

The First Christmas Carol

Text: **Colossians 1:15-23**

Intro: One of the most wonderful and familiar distinctions about Christmas is the special music of the season. Almost everyone has a favorite Christmas carol or hymn. The majority of those chosen as number one favorite by people all over the world have the coming of the Savior, the birth of the Lord Jesus, as their theme – even for those who say that they don't believe in Jesus Christ, don't believe in God even.

One recent survey showed that the **top fifteen favorite Christmas carols** all had a Christian theme. Let me run down the titles for just the first five and you will see what I mean:

1. O Holy Night
2. Oh Come All Ye Faithful
3. What Child is This
4. O Come, O Come, Emmanuel
5. We Three Kings of Orient Are

My favorite, is **O Come All Ye Faithful**. I'm sure that you have a favorite, also. And, I wouldn't be at all surprised if that favorite of yours said something about Jesus, our Savior and Lord, coming to be born here on earth. I wouldn't be surprised if it said something about how He became humble and became one of us and that it was for our benefit. And, I wouldn't be at all surprised if that favorite Christmas carol glorified God in some way.

Many scholars believe that the magnificent description of Jesus Christ found in verses Colossians 1:15-20, is an early Christian hymn that Paul is quoting. These words also comprise some of the earliest verses of the very first of all Christmas carols that have come down through the ages. The tune for this hymn has been lost in ages past, but the words remain, and they focus upon the overall supremacy of our Lord. There are four aspects of this passage that I want to address:

I. **Person and Position of Christ - Who is this Jesus?**

Col 1:15-20 (NIV) 15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16 For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. 17 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 and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy.

-image of God - revealed in two thoughts: first: Likeness- exact likeness of God, second
- manifestation: Christ is the image of God in the sense that the nature and being of God

are perfectly revealed in him (John 1:18)

-The word “firstborn” here has to do with birthright, not order of birth. Throughout history, and especially Hebrew history, the firstborn son was regarded as sacred to God and a special sacrifice was to be made if the child lived beyond the first thirty days. The firstborn has special rights, responsibilities and privileges. And, it was the firstborn of the royal household to whom the crown and the throne would be passed when the king either retired or died.

Now, there are many other significant factors that distinguish the firstborn in Sacred literature, but suffice it to say, **in this context the focus** is on the preeminence of Jesus Christ. What do we mean by “preeminence”? Preeminence means primacy, superiority, dominance, supremacy and incomparability. He is supreme he is above all. This part of the passage teaches that Jesus Christ is the Father’s representative and heir and has the management of the divine household (all creation) committed to him. He is thus Lord over all God’s creation.

II. Purpose - Why did he come to earth?

Col 1:19-20 (NIV) 19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, 20 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.

Christ Jesus came to bring mankind back into relationship with their creator and to create in us new life. (2 Corinthians 5:17). All the rules changed when Jesus came and was born in Bethlehem those many years ago. There is an old Christmas carol that tells this beautifully:

Let All Mortal Flesh Keep Silence

Let all mortal flesh keep silence,
And with fear and trembling stand;
Ponder nothing earthly minded,
For with blessing in His hand,
Christ our God to earth descendeth,
Our full homage to demand.

King of kings, yet born of Mary,
As of old on earth He stood,
Lord of lords, in human vesture,
In the body and the blood;
He will give to all the faithful
His own self for heavenly food.

Rank on rank the host of heaven
Spreads its vanguard on the way,
As the Light of light descendeth
From the realms of endless day,
That the powers of hell may vanish
As the darkness clears away.

At His feet the six winged seraph,
Cherubim with sleepless eye,
Veil their faces to the presence,
As with ceaseless voice they cry:
Alleluia, Alleluia
Alleluia, Lord Most High!

-All the fullness of God dwells in Jesus Christ, which means that Jesus is fully God – as much as the father is. It also means that, just as Jesus said in John 14:9, “He who has seen me has seen the Father.” Notice how carefully the apostle links together the deity of Jesus Christ with His reconciling work. Jesus had to be God to do what he did!

One Bible teacher said it this way: "The world is lost without a sense of God. Men and women everywhere desperately need to know that there is Someone in charge of life, and that there is a Source to whom they can turn for help and for deliverance. The world needs to know that Jesus Christ is God. If Jesus is not God, then I do not have a Savior."

If Jesus is not God, then there is nothing that can cross the “Grand Canyon” caused by sin that separates God and man.

