



“The Firstborn of All Creation”

Colossians 1:15-16

December 5, 2021

Good morning, everybody! Welcome to Bethel Grace and welcome to this, the first Sunday morning of December. Has anybody noticed that it is Christmas time? We are met with a wonderful monthlong soundtrack of Christmas music—Christmas carols pointing us to the glory of Jesus Christ. We sing them on Sunday mornings. We might even hear them on radio stations. We might even hear them playing in the mall. Sometimes in shopping centers I am amazed at some of the songs that are played and I say, Lord, give them ears to hear.

This morning as we move forward in our study of Colossians, it will be the study of another hymn that will get our attention as we move into what is for the many the most familiar portion of the book of Colossians. This letter was written to the Colossian church. It is one of the theological high portions of the New Testament. In it, we may very well be reading one of the spiritual songs sung by the early church of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Some detect here in Colossians Chapter 1 and beginning in Verse 15, a brief shift in the style of writing that is carried forward into Verse 20. Suddenly all of the long and mounting sentences that are so characteristic of our brother, the Apostle Paul, gives way to a series of concise statements about the person of our Lord Jesus Christ. Even further, Greek scholars have detected something of a rhythm to the sentences that are before us. This has led to the suggestion that Paul was then quoting a hymn about the Son of God, declaring the glories of who He is; a song sung by the early church.

Whether or not that is the case, we cannot be certain. Paul may have incorporated a song of the church or he may have been composing the hymn right then by himself. But what I do know is that when the Spirit of God is filling our hearts and giving us understanding of what is written here, this portion of Scripture will lead forth with praise from the hearts of the people of God, for in this text the glories of the Lord Jesus Christ streams forth from Scripture into the lives of God’s people and into the church. It is magnificent, and I pray that the Spirit would give us hearts to receive it as such as we read it right now.

Let me read for us what is in Colossians Chapter 1 and Verses 15 through 20:

**<sup>15</sup>He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. <sup>16</sup>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. <sup>17</sup>And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup>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. <sup>19</sup>For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, <sup>20</sup>and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross.**

So we have before us this glorious hymn of praise. In this, the small Colossian church was given a colossal view of the Lord Jesus Christ, was it not? Here in this text we see Jesus presented to them and to us as the Lord of all creation, and He is the Lord of the new creation. Jesus is presented to us as the source of all things made.

Christ is the source of all things made new. Christ presides over the natural realm and the supernatural realm; over the universe; over the world; over the church; over your life. It is all under the rule of the Messiah, King Jesus, in whom the fullness of God has been pleased to dwell.

As we look at what is here for us in this paragraph, let us keep in mind that Paul either incorporated or composed this hymn to fortify the church of Colossae against a threat. False doctrine was found in the city of Colossae and it was knocking at the door of the church. It was trying to find its way in.

Some have described this false teaching as a form of Jewish mysticism. We can't be too assertive in what we define it as because reading the book of Colossians, is like listening to the one side of a telephone conversation. We hear what Paul said and we can gather from what he said about what was happening in the city of Colossae.

It would seem from what we read in Chapter 2 where Paul dealt with this heresy head-on, that there were some who were trying to commend contact with and devotion to angels who could then usher them into the heavenly temple of God by way of visions. Those things are evident as we read what comes later in Chapter 2. So in the eyes of those false teachers it is evident that Christ was being presented as one of multiple paths and ways to approach the Father, if they recognized Christ at all.

Even though the church had not yet been infected, praise God, by this false doctrine, Paul had glowing things to say about the Colossian church and the substance of their faith. Even though the church had not been infected by false teaching, Paul wrote this letter to bolster their immune system with life-giving, strength-providing doctrine and teaching about just who Christ Jesus is.

In addition to this, we must keep in mind that for the most part, the Colossians were Gentile converts to Christ. They would have been raised up in a polytheistic world. People in their city believed in the entire pantheon of gods that needed to be placated by various offerings and rites of worship. Some of those so-called experiences of worship being very sensual and very dark, resembling that which might take place more in a nightclub rather than a house of worship. To be honest, some of their practices of devotion were quite brutal.

