

## Advent 2020: God With The Church, Colossians 1:15-20, 12/6/20

I would like to also share some encouraging news about some plans that we are putting in place to better shepherd and care for our church family. Long before COVID hit, it has been my vision to develop and implement a plan to proactively shepherd, disciple and care for our congregation. COVID has accentuated the urgency and importance of this need because with three staff pastors and a large congregation, we just don't have the ability to be everything we would like to be to the flock. Behind the scenes I have been working to develop lay shepherds as well as a better system of congregational care. Our plan was to begin rolling out a fully orbed shepherding model to you in this past summer, before all our plans got rearranged by COVID. But starting in January, we will be rolling out our pastoral care initiative. Our goal over the next 18 months is to get to the place where every person who calls BVBC their church home has a shepherd and support team whose responsibility is to proactively encourage, support, care for and pray for you by name. It will take time to develop and carry out a fully orbed plan, but in the meantime, we have a team of about 10 shepherds and additional support, who will begin coordinating care for our church family. Look for more information in my Year End Letter that will be sent out later this month. As always, if you would like a pastor to reach out to you use the connection card. Let's pray.

I want to introduce our Advent series by having us consider the significance of this word: "With". As most of you know, my wife's father passed away last Sunday from his battle with cancer. Thank you for all your prayers, cards, support. At the funeral yesterday, there were many family and friends who shared stories that all conveyed the significance of WITH. How meaningful it was to be with Scott in the band, with Scott listening to music, with Him during a hard time, with Him at the end of his life. And isn't that most often the case at funerals? And the reason for that is quite clear: God created us for "with"- supporting, loving, inspiring relationships with each other and most importantly with Him. But our sin and rebellion has broken our relationship with God. But because God loves us so much He set out to restore our broken relationship so that He can be with us again. He spoke through the prophet **Isaiah 7:14** *Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.*

**[Title Slide]** Which means God with Us, this was fulfilled in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Our goal throughout this series is to discover the power of "God With Us." Today, we want to look at a passage that captures this understanding of Jesus as God with us. Do you know the first Christmas carol ever written? Kind of a trick question. We don't know for sure, but it's likely the very passage we are studying today, Colossians 1:15-20. Scholars believe that this passage was actually a Christmas carol, a worship song about incarnation of Jesus, that was sung among the early church that Paul is quoting in his letter. In this letter we are going to see two essential truths about the Incarnation: Jesus is God, and Jesus was sent to be God with us.

### **Jesus is God Incarnate**

<sup>15</sup> *The Son is the image of the invisible God.*

God is invisible; he is spirit; human eye cannot see him. So how can he be known and seen? Through the 2<sup>nd</sup> person of the trinity- The Son, Jesus. He is the "Image"- the Greek word Icon- the likeness...But it's far more than just a resemblance. After all we are made in the "image" of God, in that we have characteristics of God- morality, relational qualities... But Paul means something far more than a resemblance. Just a few verses later <sup>19</sup>*For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him.* Paul is describing the incarnation- Deity dwelt in human flesh in Jesus Christ.

**Hebrews 1:3**

*The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being.*

Jesus is the ultimate revealer of God to humanity. John 1:18 summarizes it perfectly- *No one has ever seen God, but the one and only Son, who is himself God and is in closest relationship with the Father, has made him known.*

Jesus is not just like God, Jesus is not the closest thing to God, Jesus even isn't second-in-command to God...He is God revealed in the flesh.

**Jesus is God the Creator**

<sup>16</sup>*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.*

Now for some of us that might be the first time we've heard that. Maybe you think of God the Father as the one who made the universe, in a sense he did- but the agent by which the Godhead created the universe was through the Son, Jesus.

**John 1:3** *Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made.*

Some of us need to readjust our view of Jesus... Yes, Jesus is meek and mild, humble, that is in fact depicted in the incarnation of Jesus as a baby in a manger in Christmas... but we also need to come to grips with the overwhelming splendor of Jesus as the Creator. Astrophysicists tell us that the largest sun in our universe is **Canis Majoris (Picture)**. It's the brightest of these on the screen. Now to get just a sense of how big Canis Majoris is here's a **picture of our sun compared to Canis Majoris (show picture)**. You could fit 7 Quadrillion earths inside Canis Majoris. Jesus made that. **Revelation 1:16** *In his right hand he held seven stars.* He could hold Canis Majoris like a marble in His hand.

Not only did He make everything, it's all for Him. For His glory, like we said like week- you exist for the glory of Christ. He made you very purposefully to show His glory through you. It also means He is our owner. We belong to Him because we are stamped with His design.

