

The Triumph of the Cross

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[0:00] Colossians chapter 2 verses 13 through 15.! Just a few verses. Hear now the Apostle Paul. And you who were dead in your trespasses!

God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with his legal demands, this he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in him. That is the word of the Lord.

Please be seated. Sometimes you look at the cross and we rightly so see a death and we see sorrow and pain and that's right too.

But sometimes we miss, maybe not you, but I know it happens, sometimes we miss what was really going on. Sure, it was the death of the Son of God, but it was also his triumph.

[1:23] It was also his victory. Doesn't mean the devil doesn't have power and still fight against us, but it means a new power has broken into humanity and those who follow Jesus can live in his victory.

Good Friday looks like defeat, but it was far from that. Paul in this wonderful passage, I can't preach all of it and I won't try, but in chapter 2, he is encouraging the saints to live their lives rooted in Christ according to the gospel that they were taught.

And so to be filled, that is, with thanksgiving to God in the midst of that. The reason is because there were so many human philosophies around, not today of course, but back then, that promised a good life.

But those philosophies undermined faith in Jesus. Christ is better than all human philosophies and isms. Then Paul launches into what we have in our union with Christ, verse 10, that we are filled with him.

Verse 11, that we are circumcised in him. Verse 12, that we are buried with him in baptism. Verse 12, we are raised with him through faith. And verse 13, we are made alive with him.

[2:49] And verse 15, the Father triumphed over the forces of darkness at the cross in him. This is all that Jesus experienced and we experienced through our union with him.

And our text is highlighting our lost condition and how we are forgiven through the cross of Christ. But also the cross, we must see the cross as God's rescue of humanity.

But it also is God's retribution upon the forces of darkness. So three points basically, I think. Yeah. Yeah, that's right.

I wrote this. I really did. Well, basically two, but we'll see. First of all, I want you to notice this. Before the triumph of the cross.

Notice what was going on before the triumph. And if you have your Bibles, verse 13, all of humanity, because of the sin of Adam and Eve, is born physically alive, but spiritually dead.

[3:53] We're like spiritual zombies. We're physically alive. We're physically alive. But there's deadness inside of us. It's what Paul will say in Ephesians chapter 2, verse 1. We were dead in our trespasses and sins.

He says here in Colossians, something very similar. We were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh. Now, trespasses are false steps.

It's an offense. It's crossing a known boundary. Now, it's like if you want to put up a fence in your yard, but instead of obeying the boundaries, your fence is too far over the line.

You've trespassed. Now, you can do this intentionally, but you can also do it unintentionally. God has given boundaries for our behavior and his law, things like the Ten Commandments, but

because we are spiritually dead, that is, unresponsive to God, unable to see his glory or hear his voice, we don't obey the boundaries.

We cross them. We feel they do not apply to us sometimes. We see them as old-fashioned or uninformed.

[5:14] You know, we don't like boundaries. Boundaries are restrictive. We insist on freedom. One of the great gifts that America, our country has given to the world, is this sense of freedom.

Freedom is a good thing. Freedom is what all people want. But freedom can go too far if it's not governed by God's word.

When I was a teenager, I'll never forget this, another kid in the neighborhood ran up to me, and he said, I mentioned another friend's name who I had been very close to.

He said, he's been shocked, Kevin. He's been shocked. I was like, shocked? First, I thought he said he had been shot, which in my neighborhood was possible.

It wasn't common, but it was certainly possible. No, he had been shocked. And when he had been nearly electrocuted, is what he was telling me. You see, my friend had, he and some other guys had decided to go into a train yard, and they decided to climb upon the distance.

[6:22] Now, we were teenagers now. We're talking 14 or so, maybe 15. They decided to go in this train yard and climb on top of the trains and, you know, just, you know, just do kid stuff, you know, like the Cosby kids kind of thing, you know, just hanging out.

