

All Things Hold Together

Day 5 – Monday, February 22, 2010

“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. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.”

Colossians 1:16-17 ESV

As we continue our Lenten journey, we are mindful that our worship must be first and foremost Christ-centered. Worship that is directed to a vague, mysterious God is not true worship, for it is through Christ alone that we are able to worship the Father. And so we must take in Christ in all His glory, and let that view inform our worship.

Take a moment to look around at the wonder of creation. Gaze upon the majesty of the night sky; consider the beauty of trees, of wildlife, of wind and rain. Take in the sun’s heat, and study the intricacy of a single snowflake. God created it all, and Christ was there. Colossians tells us that it was by Him, through Him, and for Him that all things were created, and hold together. The stars and planets keep their courses because of Him.

Consider also the complex and fragile creations we call our bodies: they must be sustained by a constant heartbeat, an exacting temperature. When injured, they strive to heal to their original shape and form. And Christ holds them together as well. He is indeed the “glue” which connects, sustains, empowers, heals, and gives life all around us. He is “All-in-all.”

Heart questions:

1. Do I take time to consider the amazing creation around me, and ponder how it is held together?
2. Am I grateful for life, breath, heartbeat, things without which I would cease to exist?
3. How does this view of Christ (as the means and object of all creation) change the way I worship Him?

Prayer: Dear Jesus, You were there when the worlds were created, and it is only by You that they hold together. You give me life and breath, and I am grateful. In Your holy name, Amen.

Show Us the Father

Day 6 – Tuesday, February 23, 2010

Philip said, “Lord, show us the Father and we will be satisfied.” Jesus replied, “Philip, don’t you even yet know who I am, even after all the time I have been with you? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father! So why are you asking to see him? Don’t you believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in me? The words I say are not my own, but my Father who live in me does his work through me.” John 14:8-10 NLT

Jesus had just told His followers that He was the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and that no one could come to the Father except through Him. He finished by saying, “From now on you know him and have seen him.” But these words, sadly, did not seem to register with Philip; and if we’re honest with ourselves, neither do they with us at times.

How often are we confused as to what God is truly like? How often do we question His love for us, His guidance in our lives, or His faithfulness in doing what His Word tells us He will do? And yet we need look no further than Jesus, for in Christ “all the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form” (Colossians 2:9 NIV).

To know God better, to truly worship Him and draw nearer to Him, we must look to Jesus. Read the accounts of His life, study His words, and watch His actions. See how He utilized His time on earth. Observe how He lovingly treated those who were hurting, lost, or distracted. And notice His enduring patience with all of His children, including you and me.

Heart questions:

1. What can I learn about God from the actions of Jesus?
2. What do the words that Jesus said tell me about His Father?
3. Have I truly taken time to “intimately acquaint myself” with the Savior?

Prayer: Dear Father, Your Word tells me that all the fullness of the Godhead is in Your Son Jesus, and that I need look no further than Him to know You more fully. May I devote myself to knowing Jesus in all of life. In His holy Name, Amen.

Daily Bread and More

Day 7 – Wednesday, February 24, 2010

Jesus then said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread out of heaven, but it is My Father who gives you the true bread out of heaven. “For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world.” Then they said to Him, “Lord, always give us this bread.” Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me will not hunger, and he who believes in Me will never thirst.” John 6:32-35 NASB

What do we truly need to live? In the Lord’s Prayer we ask God to “Give us this day, our daily bread.” The apostle Paul writes to Timothy that “if we have food and clothing, with these we will be content.” (1 Timothy 6:8 ESV). In our daily lives we are reminded that it is in the simplest of God’s gifts to us through which we are able to find earthly contentment.

And yet even these cannot sustain us eternally; though we seek to take care of our bodies, in time they will fail us and eventually fade away. We are confronted with our own mortality, and know that we cannot live forever.

But as Jesus said during His temptation in the wilderness, man does not (and cannot) live by bread alone. It is only by partaking of the Bread out of Heaven that we can truly see God and taste life eternal. Our earthly needs are really a sign of our incompleteness and loneliness apart from God’s life-giving Bread of Life—His Son, Jesus.

Heart questions:

1. Am I grateful everyday for the necessities of earthly life?
2. Do I recognize that, ultimately, this life isn’t satisfying, and that I am seeking “something more”?
3. Can I trust that Jesus is all I need for this life and life eternal?

Prayer: Dear God, thank You for meeting my daily needs of hunger, thirst, and rest. But I know that these earthly needs are only a temporary sign of my deepest need to be with You, which can only be met in Your Son Jesus, the Bread of Life. In His name I pray, Amen.

