

## FULLNES OF LIFE THROUGH CHRISTMAS Colossians 1:15-23

"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. <sup>16</sup> For everything was created by Him, in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him. <sup>17</sup> He is before all things, and by Him all things hold together. <sup>18</sup> He is also the head of the body, the church; He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He might come to have first place in everything. <sup>19</sup> For God was pleased to have all His fullness dwell in Him, <sup>20</sup> and through Him to reconcile everything to Himself by making peace through the blood of His cross—whether things on earth or things in heaven. <sup>21</sup> Once you were alienated and hostile in your minds because of your evil actions. <sup>22</sup> But now He has reconciled you by His physical body through His death, to present you holy, faultless, and blameless before Him— <sup>23</sup> if indeed you remain grounded and steadfast in the faith and are not shifted away from the hope of the gospel that you heard. This gospel has been proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and I, Paul, have become a servant of it."

### INTRODUCTION

As the year 1809 dawned, French armies sweeping through Austria appeared to be the most momentous event on earth. Under the leadership of Napoleon Bonaparte (1769-1821), France would soon triumph for the fifth consecutive time over coalition forces, claspng most of Europe within its Empire. Few then gave thought to the impact any babies might soon have upon this planet. But 1809 witnessed some remarkably significant births, like William Gladstone, destined to become one of Britain's finest Christian statesmen as Prime Minister under Queen Victoria. His policies and reforms bettered the lives of millions. That same year, a small town minister welcomed a son who became the celebrated Victorian poet, Alfred Tennyson. Renowned for his lyric quality and his passion for our Savior, Tennyson authored the phrase, "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of." On the American continent, Oliver Wendell Holmes, born in Cambridge, MA, emerged as one of the most influential Justices in history of the U. S. Supreme Court. Not far away in Boston, the intensely brilliant and macabre writer, Edgar Allan Poe, began his eventful, albeit tragic, life. That same year, an infant born in a rugged log cabin in Hardin County, KY, would do more to enshrine liberty and virtue as the twin pillars of society for all citizens of the United States of America than anyone since George Washington. The boy's name? Abraham Lincoln. If there had been news broadcasts in early 1809, we would likely have heard, "The destiny of the world is being shaped on an Austrian battlefield today." But history was actually being shaped in the cradles of England and America in vastly more far-reaching ways. In the reign of Caesar Augustus, most thought his taxation census was the big news. But a Jewish virgin named Mary cradled the greatest news of all, which angels announced to shepherds in these words: "'For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord'" (**Luke 2:1-11**, ESV).

Today we are bombarded with newscasts. The tentacles of media often hostile to the values of **Jesus Christ** can wrap themselves around every heart in America, in every home, and at every moment. How easy is it to lose sight of what is most important in life and get entangled in activities, ambitions, and attitudes that disgrace our name as Christians and wound our Savior's heart? Last year (2015), Tesco, a British supermarket in Wrexham, England, posted a help-wanted ad, seeking a part-time worker with a very specific set of skills: a "Christmas Light Untangler." The supermarket was launching a new service. Customers could bring in their messy Christmas lights to be untangled. The ad called for candidates who could untangle 10' of lights in less than three minutes, as well as check the bulbs for signs of breakage. The posting also said the ideal candidate for the 36-hour-per-week job would "be passionate about Christmas." Would you find it difficult to be "passionate about Christmas" while untangling countless Christmas tree lights? Today's focus, Fullness of Life Through Christmas, can help us maintain our passion for the Christ of Christmas and the quality of life He alone can offer us, despite temptations that seek to mislead us to our ruin and troubles of life that may entangle or exasperate us!

In **John 10:8-10** (GNT), **Jesus** sharply contrasts the destructive impact of being misled by society's false prophets or the devil's crowd with the quality of life He alone can offer to any who humbly embrace Him as their personal Lord and Savior. "All others who came before Me are thieves and robbers, . . . <sup>10</sup> The thief comes only in order to steal, kill, and destroy. I have come in order that you might have life—life in all its fullness." To experience the fullness of life the Son of God made available to us by coming to earth that first Christmas, first of all we must...

