



Supreme In the New Creation

Colossians 1:19-20

David Sunday December 22, 2019

Let's continue in worship as we open God's Word, the Bible. We're in the fourth of four sermons on this magnificent paragraph—a symphony to the splendor of Christ—in Colossians 1:15-20. Let us worship Him, our Lord and Savior, our King, as we listen to the Holy Spirit through the Apostle Paul extolling His glories. Colossians 1, beginning at verse 15:

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.

This is God's Word. Thanks be to God. Let's pray.

Father, may the words of my mouth and the thoughts of all our hearts be pleasing in Your sight. I believe in the Holy Spirit and pray for His empowerment now upon my preaching and our hearing of Your Holy Word. I ask that through His presence we would be transformed more into the image of Christ, Whom we worship and Whom we adore today. In His name. Amen.

Do you ever feel like this glorious story of Christmas kind of goes in one ear and out the other? It's kind of like people who buy a house by the train tracks. At first you can hardly think about anything else when the train comes barreling through because it's so overpowering. But before long you've learned to tune it out and can sleep right through it.

Well, if the Christmas train is barreling through this year and you don't even hear it passing by, come with me to the grand finale of this paragraph, verses 19 and 20. We read there, "*For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.*" This whole paragraph is here to recapture our wonder, to reignite our imagination. I want you to think of

these last two verses like spark plugs carrying the high voltage charge of the gospel to jump start the dormant battery of your heart.

What is it that gives the gospel its high voltage? It's the incarnation of God the Son. It's because of Who Christ is that His life, death and resurrection have the power to make all things new. Without the incarnation, the gospel wouldn't have any voltage. It is so necessary that we understand Who it is Who lived and died and rose again. When we do, we will know why He has the power to make all things new.

So in Colossians 1:19-20, we're going to look at three things. The Holy Spirit is going to show us, first, the meaning of the incarnation of God the Son, then the purpose of the incarnation and finally the goal of the incarnation.

The Meaning of the Incarnation of God the Son

First, we read about the meaning of the incarnation of God the Son in Colossians 1:19: *"For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell."* Now, only a person could be pleased to do something. Other translations make it clear here that God is the subject. In the CSV and NIV, this verse reads, *"God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him."* Or the New American Standard Bible says, *"It was the Father's good pleasure to have all the fullness dwell in him."*

As we think about that, I want us first to be clear about what the incarnation does not mean. It does not mean that there was a man named Jesus in Whom God came to take up residence, kind of like the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in us when we become children of God. No, when God the Son, the Eternal Word, became flesh and dwelt among us, He remained wholly and truly God and became wholly and truly man.

In order to ponder this more, I'm going to give you a mouthful of words from the Council of Chalcedon in 451 A.D. I want you to chew on how the early church came to describe what took place in the incarnation.

[Jesus Christ is] to be acknowledged in two natures—one divine, one human—without confusion, without change, without division, without separation; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved and concurring in one person and one subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ...

Now, if you're thinking, "Whoa, that was a lot to get my mind around," of course. This is a wondrous mystery. Let me explain using some analogies that I'm borrowing from a theologian named Sam Storms. First, that phrase "without confusion, without change." In other words, the

incarnation is not like when you take a glass of water and a glass of wine and mix the two together. What happens then is you produce watered down wine and alcoholic water, right? What's now in the cup is something different from what was in either of the two glasses. That's not what we're talking about in the incarnation. The divine nature of Christ did not swallow up the human nature of Jesus—kind of like the ocean would swallow up a drop of ink—and the human nature of Jesus did not dilute the divine nature into something less than truly God. That's the first thing we need to grasp.

Secondly, let's take the phrase, “without separation, the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union.” This phrase is to prevent us from concluding that the divine and human natures in Christ were kind of artificially bonded together, almost like you would glue together two separate pieces of wood. No, there's more than an external connection between the divine and human. There was a true union between the two by the Holy Spirit.

Then let's take the third phrase, “not parted or divided into two persons.” So Christ, the God-Man, is one person Who is wholly divine and wholly human; He is neither less divine because He has a human nature, nor less human because He has a divine nature. Does this blow your mind? It should. It should cause you to bow down and worship, for this is your God. And if your Lord Jesus Christ were anything less or anything other than the God-Man —one person Who is truly divine and truly human—you would still be in your sin and under its penalty.

So what does the incarnation mean? Let's take that phrase “*all the fullness*” that we read in Colossians 1:19. This is what you call in literary terms a tautology—saying the same thing twice in different words. This isn't usually a good thing to do when you're writing. For example, “I went to see him personally.” Or, “She always overexaggerates.” “The storm hit at 2:00 p.m. in the afternoon.” “I loved reading Sam's autobiography of his own life.” Those are tautologies. And here's my favorite: “Be careful. There's a lot of frozen ice on the road.” As if there is any kind of ice that is not frozen.