And they climbed onto the, on top of the trains, but somehow my boy touched a live wire. And he was nearly electrocuted. Thank God he wasn't killed.

But it did cost him. It cost him his legs below the knee. You see, when you trespass, sometimes, even the laws of humanity, there can be a penalty.

Sometimes, we have a good lawyer, and we can get off on a technicality. But not in the courtroom of heaven. We are guilty before the throne of God, and no mistakes, and no technicalities, and no injustice there.

We owe God full obedience, but we've trespassed. We've taken many missteps, intentional, like I said, or unintentional. But whatever it was, we've crossed the line and fallen down hard, and we can't get up.

[7:37] Circumcision, what Paul mentions, was God's sign given to Abraham and all his male descendants. It meant they were in covenant with God, and therefore, they were his, and would follow him.

Uncircumcision, is what Paul uses here, uncircumcision says, you are not part of that covenant, and therefore, not one of his people. God looked at us and said, not my people.

And we were not. It means to be lost. And this is all of humanity before the cross. Here's how Paul writes it in Ephesians chapter 2, 11 and 12. Therefore, remember that at one time, you Gentiles in the flesh called the uncircumcision by what is called the circumcision, the Jews, which is made in the flesh by hands.

Remember that you were at that time separated from Christ, alienated from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers to the covenants of promise, and here's the worst part, having no hope and without God in the world.

This is what life is like before the triumph of the cross. Pastor Billy read from 1 Corinthians 5 a minute ago in our call to worship. It is to celebrate the feast.

[8:55] It is celebrate life with the leavened bread of malice and evil. We lived in malice and evil.

We're trapped in darkness. No way out. As a matter of fact, many of us weren't looking for a way out because we were having a good time in darkness.

Alienated. Not able to see there was something better. Not able to see the glory of God. Not able to understand that God had made us in his image to live as people who reflect him.

We're unable to see all that. This is all before the triumph of the cross. This is where we were. But after the triumph of the cross, oh boy, after the triumph, here it is.

God made alive together with him having forgiven us all our trespasses, canceling our debt, disarming the rulers and authorities after the cross.

[10:02] By the kindness of God, it's his kindness that leads us to repentance, right? We are granted faith in the cross of Jesus.

We who are spiritually dead, unresponsive to God have been made alive. When you are alive, spiritually, you can see the majesty of Christ.

You can look at something like Good Friday and not as some of the atheists called it spiritual child abuse. You can see the glory of God and the glory of the Son on this day we call Good Friday and we can follow him.

The Bible likens this situation before and after to being in debt before God. He describes it. Now listen, we're in debt to God.

Some have said we're in debt to the devil. No. We don't owe him anything. The phrase Paul uses here, record of debt, speaks of a written code.

[11:14] It means handwritten. In that culture, it's like an IOU, signed by the debtor's own hand. It said exactly what you owe a debtor to someone, what you owed and you signed it.

It listed legal demands, that is, in our case, God's law that we have broken. we've committed cosmic treason against the holiness of God and our signatures are on the court record.

We signed our own death sentence with our own hand, as it were. Here's the thing, some people then and today would default on their debts.

Today, we spend our credit cards to the max and then refuse to pay what we owe. For one reason or another, some just decide they don't want to pay. Just going to walk away from the debt.

Some people do that. Some fall on hard financial times and can't pay. Either way, it's called default. But we can't do this with our spiritual debts.

[12:22] Our trespasses have run up a considerable tab. Our credit stinks in the bank of heaven. And when we stand before him, the bill will come due.

But God, oh, I love that phrase. Somebody called it the apostolic but. But God, in matchless love and supreme grace, triumphed over our indebtedness by the cross, all our spiritual debts are paid in full.

people. That's why they've been canceled. Or more literally, they've been blotted out. They've been erased. Gone.

We get to pray now on a regular basis, forgive us our debts, right? That's because of an ongoing relationship that we're maintaining with the Lord by his grace.

but the big debt, the overall debt, the debt that was killing us and cramping our style. You know what happens when you're in debt?