The Gentiles living in Colossae would have been somewhat tolerant of the believers in their worship of Jesus, perhaps demi-god among other demi-gods. But exclusive worship of Jesus would have been very strange in their eyes. This is something that they would have come against as something that was crazy and somewhat risky as there were regional gods that needed to be placated for the wellbeing of the citizens. That is what the people in Colossae were facing.; this young church now worshipping Christ as worshipping Christ alone as Lord God and Savior.

In addition, brothers and sisters, you and I here in the Twenty-First Century California, we are living in the midst of a land filled with the claims of spiritual diversity. According to the spirit of the age, it is okay to believe in Jesus as long as you believe in Jesus as an option among other options, one path among multiple paths by which to connect to the God of the universe, however you see Him or it might be approached.

That is the perspective of the world and we must be careful that such perspective does not enter into us. There are also Christian cults who do not present Christ as the Divine Lord of all, but perhaps as an inspired prophet, or even an angelic being Himself.

So we too in the midst of a place of great spiritual diversity, we need to have our spiritual immune systems bolstered and fortified and strengthened and given health and life with a clear, accurate, biblical picture of who Jesus Christ is. We need to be nourished by this portion of Scripture because even our own hearts are prone to wander.

We will see how the Lord is providing for us that very nourishment of soul through the Living Words of Jesus that are here in this text. Moving into the weeks ahead of us in December we are going to go very, very deliberately and slowly through this wonderful hymn that is recorded in these six verses.

We are going to take it stanza by stanza, two verses at a time, and I pray that the stream of glory that comes from the Throne of God will enter into our church and into each one of our hearts as we see and worship and as we walk in Christ, the King of kings and the Lord of lords.

This morning we will see how Verse 15 reveals Him to us and we will see how Verse 16 gives the fuller explanation of what is meant by the second phrase in Verse 15. We are going to look at two statements about Jesus Christ. First is that He is the image of the invisible God and then that He is the firstborn of all creation.

First we read in Colossians Chapter 1 is that:

### **1. Christ is the image of the invisible God.**

Something that becomes very clear as we look in this paragraph of Scripture and in statements that follow is that the universe that you and I live in, it is filled with things visible and invisible. There are some beings that you can see with your eyes, and there are some living beings that you cannot see with your eyes. So the question that we start off with is: which one does the One Living God belong to. Which category is He? Seen or unseen? I want to let you know that He is both! He is revealed to us as both. Christ is the image of the invisible God.

On the one hand, God cannot be seen by human eyes. He is declared to be invisible. Paul also said this in a burst of praise in I Timothy Chapter 1 and Verse 17:

**<sup>17</sup>To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.**

And John Chapter 1 and Verse 18 states very bluntly:

**<sup>18</sup>No one has ever seen God; the only God, who is at the Father's side, he has made him known.**

Here in this text, it is revealed to us that Jesus, the Son of God, He is the image of the invisible God. That word *image* translates the Greek term *eikon*, and from that we get the English word *icon*. An icon is a visual representation or manifestation of a living being. So this is what is stated of Jesus, that He is the image of the invisible God.

In Exodus Chapter 4 and Verse 20 we read:

**<sup>4</sup>You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth.**

There should be no object of worship made by human hands to represent God because nothing that man can create can faithfully represent God. Yet, we read in Genesis Chapter 1 and Verse 27:

**<sup>27</sup>So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.**

So we read early in the pages of Scripture that human beings were made in the image of God. They were made to image forth to a certain extent God's nature as those who represent His rule on the earth. But this is only so to a certain extent. We image forth God in terms of His communicable attributes. His love. As those who represent Him on the earth and move forward His dominion.

That is how we were originally created. We were created as rational beings with intellect and emotion and volition that is on a level completely different from anything else in the created realm here on the earth.

But we do not share God's incommunicable attributes, such as eternity, immutability, omniscience, omnipotence, or omnipresence. And we do not bear God's image morally. God is holy. We are not. Beginning with Adam, "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." (Romans 3:23).

But there is One who bears God's image to the very core essence of all that God is. There is One who is the image of God. The visual representation of God. The visual manifestation of God in every way. It is said of Christ and of Christ alone:

**<sup>15</sup>He is the image of the invisible God**

In the Son of God, the unseen God images Himself forth in the fullness of God who is manifested in the perfect person, Jesus Christ the Godman. In Christ all that God is now dwells

in bodily form. He is the very image of God. In Christ there is found the fullness of all that God is. This is our Christ. This is our King. This is our Lord. This is our Savior.