So this phrase “all the fullness” is like that. It's a tautology. There can be no such thing as partial fullness or half-fullness. But Paul says, “all the fullness,” so it's clear that he's going out of his way to make a point. What is the point? The point he's making is that everything that makes God God is true of Jesus Christ. Anything you could say is true about God is also true of Jesus, the Baby born in the manger, the Carpenter from Nazareth, the Preacher who walked the dusty roads and sailed the Sea of Galilee, the Friend of tax collectors and sinners and the enemy of self-righteous religiosity. He was the One Who ate, slept, thirsted, cried, laughed and hugged. He was the One Who was falsely convicted, nailed to a cross of wood and Who died.

This Jesus is God Himself. He's not a partial God or a half-way God. Jesus is fully God. And if that is true, it changes everything about how you think, how you live, how you worship, how you feel and how you die. If this is not true, I have just uttered the worst blasphemy possible.

"In [Christ], all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell." Think of those last words. What was "pleased to dwell"? He Who was rich beyond all splendor, all for love's sake became poor. God in His glory became human and did not do it reluctantly. He did it gladly, willingly, out of His good pleasure. It was His delight.

What the old theologian Anselm reasoned is true. He reasoned that the incarnation was born of necessity, because only God can pay for our sin and only man must repent. So if our sins were going to be atoned for, God needed to become man. That's true—but that's not the full extent of the good news. God did not become man just to satisfy a legal debt, as wonderful as that is. Salvation is not just a cold, clinical, legal transaction. No—it's an act of love.

Athanasius proclaimed this so beautifully in the fourth century: "Christ became what we are, that we might become what He is. This is the 'marvelous exchange.' He enters our life that we might enter His. Behold, God the Son, Who has become our Brother." That's beautiful. This is family language. This is the language of love. Think about it. The Father of the Spirit-filled Son sent His Son into the world to become our Brother, so that we might become His children. He sent His Son down to earth to bring His family home.

I remember Christmas 1995 when we had just two little children at home; our son was just three months old. I had just purchased a new car—which was really an old car—and I was really excited about it for about two weeks, then there were many months of misery with that car. It was Christmas Eve and was snowing and very cold—and the car wasn't working right. My grandpa had just died the week before and my dad did not want us to miss Christmas Eve at their house. So he drove down to get us and bring us home. That's what the God the Father did. He sent His Son down to earth to bring His family home.

The Wonderful Counselor, boundless in might,
The Father's own image, the beam of His light.
Behold Him now wearing the likeness of man,
Weak, helpless and speechless, in measure a span.

O wonder of wonders, which none can unfold:
The Ancient of Days is an hour or two old;
The Maker of all things is made of the earth,
Man is worshiped by angels and God comes to birth.

The Word in the bliss of the Godhead remains,
Yet in flesh comes to suffer the keenest of pains;

He is that He was and forever shall be,
But becomes that He was not, for you and for me.

Then let us adore Him and praise His great love;
To save us poor sinners He came from above.

[From "The Great God of Heaven" by Henry Ramsden Bramley]

The Purpose of the Incarnation of the Son of God

We see the purpose of the incarnation at the beginning of Colossians 1:20. God the Son became a man and in Him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell—for what reason? What is the mission of the incarnation? *"And through him to reconcile everything to himself, whether things on earth or things in heaven."* There it is. There is the ultimate purpose of the incarnation of the Son of God. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us—why? So that through Him God might reconcile all things to Christ.

Think of accountants reconciling the books. What are they doing? They're bringing everything back into its true and proper order. The true and proper order for all things in creation is to be under the authority of Jesus Christ and in peaceful submission to His rule and reign. Why? Because everything in the universe was made by Him (verse 16) and through Him and for Him. He holds all things together (verse 17). Nothing in all creation is before Him, above Him or beyond Him. So it is only right and proper that all things—all things—should come under submission to His Lordship, without Whom they would not exist. He is the Lord of creation, Paul is also telling us here that He is the Lord of re-creation. Last week we saw in verse 18 that death itself has come under submission to Christ's Lordship. He is the firstborn from the dead, which means Christ's resurrection is the starting gun of the new creation. When He rose, a new humanity began, a new creation started.

The necessary implication of all this glorious truth that God has revealed to us in Colossians 1:15-18 is that nothing in the universe is functioning as it should until it is reconciled to Christ. But when all things are reconciled to Christ, we will experience a world that is laid hold of, redeemed and raised up into resurrection joy.