[13:35] You can't live. When you got big debt, it cramps your style. You can't enjoy life. You can't spend like you, you can't go, you can't even give.

That's one thing, one reason we should all try to get out of debt, so we can give. So we can be ready to give when God presents the opportunity to be a blessing.

But when you're in debt, you can't give. And God forbid you should try to tithe. It gets really hard. I'm just trying to be real. It gets really hard when you are in debt.

Hallelujah. But we've been delivered from our spiritual debt, so now we can give ourselves away. Now we're able to give ourselves to God unreservedly and listen, give ourselves to each other.

Now we can serve. We've been delivered. The cross triumphs over our debts. Now listen, it is striking that we can think of three things that were nailed to our Lord's cross.

[14:43] Three things. One, his body. You know that, we see that, that is oh so clear, as Sister Nisha was pointing out. I said this in one of the retreats recently.

Same thing that I was thinking about. The blood. All those animals sacrificed, the priests literally waited in blood. And on the hot days, you can imagine what that was like.

Knife slice after slice blood, and Christ goes to the cross, slaughter, the Lamb of God taking away the sin of his people, the sin of the world, goes to the cross.

His body is nailed to the cross. We see that. But another thing was nailed to the cross, do you remember? A sign above his head that Pilate, the Roman governor, had put there, this is Jesus, the king of the Jews.

The Jewish leaders didn't like this. Pull that thing down. He's not our king. Pilate's like, what I have written, I have written. He knew, he knew, he didn't know, but he knew.

[15:52] He did more than he knew. Jesus is nailed to the cross, and above his head there is this sign, but there was one more thing nailed to the cross.

It was invisible though. The record of our sins. Hallelujah. Hallelujah. no one could see it, but it was there, it was there above his head, there under the name the king of the Jews, there it was, nailed to the cross, our sins, debt paid in full, blood has been shed, our life has ended, but not just any life, the life of the son of God, the humanity of the son of God has been snuffed out, that your sins and my debts before God set free.

Wouldn't it be great? What would it be like if you walked into your mortgage company or to your credit card company or to your car note company and they said to you, it's been erased.

You'd do cartwheels out of there. We'd be calling the funny wagon to come get you because you'd be going crazy. I know I would be because I got a mortgage. You know what I'm saying? I mean, why are we doing cartwheels when we know that our sin debt has been paid?

That which had killed us had determined that we would spend eternity away from God in a place that God calls hell. A place of eternal torment away from him.

[17:29] That debt that we owed and could not pay God has been nailed to the cross of Christ and we bear it no more.

Hallelujah. Heaven. Paradise has been opened to us. Paradise. I'm not worried about getting real estate in Israel.

A lot of sand. I've been there. I've been in that area. A lot of dirt there. Rocks. I got somewhere else to go. I got a mansion, a place, a dwelling in the new heavens and the new earth in the presence of the living God.

The meek shall inherit the earth. Not one piece of estate. We inherit it all. All of it. Because our sins have been atoned for.

We are now one with God. The war is over. The war is over. And we have been given clemency. We have been found not guilty.

[18:38] God doesn't hold it against you. Oh, my goodness. The cross triumphs over our sins. For where sin did abound, grace did much more abound at the cross.

But there's one more thing there and we're going to finish up with this. One more thing. There's the defeat of Satan and his spiritual forces of darkness took place at the cross.

That's what verse 15 is all about. He disarmed the rules and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in him.

That is, God triumphed over the force of the darkness in Christ and his cross. Now, rules and authorities, you know, refer to spiritual forces of evil.

Paul uses that same language in Ephesians chapter 6 and in chapter 1 actually. It isn't just sinful people at work in the world. There is something animating the evil that we see.

[19:44] Something that will not let evil die. It's always poking and prodding us to go as far from God as we can. In the gospels, our Lord cast out demons and referred to Satan as, what do you call him?