### **I. AFFIRM JESUS AS LORD OF CREATION (Colossians 1:15-17)**

The Bible is very clear here. **Jesus** is God. "He is the image of the invisible God." When you look at a penny, you see President Lincoln's image imprinted on that coin. Though invisible to us, that image shows us what he looks like. When we look at **Jesus** as described in Scripture, He shows us what God looks like. He makes the invisible God visible. **John 1:18** (NIV) declares, "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** Himself said, "The one who has seen Me has seen the Father" (**John 14:9**). Origen, a Church leader of the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, had a great analogy. He told of a village with a huge statue—so immense no one could see who it was supposed to represent. Finally, someone miniaturized the statue so people could see the person it honored. Origen said, "That is what God did in his Son." **Jesus Christ**, the Son of God in human flesh, is the self-miniaturization "of the invisible God."

Not only is **Jesus Christ**, "the image of the invisible God." He is also "the firstborn over all creation." This does not mean **Jesus** was the first created in sequence. "Firstborn" speaks of a person's status within a family, not the sequence of his birth. It speaks of the primary heir in the family and the one entitled to leadership authority over the extended family, next to the father. Throughout the extended family of every creature on earth, and especially the family of humankind "made in the "image" and "likeness" of God (**Genesis 1:26**), there is but one entitled to exercises the privileges of the "firstborn": the Son of God.

**Jesus Christ** "is the image of the invisible God." He is "the firstborn over all creation." "All things have" also "been created through Him and for Him." "For everything was created by Him, in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him." Who was the instrument of bringing the vast reaches of the material universe into existence, carrying out the wishes of God the Father? Who created the wondrous ranks of angels and rules over various powers and authorities in the spirit world? Who is the origin of all that is created, the means by which it came into existence, and its purpose for existing? **Jesus Christ**, the unique Son of God, our Creator, and our Re-creator by the gift of salvation (**II Corinthians 5:17**).

In William Steig's children's book, *Yellow & Pink* (1988), two wooden figures wake up to find themselves lying on an old newspaper in the hot sun. One figure is painted yellow, the other pink. Suddenly, Yellow sits up and asks, "Do you know what we're doing here?" The two marionettes begin to debate the origin of their existence. Pink surveys their well-formed features and concludes, "Someone must have made us." Yellow disagrees. "I say we're an accident," and he outlines a hypothetical scenario of how it might have happened. A branch might have broken off a tree and fallen on a sharp rock, splitting one end of the branch into two legs. Then the wind might have sent it tumbling down a hill until it was chipped and shaped. Perhaps a flash of lightning struck in such a way as to splinter the wood into arms and fingers. Eyes might have been formed by woodpeckers boring in the wood. "With enough time," Yellow says, "a thousand, a million, maybe two-and-a-half million years, lots of unusual things could happen. Why not us?" The two figures argue back and forth. Then a man comes out of a nearby house, strolls over to the marionettes, picks them up and checks their paint. "Nice and dry," he says, tucks them under his arm, and goes back toward the house. Peering out from under the man's arm, Yellow whispers in Pink's ear, "Who is this guy?" When **Jesus**, our creator, shows up to judge our readiness for heaven, many will say, "Who is this guy?" They will discover too late that accidental chance did not create them, but the Son of God!

Yet, **vs. 17** of our text reveals something even more astonishing: **Jesus** "is before all things, and by Him all things hold together"! Have you held positive or negative ends of two magnets together and felt the strength of their repulsive power? Positively charged protons are clustered within the nucleus of each atom. Why don't these protons repel each other and destroy the atom? According to a July 2009 Parade magazine article, the scientists at Fermilab (near Chicago) are searching for what they have nicknamed "the God particle." They believe an elusive subatomic particle exists. It's never been observed under laboratory tests, but something mysterious allows all other particles in the universe to have mass and come together to form everything around us. According to one Fermilab scientist, without the "God particle," "atoms would have no integrity, so there would be no chemical bonding, no stable structures—no liquids or solids—and, of course, no physicists and no reporters." Other scientists call this binding factor the "strong nuclear force." They have observed it at work but still cannot explain its existence because proton clusters defy nuclear physics. But **vs. 17** reveals the mysterious "God particle" is not a particle; He's a person, **Jesus Christ**. "[B]y Him all things hold together." The Greek word for "holds together" literally means, "cause to stand together" or "to cohere in mutual dependence."