That's how evangelist Glen Scrivener describes the reconciliation of all things: "Christmas should be the time we point with eager entreaty: 'Look! God has shown up to put things right. In becoming man, the Lord of all has taken the wheel of this world, switched on the GPS and pressed Home!' He's bringing it all back to its original design and purpose—and even better, He has redeemed it all.

I hope you noticed that when I came to this word “reconcile” in verse 20, I didn’t jump immediately from the reconciliation of all things to the salvation of individual human beings. I didn’t do that because the Apostle Paul doesn’t start here with the salvation of human beings. First, Paul wants us to see the vastness of the purposes of Christ’s incarnation. He wants us to see there’s a cosmic scope here and he doesn’t want us to miss it. He wants us to realize that the “all things” mentioned here in verse 20 are the same “all things” we read about in verse 16: *“all things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rules or authorities.”*

This means—this is important—the gospel is not just about the salvation of individual people. The gospel doesn’t start with Genesis 3. It goes all the way back to Genesis 1. So I have a question for you. This is not a trick question, but I think it’s one you’ll need to chew on and think about for a bit. Here it is: “What is the Bible more concerned about: God coming down to earth or people going up to heaven?”

Often when we present the gospel, we can give the impression that the gospel is the good news of how God has provided salvation for sinners. Why? So that we can go to heaven when we die. Anyone ever heard a gospel presentation like that? I think I’ve given a few, so you’ve probably heard a gospel presentation like that.

But I want you to hear this morning that the gospel is even better news than that. Don’t get me wrong—I do want to go to heaven when I die and I am glad the gospel provides the answer for that. But the gospel doesn’t end with saved sinners going to heaven when they die. That’s just what theologians call the “intermediate state.” It’s not the final purpose of the gospel. The gospel is ultimately about God coming down to earth to dwell with us in a renewed and restored creation. It’s about the Kingdom of God coming on earth as it is in heaven.

I think that might help you relate even more to what salvation is, because we live here on earth and God is going to redeem this creation. Think about it. Throughout the Bible, the movement is from heaven down to earth:

- What do we see in the Garden of Eden? God came down and walked with Adam and Eve in the garden in the cool of the day. He lived with them there.
- In the tabernacle, God came down and manifested His glory.
- In the temple, the glory of God filled the temple.
- In the incarnation, it pleased the Lord that all His fullness would come down and dwell in Christ.
- In the crucifixion, that is God on the cross, come down to a hill outside Jerusalem.
- In the resurrection, that is God rising from the dead here on earth.

- And in the second coming of our Lord, Jesus is coming back to earth. That's the focus of our hope as Christians. His return is not going to just be for a short visit. He's coming back to stay forever. This is the grand finale of the Bible.

What does Revelation 21 say? The New Jerusalem will come down out of heaven, from God—arrayed with God's glory—and Jesus, the Lamb, will dwell among us. He will make His home here in a renewed earth with all His loved ones who have been redeemed by Him. Friends, the ultimate purpose of God is that one day there will no longer be a separation between heaven and earth, but heaven and earth will be one—and God will dwell with us!

Just like God purified the world in Noah's day with a flood, the present heavens and earth as we know them are going to be purified as by fire. The works in it are going to be disclosed and the world is going to be dissolved and cleansed. But, Peter says, we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth where righteousness dwells. God's not going to abandon His creation.

Isaac Watts understood this which is why he included these verses in his Advent hymn: "Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns, let men their songs employ, while fields and floods, rocks, hills and plains repeat the sounding joy." All creation rejoices at His coming! "No more let sins and sorrows grow nor thorns infest the ground." Why? Because He comes here "to make His blessings flow" here, "far as the curse is found." Jesus is the Lord of creation and He's the Lord of re-creation.

And when He returns, He will return to a renewed creation in which all things will be reconciled to Himself, where He will reign supreme, unrivaled, rightfully crowned as the preeminent One, given the first place in everything—and that is what the gospel is about. It's about all things in heaven and on earth coming back under the sovereign Lordship of Jesus Christ, so that everything sin unraveled will be brought back into order and everything sad will become untrue. The gospel is about the reconciliation of all things in heaven and on earth.

Ian Smith says, "When we understand that the end of all things is the renewal of all things, then all things become important." Music. Art. Your job. The soil of this earth. Everything earthly becomes important when you understand that the end of all things is the renewal of all things.