The strong man who guards his goods. Remember this in Luke chapter 11, 20 and 22? But if it's by the, Jesus is speaking, if it's by the finger of God that I cast out demons, then the kingdom of God has come upon you.

When a strong man fully armed guards his own palace, his goods are safe. But when one stronger than he attacks him and overcomes him, he takes away his armor in which he trusted and devised his spoil.

it's at the cross that the strong man, Satan, and his forces are stripped of their weapons and put to shame. That is, they are made a public spectacle, a public example of by one who is stronger.

The same pictures in Revelation chapter 20. It's not up there on the screen, but in Revelation chapter 20, you see where Satan is bound for a thousand years so that he's unable to deceive the nations any longer.

[20:53] Remember that passage? Meaning, that's the same picture. Satan being bound is the same thing Christ was talking about in the Gospels and

right here in Ephesians.

He is bound so that the Gospel can go forth in the power of the Holy Spirit and bring people out of satanic darkness where he blinds them.

He blinds them and Paul says in 2 Corinthians chapter 4, keeping them from seeing the light of the Gospel of the glory of Christ who is the image of God. That's what the devil is doing in the world. He's blinding people. That's what he did with me. That's what he did. If you came to Christ later in your youth or whatever, you came out of blindness. As it were, he gave you a spiritual eye disorder. Along with the deadness and sin, Satan blinds. So you were double blind. unable to see who Jesus was. I tell you, people will come tell me the gospel.

[22:00] We sit on the porch, me and my boys playing pinochle, having a good old time. People will come up on the porch, literally, are you saved? I had no idea what they were talking about.

Saved from what? I'm serious, I really did not know. I didn't know any of the language of the kingdom. And that's true of a lot of people, today especially. But I was blind. I mean, it happened time and time and time again.

I even went to church and heard people talk about Jesus. And it meant nothing. It was just nice. And I went home and forgot all about it.

That's what happens when you're blind. We can talk to people and they're blue in the face and they still will look at you and go, that's nice. That's blindness.

Spiritual. See, the only way that can be defeated is if God does something. God must do something. God must bind but set them alive.

[23:03] God must make them alive so that the blindness comes off and they can see the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus. The strong man has been bound.

Jesus goes to the cross and he does exactly what he said he would do when an eye when I am lifted up from the earth will draw all people to myself.

How is that possible? The strong man has been bound so that people can be delivered out of the kingdom of darkness and brought into the kingdom of light.

Be encouraged by that. We'll come back to that in a minute. So what are some of the weapons he's disarmed? So what were some of the weapons he was using? What were his weapons? Well I'm going to give you just two big ones and we already mentioned one.

First one is deception. Revelation 12 9. When the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent who's called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world, he was thrown down to the earth and his angels were thrown down with him.

[24:17] That great dragon, Jesus said, I saw Satan fall like lightning from heaven. The cross is God humbling Satan so that he can no longer just deceive at will.

People can be delivered. He's still deceiving, don't get me wrong, but now there's a power at work in the world that we've never seen before into Pentecost with a gospel.

The spirit of God comes so that people from every tribe, language, and nation can be brought into the kingdom, can see and set free in Christ.

How the devil deceives us if we're not listening to the gospel? Even the saints can be deceived to some extent, to some extent, tricked, thinking that this world's goods is what we should live for, thinking that this world's approval is what we need to have more than anything else, thinking that the only thing that exists is what we see, and that's most important.

You see, that's how the world, the enemy continues to deceive the world, and if we're not careful, because we're still fallen, as Christians, we can still fall for the same thing. We begin to live for what is right in front of our face, and forget Christ and his kingdom, and all that he offers us.

[25:37] Deception is still real, but now people can be set free. But the other thing he used is death. Two weapons, deception and death.

The fear of it. The fear of death and the judgment. Hebrews 2, 10, 14, and 15. 10 won't be up there, but I think 14 and 15 might be there, I don't remember now, but here's what it says, verse 10 of Hebrews 2.

