

## The Lord Who Lived Among Us

Colossians 1:15-20

Advent 2017

© 2017 Daniel R. Hyde

“**O**UR King and Savior draws near.” We say this in faith today with our forefathers and foremothers who looked forward to the promised Savior. We say this in faith because he has come! We say this in hope as he’s promised to come again as “our blessed hope” (Titus 2:14). With love for him to whom our faith looks back and our hope looks forward and upward, we say, “O come, let us adore him!” This Advent we’re focusing our hearts and minds on texts that proclaim “the advent of our God.” We turn to Colossians 1 and *The Lord Who Lived Among Us*.

**I**T’S always vital to get a sense of the surrounding context when reading the Word of God. Note how the opening of this letter is prayer. Paul begins with thanksgiving that the gospel message had come to the Colossians (vv. 3-8). Then he mentions his interceding for them to continue to grow in faith, hope, and love (vv. 9-11). He rounds it out glorifying God the Father who delivered them from the domain of

darkness and transferred them into the kingdom of his beloved Son, our Lord Jesus Christ (vv. 12-14).

There's something practical here. The earliest congregations were small and within an earthly kingdom that manifested the kingdom of darkness in its political problems and ability persecute believers. Yet Paul focuses not so much on the ungodly society out there nor even on how they could live as light in darkness. I say this because what happens when we focus on the world out there or on ourselves in here? In survival situations if you focus on your immediate surroundings, you can easily get lost, even walking in circles. If you focus solely on your needs of discomfort you can also become disoriented. But when you focus on a fixed object way off into the distance, you have a reference point to judge your surroundings and give a goal for your own problems. That reference point is the Son, our Lord, who delivered them. Let's focus on him.

**H**E is *Lord of all creation*. Look at verses 15-17. Paul draws upon that most ancient story of creation to describe who this Son is as the Lord.

**He is the image of the invisible God** (v. 15). This comes right from Genesis 1 where God is said to have made man “*in* [his] image” (vv. 26, 27). This easiest way to understand this is so say Adam was made to be like his Creator as much as a creature could possibly be, reflecting God’s wisdom and righteousness. But he was still a creature. He was *in* the image of God. The Son *is* the image...of God. That’s a huge difference! It means he is God made visible. He is not *like* God; he *is* God incarnate. I was thinking this week of how Advent is so full of crises and pain in our and our neighbors’ lives. “What do others’ gift say about what I’m worth?” “If I’m lonely, I must be alone.” “Is there any meaning in it all?” Jesus says the answer is not to look to others or yourself, but to him, because “if you’ve seen me” the image of God “you’ve seen the Father.”

**He is...the firstborn of all creation** (v. 15). This is not a temporal term. The Son of God was not the first thing God created. He is **firstborn** in a hierarchical sense. In ancient society the firstborn son was the one with authority. Children, why do your parents leave your big brother or big sister in charge if they go somewhere? It’s because they have the

authority of mom and dad. And note **he is...the firstborn of** or “over”

(NIV) **all creation**. Creation is the Son’s servant; he is its Lord.

The very next verse shows this key idea that the Son is not a creature but the Creator: **for by him all things were created**. What things? **All things!** And what things are those? **Things...in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities**. Reiterating he says, **all things were created through him and for him** (v. 16). And reiterating that he’s not a creature but the Creator, he says, **and he is before all things** (v. 17).

Finally, as Lord of all creation Paul says **and in him all things hold together** (v. 17). The Son is Creator and Sustainer; the power that made all things and the provider for those things; the hands that flung entire galaxies into space are the hands that are never empty but ever full of all it takes for that very existence itself to exist. What is beautiful here is that Paul uses a perfect tense to express that in contrast to the once for all creation in the past, ever since, now, and forever into the future, everything is continually held together by the Son. The One who made the cosmos keeps it from becoming chaos *and your chaos this season!*

**H**E is *Lord of a new creation*. We know the biblical story that the creation brought forth by the Son of God, which he constantly holds together, fell from its lofty place and was shattered into a million pieces. But the Lord who is Creator and Sustainer is **Reconcile**[r] (v. 20).

Reconciliation is such a beautiful thing, isn't it? Maybe this is the year you make that phone call to a family member or estranged friend. There's tension, there's history, there's drama. Reconciliation is that work of bringing the two at opposite sides of the room together. With Jesus, this work of reconciliation between a thrice Holy God and a hard-hearted people is like a new creation.

As Lord he begins this work of a new creation in the church:

**And he is the head of the body, the church** (v. 18). In ancient Greek philosophy the *kosmos* was like a body and the divine *logos* or wisdom was like the head that gave life to the body. But what does Paul proclaim? The Son of God is head and source of life. The head of all things is not a principle, but a Person. And he gives life to a body made up of real people called **the church**. Here you are in a season you're told fulfillment is found in stuff. This self-satisfaction can come in other forms: a man, a

woman, a job, a location, a position, pride that you're better than another; the list goes on. But new creation life only comes from Jesus Christ. Stop trying to find fulfillment in yourself! Stop expecting it to come from someone else. Find it in Jesus alone. He's the **head**. And notice the location where he gives new life **the church**. Stop searching out there in others or in here, within yourself; find it in Christ among these sinners!

“The good news of Jesus is so awesome to my soul! His church...not so much! Truth be told the church is such a disappointing even dangerous place for me.” But Paul says **the church** is the new creation of Jesus Christ himself. Again in verse 18 Paul calls him **the beginning**, meaning, the creative source of new life. He also calls him **the firstborn from the dead**, which is Paul's way of describing how the final resurrection the Jews expected on the last day has already happened in Jesus. That's why he can say **in everything Jesus might be preeminent**. If I'm joined to him by faith my resurrection is assured. In his resurrection the new humanity of the new creation came forth out of the old world of the tomb. The church therefore does not exist to serve your desires; it's exists to demonstrate to the world that heaven has already come to earth!

The new creation that our Lord as **Reconcile**[r] (v. 20) has already begun in the church will also extend ultimately into a new creation of everything: **through him to reconcile to himself *all things*, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross** (v. 20).

What's so wonderful here for us today is that this Lord of all creation who is also Lord of a new creation became human: **For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell** (v. 19). The Greeks had a philosophy in which there were various levels and degrees of the divine from the top down to the bottom here on earth. But in the Son-made-man, the **fullness** of all God is, God has, and God gives in found in him! Do you see what this means? It's easy to say before the Son became the God-man, he created and sustained all things. But while he was in the form of a zygote, we can sing, "he's got the whole world in his hands." While he was growing in his mother's womb he was preserving heaven and earth. While his mother held him as an infant held he sustained the cosmos. While he was nourished he was giving nourishment to the world. Do you know this glorious Savior? This Jesus who is God, who reveals God, and who leads to God? This Jesus who is the Lord of heaven and

earth and whose power triumphs over all temporal powers? Believe in him today! Hope in his coming tomorrow. And love him for eternity.