So we recall Philip's request of Jesus on the eve of His crucifixion in John Chapter 14 and Verses 8 and 9. Philip said to Him after all that Jesus had taught them about the Father

**<sup>8</sup>...Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us.” <sup>9</sup>Jesus said to him, “Have I been with you so long, and you still do not know me, Phillip? Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.**

To see Christ is to see God. He is the image of the invisible God. This is our Christ. This is the Lord. So moving into this very special month, this month where we celebrate the incarnation of Christ, let us remember that Christ is the very image of God dwelling among us for the time that He was with us on this earth.

Jesus is the very image of God enthroned in Heaven. Christ is the Lord! We see this brought to us first here in this portion of Scripture. He is the image of the invisible God. Then Paul went on to emphasize that:

## **2. Christ is the firstborn of all creation.**

**<sup>15</sup>He is the image of the invisible God, *the firstborn of all creation.***

Understand that this is not to say that Christ is a created being. There is a difference between being the firstborn and the first-created. These are two totally different concepts which did in fact have two totally different words in the Greek language.

This is important for us to take to heart because beginning with a man by the name of Arius at the turn of the Fourth Century, a certain teaching has been popularized. It states that Christ being the firstborn is the first created of all of God's creatures. This false doctrine has been perpetuated by the Jehovah's Witness cult into the day that we live in now.

They will tell you that Christ is the first and the greatest of God's created beings, but He is not God Himself. That is not true. That is false doctrine. Christ was never created. Christ is the source of all things created. If there is anything that was created, it was created by Christ. Christ does not fall into the category of things created because He is the source of all things created.

The Jehovah Witness translation which is a false translation and which is a paraphrase based on false doctrine, they fill it with all other things created. That is not what the verse says. Christ is not a created being. He is the Creator of all things. So what did Paul mean then by Christ is the firstborn of all creation? How would the Jewish Rabi of the first century understand the term of firstborn? It is a glorious word and it is a very important word used to describe who our Jesus is.

The term firstborn, yes, it did originate speaking of those born first into a family chronologically, but this term came to be a common usage among the Jews to speak of a priority position which

was held by the eldest son. In Jewish tradition the firstborn son assumed a place of primacy and authority in the family clan. This term firstborn became a term of rank.

Even in the Old Testament, you will find an important statement to help you to understand the positional nature of the term firstborn. It is a very interesting statement. Psalm 89 is a messianic psalm. It was initially written speaking of the life of King David, Israel's greatest king of old, also looking forward to the Eternal Son of David, the Messiah. Look what it says of King David, the ancient King of Israel. Look how he is spoken of in Psalm 89 and Verses 20 and 27:

**<sup>20</sup>I have found David, my servant;  
with my holy oil I have anointed him  
<sup>27</sup>And I will make him the firstborn,  
the highest of the kings of the earth.**

That's very interesting. God was speaking of David as the one that He would appoint as the firstborn. Now every Sunday school teacher and graduate I hope would know that David was not the firstborn among the sons of Jesse. Where did David fall in the order of the sons of Jesse? He was like the runt of the litter.

When he was finally brought before Samuel for anointing, was he asking, Lord, that's him?! He was the seventh in chronological order, yet the Lord appointed David firstborn. If a person born seventh can be appointed firstborn, then a person uncreated can be appointed firstborn. That is what we have with Christ. He is the One who is first in rank. The Lord of Creation. The air and owner of all things, this is Christ.

If you want to know the relation of Jesus Christ to all things created, look at the language that is used of Him in this glorious hymn that is found in Colossians Chapter 1. Notice the different portions of language that are used of Jesus, the Son of God.

**<sup>16</sup>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.***

All things were created by the Son of God. He was present and directly involved in everything that we read in Genesis Chapter 1. When God said, "Let there be light," it was the Son of God commanding forth the existence of creation. Just like it was the command of the Son of God at the grave of Lazarus, calling the dead man to come forth, so it was the command of the Son of God calling all creation to come forth at the beginning of the universe. This is Christ! All things were created by Him.

All things were created through Him. This indicates to us that others were involved. Our God is the One Triune God, Father, Son, and Spirit. They are one and they share one name; one name into which we are baptized—Father and the Son and the Spirit. At creation, it was the will of the Father being expressed through the command of the Son, the Father being the Divine Architect. The Son being the Master Worker, with the power of the Holy Spirit applied and reverberating through it all. All things were created by Him. All things were created through Him.