So, friends, the gospel isn't just about knowing where you go if you die tonight. The gospel is also about knowing why you are alive tomorrow if you don't die tonight. The gospel restores meaning to your life on earth. It shows you why your life on earth matters. You have a mission here to faithfully and beautifully show what a life reconciled to Christ and living under His reign looks like, so that people in your life here on earth will want to receive Christ as their King, will

want to prepare Him room in their hearts and will want to be ready for Him at His return when all heaven and nature will sing.

That's the purpose of Christ's incarnation—the reconciliation of all things. But it's clear in Scripture that this reconciliation doesn't come without a terrible cost—and that brings us to the last point this morning.

The Goal of the Incarnation of the Son of God

A goal is something you have to achieve in order to accomplish your ultimate purpose. There was something very specific Christ needed to achieve in order for God to reconcile all things to Himself. The only way Christ could make His blessings flow far as the curse is found is in the last part of Colossians 1:20. He did this by “*making peace by the blood of his cross.*” The reason the earth is without peace is because people live without God. If God is going to deal with the lack of peace on earth, He first has to deal with the lack of peace between heaven and earth. The only way that could be done was by Christ making peace through His blood shed on the cross. So see your Creator lying in a manger and behold the shadow of the cross looming over that manger.

Why lies He in such mean estate,
Where ox and lamb are feeding?
Good Christians, fear, for sinners here
The silent Word is pleading.
Nails, spear shall pierce Him through,
The cross be borne for me, for you.

[From “What Child Is This?” by William C. Dix]

It was only through the blood of the incarnate God shed on the cross that the curse on creation could be removed and all creation be renewed. Reflecting on this, Peter Lewis writes, “There will be no part of God's renewed universe that will be unaffected by the cross—no place where Calvary is irrelevant.” That's why, as Revelation says, we'll be shouting and singing in the new creation, “Worthy is the Lamb Who was slain,” because the cross will forever be relevant.

If you or I want to be reconciled to God in Christ in a saving way, we will have to stop treating the cross of Calvary is irrelevant and we will have to recognize that nothing but the blood of Jesus can wash away our sin. Outside the blood of Jesus, there is only one way you can be brought under His authority and rule, and that's in judgment. You can either be reconciled to Him in forgiveness through His blood or you can be reconciled to Him in judgment. No one will escape the Lord of all creation.

Just as we celebrate this week that He came as a babe in Bethlehem, so we also believe that He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead. We will all stand before Him. Heaven

and earth will flee before Him when He comes to reign and every tongue will confess Jesus is Lord. For some, that's going to be a shout of joy; for others it's going to be a cry of anguish, as every knee bows at His return. For some, that's going to be a reconciliation of welcome; for others, it's going to be a reconciliation of judgment.

So friends, Jesus wants you and me to take His blood shed on the cross very personally. That's where the Apostle Paul goes, beginning in Colossians 1:21 (CSB). Look at how he describes our condition outside of God's grace: "*Once you were alienated and hostile in your minds expressed in your evil actions.*" That's true of all of us outside of God's grace. But Jesus, the Designer, Creator, Sustainer and Owner of the universe, comes to us in our alienated and hostile condition, saying, "Be reconciled to God."

Let's be clear. We weren't jumping up and down, saying, "Jesus, let's be friends." No, we were alienated. You know what it's like to be alienated from someone. You don't visit each other anymore. You don't let your children speak to each other. If you see each other in public, you look the other way. That's the way it is between us and God by nature. We don't visit Him. We don't seek His presence. We don't like His words or His ways. Whenever God meets us—whether it's through His Word or through our circumstances—we try to look the other way. We don't want to look God in the eye. That wasn't just kind of a bad day we were having. No, that was our settled disposition.

Paul says in verse 21 that we were hostile in our minds. We were engaged in treachery against God, intent on overthrowing His government over our lives and doing evil deeds. The proof of our hostility is what we did with His Son when He came. How did we treat Him? "*He was despised and rejected by people; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with suffering. Like one from whom people hide their faces, he was despised, and we esteemed Him not*" (Isaiah 53:3). To the One Who came to reconcile we said, "I'm alienated from You; I don't want to look You in the eye."

For each of us, our sin leaves us with a heavy debt we can't pay. It's a debt so infinitely high that only the blood of the incarnate God could cover it. So if you don't value what He's done on the cross, if you treat His blood as irrelevant, your sins are still on your record as a debt that will need to be paid and you're facing the reconciling judgment of the Lord Jesus. It doesn't matter if you're going to church, listening to sermons, putting money in the offering plate, teaching Sunday school or even preaching sermons. If you do not recognize that you need His blood to cleanse you and no other fount can do that, then you're not reconciled yet to God. Only His blood shed on the cross can do that.