And, that is why Christianity is so offensive to people of other faiths. They want us to be tolerant”, they want us to deny what we know to be true – they want us to deny what God has said repeatedly in His Word, especially what Jesus Himself said about being the only way.

No matter what anyone says, no matter what argument they may have against it, **Jesus Christ is the reason for the season!** God came to earth as an infant to identify with us, suffer with us, pay the price for our sins, and then return to Heaven to rule and to reign for eternity.

The glory of Christmas is that Jesus Christ is the answer to every dilemma we find ourselves in as individuals and as the whole human race.

III. Provision - What does it mean for us right now?

Col 1:21-23 (NIV): 21 Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior. 22 But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation-- 23 if you continue in your faith, established and firm, not moved from the hope held out in the gospel. This is the gospel that you heard and that has been proclaimed to every creature under heaven, and of which I, Paul, have become a servant.

-This is one of the clearest summaries of the salvation message in all of Scripture. Reconciliation really is what Christmas is all about – it isn't about gifts and giving and family and food – it is about reconciliation between God and man.

-If you look elsewhere in Scripture, you will find the word "reconcile" used in many contexts. In Ephesians 2:11-22 (cf 16), for instance, Paul uses it of the breaking down the barriers between Jew and Gentile and reconciling them into one body. Through the Gospel penetrating into both cultures, they were now able to live in harmony in ways

they never had been before.

-There are several instances where the Scriptures speak of being reconciled to one another. It tells us that brother believers are to be reconciled to one another (Matthew 5:24), that husbands and wives are to be reconciled to one another (1 Corinthians 7:11).

-You see, the basic meaning of this word reconcile is "to remove all impediments to peace" so that harmony prevails. Just as Christmas is a time when reconciliation between God and man through the humbling of His Son, Christmas should be the time when we are reconciled to one another.

IV. Prospect of our Future - What does it mean for our future?

Finally, We ask the question. What does it mean, then, in **Col 1:19-20 (NIV)** "19 For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, 20 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."?

-It means a day is coming when the hostility of evil against righteousness will be brought to a sudden halt. It means that evil men and angels will find themselves unable to function in their enmity against God. All rebellion against God will be subdued and come to an end. It does not mean that their punishment ends; it just means that their active hostility will cease.

-Just as Paul tells us in **Philippians 2:10-11** that the day is coming when "every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord."

And, on that day, we will understand many things that we never understood before. Our questions will be answered, our doubts will be erased, our tears will be wiped away. We will have every hurt, disappointment and fear resolved.

-In Isaiah 11, there is a long discourse by God where He tells us through the prophet what those days will be like. Verse 9 says: **Isaiah 11:9 (NIV)** 9 They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.

Every hurt will be resolved, every tear will be wiped away, every pain will be relieved. At last the whole universe will live in peace and harmony with one another. "Nothing shall hurt or destroy in all God's holy mountain." Read the great promises of Isaiah in this regard. What glorious language he employs to picture an earth where nothing is out of step, nothing is eccentric, nothing is out of balance; everything is in harmony with everything else. That is what this declares. Surely this is what Paul is describing in that great passage in Philippians. An hour is coming when "every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is

Lord to the glory of God the Father." That is where history is headed.

The marvelous thing about this is that it flows out of the death of Jesus on the cross. It is the cross that has brought this to pass. That is why it has been the central symbol of Christian faith since the very beginning. We put crosses up in our sanctuaries, not to make us think that the cross was a beautiful piece of wood, for it was a dirty, bloody, rugged means of death. But out of that death has flowed life to all the universe. That is what this is telling us. We find it described very clearly in chapter two of this letter, in the words, "And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross" (2:15). It is the cross that is the center of all life.

Here is how he describes it in Revelation 5:11-14:

Rev 5:11-14 (NIV) 11 Then I looked and heard the voice of many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. 12 In a loud voice they sang: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" 13 Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!" 14 The four living creatures said, "Amen," and the elders fell down and worshiped.

That is what Christmas initiates: it is the beginning of the great process that shall end in the perfect harmony of all creation. We are privileged to have a part in proclaiming this good news right now, and in our hearts to give honor and glory to the Lord Jesus, even before the rest of creation joins in the song.

Conclusion

Revelation closes with this reminder:

The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life... He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming soon." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all God's people. Amen. (Rev. 22:17,20-21)