For it is fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, shall make the founder of their salvation perfect through suffering, ultimately the cross.

verse 14 and 15. Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he, Jesus himself likewise partook of the same things, that through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is the devil, and deliver all those who through fear of death were subject to lifelong slavery.

suffering. When the writer of Hebrews mentions the founder, the founder of our salvation, the word there can be translated champion. Jesus is like David.

[26:53] Remember when David and Goliath faced off against each other? Each nation chose a champion. Goliath was the champion of the Gentiles, and David is the champion of God's people.

And the battle is decided between the two of them. Whoever wins, wins for their whole team, for their whole country, their whole people.

Jesus goes up against the devil as our champion, and it's not even a contest. The devil thought he was winning, if he only knew.

He thought he was winning, and in the whole time, he was losing. Jesus wins the battle. He's our champion who wins in our place and for us and delivers us from the slavery of the fear of death.

I just, I've sat by, over the years, quite a number of people, as they were about to breathe their last, and sometimes I was there when they breathed their last, and I've watched the saints of God go with peace.

[28:05] I've watched some struggle when that's real, I'm not putting them down. It's real. The great enemy is death. That is our great enemy. It's not supposed to be here, as it were.

It's here because of sin, because Satan tricked our first family into rebelling against God, and death entered the world, and it's going to be here until Jesus comes.

It is that last terror that people of all ages, races, and creeds, and nations fear more than anything else.

Why do you think we make our cemetery so beautiful in this country? It's like a denial of the ugliness of death. He's gone to a better place, not if he doesn't know Jesus.

We tell each other all the time. He's gone to a better world. She's gone to a better world. It's ugly.

And what happens to us when we do die, the ravages that happens to our body as we go to it's not pretty.

[29:17] Jesus has taken away the fear. Why? How? Because we know there's life.

death has now become an usher who takes us from this life into our seat in the kingdom. I look at death, I can see him coming for me now.

And he's going to look at me and say, come this way. He'll grab my arm and say, come this way.

Oh, this is your seat right here. And I'm going to walk into the presence of Jesus. Hallelujah.

Now, I'm not excited about the process, don't get me wrong, but I'm excited about the end. That's how we have to look at death. We don't look at just itself, but what's on the other side of it.

Now we know what's on the other side of death, Jesus. Glory. And the presence of Jesus. How do we know? Because Easter Sunday happened.

[30:16] Because he rose from the dead. We'll come back to that next time. But in doing this, he makes a spectacle. I mean, here's what he's doing.

This is coming from that world. The whole deal of being a spectacle. He shamed them and made a spectacle. In that culture, when a Roman general would win a war, win a battle, he would come back into Rome or into whatever city he's from, and he would ride in on his white horse, and behind him would be all his captives.

All the people he defeated, and they'd be in chains. And bedraggled, and dirty, because they had to walk all the way. Clothes, tattered, maybe still with wounds on their bodies, and they come walking in bedraggled, defeated, shamed.

If only the devil knew. When Jesus went to the cross, he is the one walking behind the cross.

He's walking behind. He don't even know it. He's walking behind the cross, bedraggled, dirty, and filthy, and defeated. He and all his forces of darkness have been cut down.

[31:32] Oh, they still live, don't get me wrong, because their end is still coming. But the battle has been won. He has made a public spectacle of them. The cross is God's retribution upon the forces of darkness.

cross. And when God gets retribution, he doesn't play. He has a plan for them too yet. The lake of fire, the second death is for them, and it's coming.

But until then, we know that the cross is God's victory. John Stott said it so wonderfully. We're not to regard the cross as defeat and the resurrection as victory.

Rather, the cross was the victory won, and the resurrection, the victory endorsed, proclaimed, and demonstrated. Okay.

When you are in Christ, the Holy God, the creator of heaven and earth, holds nothing against you. You've been forgiven.