The Good Shepherd

Day 8 – Thursday, February 25, 2010

“I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me, just as my Father knows me and I know the Father. And I lay down my life for the sheep. The Father loves me because I lay down my life that I may have it back again.” John 10:14-15, 17 NLT

Because most of us are far-removed from the agrarian culture of the Bible, it is easy to miss the references Jesus made to farming in general, and to herding sheep in particular. And yet the Bible is full of references to a lifestyle that, in His day, was well known by nearly everyone.

Sheep are commonly understood to be fearful and untrusting. They sleep standing up to avoid the sudden attack of an enemy. They can be stubborn, and often must be prodded to do even what is best for them. So it is a wonder that a shepherd is able to gain the trust of his sheep, and over time allow his voice to represent to them comfort, safety, and health.

Among God’s promises to us in Psalm 23 are freedom from want, peace, restoration, guidance, lack of fear, comfort, goodness, mercy, and the promise of dwelling with Him. These are what Jesus the Good Shepherd promises to us. If we hear His voice, we can follow Him, and trust Him for everything; He will not fail us.

Heart questions:

1. Am I able to trust Jesus fully for everything I need—safety, comfort, protection, and peace?
2. Do I go to Him first in prayer when I am fearful, anxious, apprehensive, or frightened?
3. Can I seek Him and learn to trust Him more fully for each day of my future?

Prayer: Dear Jesus, I admit that I don’t always trust You to protect me and keep me safe. I admit that I am fearful at times. Lord, I want to trust in You more, and seek peace and safety only in You. In Your holy name I pray, Amen.

Friend of Sinners

Day 9 – Friday, February 26, 2010

“Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.” John 15:13-15 NIV

God created man for intimate fellowship with Himself. But over time this relationship had degenerated into fearful rule-following. The religious leaders in Jesus’ day sought to separate themselves from sin and from sinners. Since they could not admit their own sin, theirs was a religion of isolation and exclusion.

Into this culture comes Jesus, not only proclaiming Himself equal to the God they worshiped, but actually eating with and befriending sinners! Recoiling at this subversive view of a holy God reaching out to fallen man, the leaders rejected Jesus’ offer of love, mercy, and salvation.

Jesus befriended sinners. It was sinners whom He came to save, and it is only self-admitted sinners who may approach Him. We must be honest about our sin and disobedience, but in this honesty we may boldly approach the throne of grace, and embrace our Savior without fear, as in the words of the old hymn:

*Can we find a friend so faithful
who will all our sorrows share?
Jesus knows our every weakness
take it to the Lord in prayer.*

Heart questions:

1. How often do I consider Jesus as friend?
2. How did Jesus relate to His friends in the Bible?
3. What promises did He make to them? And to me?

Prayer: Dear Jesus, You have promised to be my friend, and to reach out in love to me. I accept Your gift of love, and I choose to obey You more fully in everything. In Your name I pray, Amen.

Behold the Lamb

Day 10 – Saturday, February 27, 2010

The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” John 1:29 NIV

John the Baptist lived a life marked by God from before birth. He would always be different than others, finding himself drawn to a lifestyle of solitude and seeking God. And at the proper time, he would utter these prophetic words, “Behold, the Lamb of God.” For John knew in His heart that the promise of God, the deliverance of man from sin, would take place through the sacrifice of a perfect and spotless lamb, and that he was now seeing that Lamb before him—Jesus Himself.

The Old Testament practice of sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins is one we’ll address in later devotionals. But as we explore Jesus as both the object and means of our worship, we must understand that it is because He did choose to sacrifice His own life for His friends that “God raised him to the heights of heaven” (Philippians 2:8b-9 NLT), and that this last choice in His life now gives us boldness to come to the Father through Him. It is through the cross of death that Jesus now promises us life.

Jesus is our Way, our Daily Bread, our Shepherd, our Friend, and our Sacrifice. He is All-in-all, and we may truly wonder at His greatness and majesty before us. And as we approach Easter may we glory not only in the cross, but in the life in His resurrection.

Heart questions:

1. What does Jesus’ sacrifice reveal to me about the depth of my sin?
2. What emotion does the cross stir in me?
3. How does my view of Jesus’ death influence my desire to live for Him more intently?

Prayer: Dear Jesus, I pray that throughout Lent I more deeply ponder your sacrifice on the cross, and that it will create in me a desire to obey You more fully. In Your holy name, Amen.