**Jesus is God the Sustainer**

<sup>17</sup>*He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.*

He is not the aloof God of the deists who wound the world like a clock and then let it go. He is personally, actively the sun, stars, planets...and you and me together. Nuclear scientist for decades have been studying **the atom (show picture)**, the essential building blocks of all matter in the universe. Inside our bodies are quadrillions of these atoms. The big question that still is ultimately unanswered by scientists is what holds these atoms together since the positive and negative charges (protons, electrons, neutrons...) in the subatomic particles in theory should not hold together. Karl Darrow, a physicist with the Bell Labs in New York City, said that, *"These nuclei have no right to be alive at all. In fact, they never should have been created; and if they were created, they should have been blown up instantly. Yet there they are. Some inflexible inhibition is relentlessly holding them together."* Now science can label these mysterious forces, which they have but as Christians we know the ultimate answer... He holds atoms together. He created the "inflexible inhibition" holding them together! And friends, just like if the Sun wasn't the center of our solar system all the planets would crumble, if Christ isn't the center of your life, holding everything together, we will crumble too.

Jesus in all his powerful creative might and splendor and glory and supremacy...and then Paul shifts to how this amazing God man is with us.

### **Jesus is With Us**

#### **Jesus is God with the Church**

*<sup>18</sup> And he is the head of the body, the church.*

In this analogy Paul is communicating at least three things about Jesus in his relationship to us.

**#1 Jesus is personally connected to us.** Kind of obvious that heads and bodies go together. In the same way that your head is connected and intimately present in everything your body does, so Jesus is personal and intimately present our individual believers and corporate lives as a church.

**#2 Our relationship with Jesus is vital to our spiritual maturity.** In the same way our brains send vital signals and create vital chemicals to develop our bodies, so too Jesus is the vital connection to our spiritual growth individually and corporately.

Ephesians 4:15-16

*<sup>15</sup> Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.*

*<sup>16</sup> From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.*

**#3 Jesus is our loving leader.** If you love your body you will lead your body towards things that are good for it- diet, exercise, avoiding certain dangers and getting to the doctor...in the same way, Jesus loves His body the church and so He leads us through His word and His spirit toward what is best, and healthiest and leads us to paths of life and how to avoid what will harm us.

**Slide** Do you know there are diseases that cause the body to no longer responds to the brain? The brain wants the legs to move, or the arms to grab...but the body isn't responding. Do you know that disease can also affect the church? That happens when the church doesn't respond to the commands of Jesus in Scripture and decides a pastor, or the deacons, or members of the congregation are the commander-in-chief.

I want to remind you of my message from our 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary because it was a reflection on the supremacy of Jesus Christ in our church. This was I shared:

"This should cause us to pause in reflection as we consider the next 50 years and what Jesus would say to us. What will keep us from drifting into theological error that is rampant in our day as it was in Paul's, and certainly will be over the next 50 years? What will protect us from erecting sacred cows of programs, buildings, budgets, or "the way we've always done things"? What will make sure that we aren't overcome by conflict, division or immorality? What will ensure that we remain healthy and effective? What does it look like for God to keep his faithful hand on us? Only one answer to that question: We make sure Jesus Christ is supreme here. That he is the head of our church. The supremacy of Christ, who is the great shepherd and we are the sheep, the bridegroom and we are the bride. The cornerstone of the building which is the church. The true vine of which we are the branches. The author and perfecter of our faith, the Alpha and the Omega. The redeemer. Our first and only true love. Jesus Christ our Lord."

**Title Slide** In summary- Jesus is Immanuel, God with us. He is God incarnate. The almighty creator and sustainer of our lives. He is God with us- He is our head- intimately and vitality connected to us, and our loving leader. And because He is God with us- we know that he is simultaneously all-powerful and our intimate friend. He has all the authority and he walks with us through every pain and dark moment in our lives. He runs the universe and yet He has time to talk with me, guide me, comfort me and sustain us. This is the key to our spiritual walk with Christ.

**J.C. Ryle:** *"You'll never grow as a Christian until you develop a personal intimacy with the Lord Jesus; until you deal with him as you would a best friend—turn to him first in every need;*

*consult him at every step; talk to him about all your difficulties; spread before him all your sorrows; allow him to share in all your joys; do all things as in his sight; to go through every day leaning on him."*<sup>1</sup>

Is Jesus at arms length and distant or is He Immanuel to you today? Conversation with man-scale of 1 to 10, who are you doing spiritually? 1-2...Struggling, drifting, angry about all kinds of things, and felt ashamed so he has been avoiding Jesus and anywhere I might find Him. I had the opportunity to encourage Him to encounter Immanuel.

---

<sup>1</sup> J.C. Ryle, Growth in Grace, 1879

Now, how it is that this Holy, perfect, all powerful, creator and sustainer of the all things can be with a sinner like me?

**Jesus paved the way to be With Us forever.**

*<sup>20</sup> 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.*

How do we know Jesus is with us through the darkest moments in our lives? Because He went through the darkest moment in history for you- His crucifixion. What made that moment so dark is not just his suffering or even his death. It was having to take on himself all the sins of rebellious humanity. Taking on all our sin that makes us enemies of God. Through the shedding of his blood he paved the way for peace- to be reconciled with God.

Communion