And all things were created for Him. This is especially where we gain the meaning of what it is that Christ is the firstborn of all creation. All things were created by Him, through Him, and for Him. He is the heir of it all. He inherits it all. He owns it all. It all comes under His feet and under His rule. The entire universe is the property of the Son of God. It is His dominion, and He has ultimate dominion. He is the creator and the owner of all things. Everything that has existence, has a little tag on it that says, Made by and for the Son of God. Brothers and sisters, He is God. This is Christ. Christ Jesus the Lord, Creator of all things.

Social media, things like Instagram and Facebook they have their ups and downs. Right now I want to show you one of the pluses of social media. (Pastor shows overhead of a drawing of a honeybee on a flower.) I found this on my social media this morning on Facebook. With my message this morning in my heart, I felt this was perfect. This is a drawing of a honeybee that was drawn by none other than Christy Schumacher.

This is a piece of artwork from our sister's hand and with it came this statement: "I'm convinced that God created honeybees just to show us the tiniest glimpse of His wonder and joy. If you have never watched a documentary of honeybees, I hope you will. Take a moment to marvel at how they live for their work and community. How they are brilliant architects and how they communicate through dance. I've been amazed by them since I was a kid and absolutely had to draw one for Day 5."

This is just a picture of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ, who creates and sustains all things. Honeybees, humpbacked whales, hummingbirds, human beings, the Milky Way, a perfect set wave at Huntington Beach, Half Dome, Mount McKinley, the Marianas Trench deep down in the Pacific Rim.

Christ is the Creator of all things. This is the One who is found incarnate, placed in the manger of Bethlehem—Jesus our Lord! I hope His glory is filling our hearts by the work of the Spirit by the Word of God.

Having established Christ as the firstborn of all creation, this great position of rank held by the Son of God, Paul went on to focus on a particular aspect of God's created order. Now Paul spoke of all the potentates; all of the power positions that are found in the created realm.

**<sup>16</sup>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.**

Here Paul spoke of the highly organized system of regional power. There are all of these spheres and positions of power and authority. We don't need to go through and try to define each one. There are probably some overlap. The big point is that Jesus owns them all. He has created them all. The whole system of authority, it exists at the visible and the invisible level. Isn't that interesting to think about?

So Paul was very much aware of the organized Roman state of which he was a citizen. There was the emperor, who presided as the ruler over the realm. Then under him there were kings, and there prefects, and there were governors—all with their spheres of power. And there was Paul on house arrest, writing this letter, awaiting his trial before Caesar Nero and he was awaiting his trial with confidence, because he knew that whatever power Nero had, he was under the rule and the dominion of Jesus Christ.

Whether Paul's trial turned out for his own life or death, he knew that Jesus Christ would use it for His glorious purposes and Jesus had the ability to turn the heart of any king like a watercourse. So Paul was confident in the supremacy of Christ over Nero and any other ruler on this earth. Jesus is the King of kings! Jesus is the Lord of lords.

What we find when as we look through the writings of Paul is that, while he did speak of the authorities like in I Timothy Chapter 2, he also tells us that we need to be praying for earthly authorities, but perhaps even more often, Paul spoke of invisible powers and authorities and dominions, these rulers and authorities.

He used this language throughout his epistles and something of a companion epistle to the book of Colossians is the book of Ephesians, another prison epistle. Paul spoke using the language of rulers and authorities there too, where he said in Ephesians Chapter 6 and Verse 12:

**<sup>12</sup>For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.**

So Paul was here speaking of an unseen realm. There are dominions and authorities in the Bible that speak of holy angles on one side of the equation. It is evident from the study of the book of Daniel that angels, they do their work mysteriously and they do so regionally. But this is also the case with the unseen evil spirits—demons, and that is what Paul spoke about in Ephesians Chapter 6.

Paul used the language of rulers and authorities similarly of the demonic realm even in the book of Colossians in Colossians Chapter 2 and Verses 14 and 15. In Colossians Chapter 2, Paul spoke of the written record of debt, which would include your infractions against God's Holy Law—the record of guilt; how we, particularly individually, there was a record of our transgressions the Holy Law of God.