[32:40] Your debts are blotted out. Let that sink in. God holds nothing against you. Doesn't mean he doesn't discipline his children like any father would.

But your father, if you have a good father, loves you. And even though you may have to spank that little rascal, or maybe you were the little rascal that got spanked, yet your dad's arms are always open wide to receive you and to care for you.

Do everything he can to bless your life. That's our, even more so, that's our heavenly father. We have access to him at all times.

As modern people, we tend not to think of the invisible world. The ancient people understood the invisible powers that exist in this world. In different countries, if you go some places, certainly in Africa and other places, in South America and places, you'll see people are more aware of the invisible forces of darkness that exist in this world.

See, we have so much technology and something like that, we don't think about those things unless to make fun of them. And that's exactly what the devil wants. He wants us to make fun. He wants us to pretend.

[33:57] He wants us to watch those stupid TV shows and whatnot and evil is good and all that kind of good stuff. He wants us to do all that stuff and make a joke of it and not understand that he exists and the forces of darkness that animate evil in this world is real.

Why do you think some of the most crazy atrocities occur? The devil is at work. Jesus showed us that when he cast out demons, that they exist and they exert influence over humanity.

We shouldn't be preoccupied with them, no, but neither should we ignore them. We should not try to control them or manipulate them with all kinds of special language and incantations that some Christians fall into.

But we must understand they exist. And that's why you must pray. That's why you must always give yourself to prayer. Because these beings do exist and they do haunt the people of God.

They're seeking to drive us away. But Christ's triumph on the cross means we don't have to fear superstition or evil powers. You don't throw salt over your shoulder, be afraid to start building a crack.

[35:18] We don't have to fear being demon-possessed because we have the Spirit of God. And he don't share. He don't cohabit. He's in us and that's it.

It means we can live holy lives and righteousness no longer at the mercy of the devil's tricks and traps. We don't get at his mercy. Jesus resisted the devil's temptation to avoid the cross and he obeyed his father in all things to the point of death in our place and for us so that now we can follow him.

Now we can resist the devil and he will flee from us. Now we can stand against the forces of darkness as we stand in Christ and on our knees.

No longer slaves to sin and darkness. You're not a slave to your old habits. Sometimes we buy into philosophies that tell us we're slaves all the time. But we can't deal with stuff that we can't get.

Listen, the gospel says you are a new creation in Christ. You can deal with stuff that other people cannot because they don't have the same resources.

[36:28] Let the world tell you who you are and judge you by your sin. No, family. You're no longer a slave. There can be victory for you in all those things you fell into when you were unsaved outside of the kingdom.

Now in Christ you have resources. Believe the resources. Not the isms. And the philosophies of this world. Believe the gospel.

And what God wants to do in you and through you. It means we can preach the gospel and see people set free. Are you afraid to speak of Christ? Please don't be.

Don't be. He can set anybody free at any time. The strong man has been bound. I don't care if they've been the worst person in your life. Don't be afraid.

Prayerfully and speak the gospel in love to them. And to your coworkers and classmates, don't be afraid. Don't hold back. Choose your, be strategic.

[37:34] Choose your moments. Prayerfully choose your moments. But speak the gospel. Speak life. And let Jesus handle the fallout.

And also cross also means, his triumph means that our path to glory will also be a path of suffering. But glory.

But glory. We get a taste of it now. Just a taste. Oh, it's beautiful when you get those tastes. But more is coming. Yeah.

We're going to fight. We're going to limp. But glory. Is he worth it? Sometimes, I think we, I know, I know, I know, I know, I do.

Sometimes I struggle. But then I get, but then I have my sanity returned to me. Like Nebuchadnezzar. And I say, yes, it's worth it. Because he's worth it. He's worth it.

[38:39] Whatever I got to go through. I want to enjoy it. Ah, but there'll be glory. I'll take it. I'll take it. So will you.

The cross, this is victory, this is triumph.