels came down to take You home. This time Your work was finished, so they walked You to Your throne.