Does anybody know what Christ did with that record of debt? That is what is in view here in Colossian Chapter 2. It says:

**<sup>14</sup>by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. <sup>15</sup>He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.**

Somehow your guilt was the power that they would wield. Now in Christ, if you have come to faith in Him, if your eyes have been awakened by the grace of God and you are trusting in Jesus



as Messiah, your record of guilt has been nailed to the cross. It has been done away with and so has any power that the demons hold over you.

Your guilt has been nailed to the cross. It has been killed and crucified. This is something that we can take to heart as those who have entered into the provision of Jesus Christ, fleeing the wrath to come upon those who don't trust Christ, sheltered in the work that Jesus did on the cross for us. The guilt has been removed.

Think of the great relevance that this had for the Colossian context and for our context as well. For the Colossians, they lived in a world where there was full-on paganism, polytheism, all of the dark spirits that were lurking behind false gods.

Paul would never have validated the pagan deities as the actual gods that they were presented as. There is no Zeus. There is no Apollos. There is no Artemus. They don't actually exist, but Paul would absolutely attest to the dark spiritual realities behind them.

There are places today like Colossae, places that are tormented by evil spirits and the people feel like they have to placate these spirits, and Paul said, Christ owns them all. He presides over them all. You don't need to placate them. You are in Christ. In Christ you are fortified and secured in the One who reigns over all, and there is no guilt that demons can hold against you, because your guilt has been washed away. That was his message to the Colossians. What a glorious thing!

Imagine if you owed a crippling loan at a local bank. But the head of that bank, the owner of the whole operation, declared your debt forgiven. There is nothing that any lesser employee of the bank could do or say otherwise against you. No clerk at any window could trouble you about that previous loan. Neither could any branch manager.

Is that a clear and full picture of what Christ has done for His people, His church? No, it is not! That is not the fullness of the glorious doctrine of justification by faith. Because not only has he cleared the debt away, but just imagine that your bank account now has a trillion, zillion dollars in it. You have been credited the righteousness of Jesus.

So Paul was saying that you have no need to placate any demon that is going to whisper guilt in your ear. I wonder if this truth needs to be resonating in anybody's heart today, because there are false demonic spirits that still dwell in the unseen realm around us. They do hold people in bondage by guilt and fear.

Some brothers and sisters in our church can tell us about life in India with Hinduism and the whole false Pantheon of false gods who people try to placate and how brothers and sisters in that county are born again and saved out of it and set free by the One who takes all of their guilt away and washes them white as snow and puts His righteousness their account.

There are people even here in the Western World, people in the Unites States. who mess around with Spiritism; doing seances; trying to contact somebody from beyond; opening a Pandora's

Box with dark spirits and are held in fear. Jesus Christ owns everything. Demons are going to be crushed under His feet and you need to fear no dark spirit.

As we see what is written here in Colossians, above all it may be that there are voices whispering in your ear that your sin is too great to be forgiven—there is a depth to your sin that God cannot reach in Christ. That is a lie from a demonic spirit. Christ is a glorious Savior, and His grace is greater than all our sins.

As our hearts are shown the guilt of sin and we understand that in Christ a provision has come to take that sin away and wash us before the Throne of God, to make us white as snow and to cover us the clothing of His grace, it is then that we are set free. May your eyes be opened to the One whose grace is greater than all of our sins.

May you know that in Christ you can have a very white Christmas. In Christ we have a white Christmas because our sins are washed. We are white as snow and we are covered in the most glorious garments of salvation. We are not deserving of it, but God gives it as a gift of His grace.

We can't work for it. We can never purchase it. It is a gift that is given by grace through faith; by what Christ did by entering into his realm of darkness, conquering sin and Satan, dying for sin and being raised up on the third day. We worship Him.

So as we approach the Lord's Supper, I pray that you and I together as a church, we will rejoice in what Christ has accomplished for us. If you are here and you have burdens of sin that you would like prayer for, we will have people in the prayer room which is straight through the back door to the right.

There are people there that can come along side of you and pray with you. If you want to know what it is to become a Christian, to follow Jesus Christ, you will find help and support there as well.

For now, let's go to the Lord in pray and ask God to give us such clarity as to who our Savior is, that we might come and sing with Him and then commune with Him at this table that He sets before us. Let's pray.