In other words, the superintending, protective hand of each atom's Creator is required to sustain each atom, including every atom of our physical bodies. Otherwise, we'd dissolve into nothingness. **II Peter 3:10** foretells when **Jesus Christ** will no longer hold everything in our universe together: "But the Day of the Lord will come like a thief; on that day the heavens will pass away with a loud noise, the elements will burn and be dissolved, and the earth and the works on it will be disclosed." The thunderous roar of the heavens passing away could result from a massive nuclear explosion as the protons from trillions upon trillions of atoms fly apart, convicting everyone of the necessity of Christ's hand to sustain our mortal bodies moment-by-moment. "And the works on it will be disclosed" ("laid bare"—NIV) means Christ's Second Coming will also reveal how much our lives were centered upon **Jesus** as our Creator, Sustainer, Savior, and Lord. **II Peter 3:11** (NIV) confronts us with these challenging words: "Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives."

Based upon **Colossians 1:15-17** alone, it's overwhelmingly obvious **Jesus Christ** has every right to first place over all of His creation, including us. As God's Son in human flesh, **Jesus** is the self-miniaturization "of the invisible God," the one who best reveals what our Heavenly Father is like. He's also "the firstborn over all creation"; His Father's primary heir and the only one entitled to exercise a "firstborn's" privileges over all of creation as the Son of God. "Everything was" also "created by Him, in heaven and on earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things have been created through Him and for Him." **Jesus Christ** is, therefore, the origin of all that is created, the means by which it came into existence, and its purpose for even existing. **Jesus** even supplies the "God particle" that allows all other particles in the universe to have mass and come together to form everything around us. "He is before all things, and by Him all things hold together."

I asked you earlier, "How easy is it to lose sight of what is most important in life and get entangled in activities, ambitions, and attitudes that disgrace our name as Christians and wound our Savior's heart?" We know **Jesus Christ** truly deserve first place in our attention, should supersede every other affection, and is worthy of our adoration. But we greedily seek wealth, lazily seek ease, lustfully crave pleasure, or pridefully become consumed with fame or self-importance. We make idols of family or career, allow hobbies to overly preoccupy us, or allow current events to blind us to the ultimate importance of the single greatest event ever to impact this planet: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. . . .<sup>14</sup> The Word became flesh and took up residence among us. We observed His glory, the glory as the One and Only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (**John 1:1, 14**).

## CONCLUSION

In a *Focus on the Family Magazine* article from the year 2000, Dianne Matthews describes an incident from her childhood. While in the 1st grade, the little girl behind her brought a beautiful tiny Christmas gift to school one day and placed it on her desk. It was wrapped in white glossy paper and tied up with a sliver of red cellophane. "Immediately," Diane says, "I was captivated. I had never seen anything so exquisite. Day after day, the tiny gift caught my eye, and my active imagination tried to guess what miniature treasure might be inside. It had to be something wondrous beyond description." Diane became obsessed with not only longing to behold this special treasure, but with claiming it as her own. As she states, "I deserved it because I desired it." She rode an early bus to school, so it was a simple matter for her to slip into the empty classroom one morning. She writes, "My hands eagerly tore open the tiny present. Inside I found—nothing. Staring at the destruction in my hand, anticipation dissolved into disappointment and confusion. Gradually my stunned mind grasped the fact that the little package had been nothing more than a hollow decoration. I sat at my desk with the empty paper and an empty feeling, sickened by the knowledge of my guilt." Diane goes on to say, "Little did I know that morning that this scene would repeat itself many times in my life. As I grew up the world enticed me with all sorts of shiny, gaily wrapped 'presents' that caught my eye and promised happiness. Too often, when I accepted what the world was offering and tore away the wrappings, my excited expectations were replaced by feelings of emptiness. Over and over I found myself proving the old cliché: 'You can't judge a gift by its wrapping.'"

The Son of God came to earth that first Christmas more than 2,000 years ago to give His life to allow us to gain the forgiveness of our Heavenly Father, become reconciled to Him in our hearts, and to be rescued from the horrors of an everlasting Hell. But even more than that, **Jesus Christ** tells us in the words of **John 10:10** (GNT): "I have come in order that you might have life—life in all its fullness." We experience a fully satisfying life, and the peacefully complete quality of life **Jesus** alone can give us, to the extent we live for Him and for Him alone. We honor Him as "the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation," the one "through Him and by Him" we "have been created"; the One who "is before all things, and by Him all things hold together," by not allowing any blessing or opportunity He allows us to enjoy to displace Him. The fullness of the promises of Christmas are lost upon us unless **Jesus Christ** retains first place in our affection, our attention, and our adoration!