How do you know if you're trusting in His blood? Here's how you know. Go back to Colossians 1:18. You know because He becomes supreme, preeminent, number one in your life. If

someone dies for you, you do not forget that. If you knew that you were dead, but they stood in your place, you'll love them and remember them forever.

I've said this before, but let me say it once more. When we go to the oncologist for Kate's cancer checkups, we wait in the room for the doctor to review her CAT scan. We're on pins and needles while we wait. If the doctor walks in the room and looks away from Kate and says to me, "David, congratulations; you're cancer free," it wouldn't mean much to me. In fact, I'd probably be insulted. I'd probably think, "Who does she think she is? I didn't come in here thinking I had cancer." So, "David, you're cancer free"—that's not really good news. In fact, it makes me mistrust whether she knows what she's talking about. But when she says, "Kate, you're cancer free," hugs her and gives her a kiss, it means the world to us. Kate knows what it feels like to be on cancer's death row.

Is the blood of Jesus precious to you? When you know you were justly condemned to an eternity of death and darkness without it, then you'll say, "O precious is the blood that makes me white as snow." When all your trust is in His blood, then reconciliation becomes your new reality.

I love what Paul says at the beginning of Colossians 1:22: "*But now he has reconciled you by his physical body through his death...*" (CSB), Oh, what a change of fortunes. Forgiveness says, "You're free to go now." But reconciliation says, "You can come. You're invited. You're welcomed. I want you to be close to Me." Praise the Lord, He has done it. It is finished for all who trust in Him at the cross and it happened at great cost to Himself. The Puritan Stephen Charnock said, "How evil is sin that God must bleed to cure it."

Friends, no one but the incarnate Son of God could have done this job. Only the One in Whom all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell could take on flesh and offer Himself as the atoning sacrifice for our sins—and no one but Jesus would have done such a thing. He did it while we were still helpless, ungodly sinners, enemies of God. He bled then to cure the evil of our sin. Even now, as Martin Luther said, "We all walk around with His nails in our pockets."

Look at Colossians 1:22-23. If you hold fast to Jesus, stable and steadfast, not shifting from the hope of the gospel, why would you ever look anywhere else? All fullness is in Him. How can you add something to everything? If you have Christ, He won't let go of you and you won't let go of Him. The goal of what Jesus has done is that you would be presented before God just as Jesus is. Look at verse 22: "*He has now reconciled you by his physical body through his death, to present you holy, faultless and blameless before him...*" (CSB). He wants to present you before God just as He is: holy, faultless and blameless.

When on that final day, when you bid farewell to these shadowlands, as C.S. Lewis put it, it will only be the beginning of the real story for you. His ultimate purpose is the reconciliation of all

things in heaven and on earth. Because He is the Lord of a new creation, all your life in this world and all your adventures in this old creation will have only been the cover and the title page. Now at last you will find yourself beginning chapter one of the Great Story which no one on earth has read, the Great Story which goes on forever, in which every chapter is better than the one before.

New creation! This good news is the kind that deserves to be proclaimed in all creation under heaven, Paul says in verse 23. So as you celebrate a merry Christmas this week, “Go, tell it on the mountains, over the hills and everywhere.” Tell this good news that demands a response.

Let’s respond to the Lord in prayer together. Would you bow before the Lord, quiet your heart and respond to Him for just a minute? Maybe this morning you have recognized the truth about yourself for the first time. You’ve seen that the way the Bible describes your human condition is really the way you are. You’ve been living independently of God. You’ve not been looking Him in the eye. You’ve been ignoring His voice. But today He’s been speaking to you. He’s been knocking on the door of your heart, saying, “Be reconciled to Me.” He’s shown you how He’s made the way for that to be possible. Jesus made peace through His blood shed on the cross. He did that for all who would ever put their hope in Him, from every nation, male and female, every status, throughout all the ages. Anyone who puts their trust in what Jesus has done on the cross will be reconciled to God in forgiveness and experience new creation. If you need that, if you want that, join me now in prayer.

Holy God, I recognize that my sin has made a separation between me and You. I have lived alienated from You. I have expressed hostility toward You. I have done that which is evil in Your sight. But You have made a way in love for peace to come between You and me. I thank You for sending Jesus to be my Savior. My heart prepares Him room now. I receive Him as my King and I pray You would fill me with the joy of a new life of obedience to Him.

If you know Jesus and treasure what He has done for you, pray now that your life would reflect the beauty of one who lives under His reign. As we prepare to enter into a new decade, the year of our Lord 2020, pray that it would be marked by growth in grace, taking steps toward Christ Who has reconciled you and that your life this week would tell of the goodness of what He has done to all the world. For He is worthy. Amen.

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