

## **The Triumph of the Cross**

Colossians 2:15

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If we turn our Bibles to Colossians this morning, Colossians chapter number 2, I'd like us to consider reading from verses 8 through to verse number 15. The Word of God reads, "Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world, and not according to Christ. For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily, and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power. In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it."

Let's pray. Father, we come before You again. We pray that You would send Your Holy Spirit to open the eyes of our understanding, to draw our hearts and our attention to the Word of God, to bring us to the place of submission to Your truth and understanding of Your Word. I pray You would send Him, Father, to help me to proclaim the mysteries of the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, that Jesus would be exalted, that His name would be praised, that we as Your people would glory and boast in the goodness of our Savior. Father, I pray that You would help us now. Help us, we ask, in Jesus' name. Amen.

We're continuing in Colossians 2, and particularly in verse 15 this morning. When we think of verse 15, we're still thinking of the cross of Christ. Last week, we looked at verse 14 and we considered the cross in relationship to forgiveness, and that it was when Jesus died on that cross that He didn't just die and that was it. There was something very particular happening in the crucifixion, and that was our sins were being nailed to His cross, that He was bearing our sins in His body on the tree, and that the law and

its requirements were also being dealt with by the Son of God in the crucifixion. As I've been looking and studying in these things, I've only come to realize that there are so many mysteries to the cross. What I mean by that is that when we think of the cross of Christ, the more that we meditate on it and look at the Scriptures concerning it, there are so many aspects that unravel and unfold that really encompass all of our Christian living in our life. We looked at that last week, how the forgiveness that we have received is a powerful forgiveness that should motivate our forgiveness. I was reminded of the passage that Paul spoke about in Colossians chapter 1 when he wrote, saying that the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness, but to us who are being saved, it is the power of God. I thought for a moment on that, and I thought that day when Jesus was dying on the cross, no one saw what God saw, no one saw what we now saw, and to the eyes of those who are unbelievers, the cross is only shame, ridicule, it is only the words of defeat. As Paul says to the Greeks, it is foolishness that your God would die, how foolish! But to the Jews, it was more than that even, it was a stumbling block. Here you're saying our Messiah, the promised one that we've been waiting for, is the one that's going to be hanging on a tree, cursed by God? You see, and so for the mind, the fleshly mind, they cannot understand and comprehend the mysteries of the gospel and the mysteries of the cross. But Paul makes it clear that to those who are being saved, to those who are called by God, this is the wisdom of God, this is the power of God. And the cross to the spiritual mind is different. Yes, it is shame, yes, it is many of those things, of course, this was a horrible, horrific death, but the cross to the believer is not a tragedy, it is a victory. It is the victory and the triumph of love, it is the victory and the triumph of mercy, it is the victory and triumph of God's forgiveness, as we have realized and we looked at this last week. It's the victory and triumph of the believer's relationship to the law of God, wiped out the handwritings of requirements that were against us, took our sins, nailed them to the cross, the wisdom of God revealed in the cross of Jesus Christ.

But as we come to verse number 15, the wisdom continues to unfold. And when Jesus died on the cross, not only did He purchase for us forgiveness, but something happened that very day in the realm of the spiritual. Something happened that day to the principalities and powers and the rulers of the darkness of this world. In fact, the Bible teaches us, as we look at in a moment, that the crucifixion was a triumph over them. And so this very morning, we're going to consider the triumph of the cross, the triumph of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

And the text begins in verse 15 by saying to us that Christ, by His crucifixion, disarmed principalities and powers. Now, who are these principalities and powers? Well, the word principalities and powers means rulers and authorities. And it doesn't always refer to, and it's not in this context def-

initely referring to, physical people in rulership and authorities. It's the rulers and authorities in regards to the spiritual realm. This is the rulers of the darkness of this world. The Bible speaks of principalities and powers also as angels in chapter 3 of Ephesians verse 10, positively, God's angels. But it also speaks of them as the fallen angels. And it says in the same book, in Ephesians chapter 6 verse 12, that we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

The Bible presents to us that there is God with His heavenly hosts, who is over all. But it also presents to us an enemy of our souls and enemies of the cross of Christ, and that is Satan and his minions, as it were, or his demons. They have fallen from their glory, as it were, when they were once there in the presence of God the Father, and their pride entered into Satan's heart, and he said, "I will be like God, I will be like the Most High," and he fell that day. And in his fall, he brought with him other principalities and powers. And the reason why they're called principalities and powers is because in the angelic realm, there are ranks of angels, there are ranks of demons. And it's important to realize that even though we can't see them, they exist. And our ignorance to them doesn't negate the fact that they are still working hard in this world to destroy the children of God and to destroy the souls of men.

You see, the Bible teaches us in 1 John 5:19 that the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one. You see, this world in which we live, although ultimately it is God who sits on the throne, and as Luther said, that the devil is God's devil, and that he's on a chain and he's only allowed so far to do what God allows him to do. But we must never forget that he's still a roaring lion that walks about, seeking whom he may devour. And the Bible teaches us that this world system is under the sway of the wicked one. And it's very important to realize that. That men in their natural state are under the power and control of the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the sons of disobedience. As the Bible says to us, that this is the one who is the prince of the power of the air, the god of this world, who has blinded the minds of them that believe not.

And so we have to recognize that there are principalities and powers that exist, and God dealt with them at the cross. The Bible actually says that He disarmed them. And the word disarmed means that they had some weapons. And it's important to recognize their weapons so that we can understand the disarming of what took place there on that day. God spoiled them, He disarmed them, He took away their power, as it were, over those of us that believe in Jesus Christ. And so, what are their weapons? What do they do? How does Satan and his angels, as it were, control the world

and bring people under bondage? Well, very clearly, the Bible teaches us that they appeal, as it were, to the lust of the flesh, to the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. You see, they create an environment in this world, in this system, whereby there are appeals on every corner to the lust of our flesh, to the lust of our eyes, and to the pride of life. Knowing that man has fallen, actually, in a sense, with them – okay, not at the same time with them, but with them fallen from splendor, as it were, fallen from God's intent – what has ended up happening now is that they have made appeals to all the fallenness of man. You don't have to go very far to recognize this. Everywhere we look, there are appeals to everything within us that is dark: the billboards, the lust, the pornography, the adultery, the arrogance, the disobedience that is exalted and gloried in. You just flick the television on, and you can see it all there: the glorying in children rebelling against their parents and the whole thing. You don't have to go very far to see that this world system is feeding, feeding, feeding the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.

It's all about the better car, the big house, and they pursue this debt after debt, loan after loan, so they can't be in the Lord's house on Sunday because they have to make some extra bucks, and the rest of it is history – the spiritual life of men falls into despair. So, Satan has his weapons in that regard, as in there are these appeals in the world system. But beyond that, there is also direct temptation that Satan himself and his demons can directly come to somebody and tempt them, to speak lies into their heart. You see, it's the death of Ananias and Sapphira that Satan has filled your heart, and you've lied to the Holy Ghost, and also what happened with Judas there and other places. So, Satan is also, and his demons, active in speaking lies into the minds and hearts of people.

How do people come up with all these sophisticated lies regarding atheism? Surely there is a darkness behind all of this rejection of God in the religious realm as well. And so, Satan also does that; he directly lies to men and directly tempts men into sin. But the Bible teaches us also that it's through fear that Satan has people in bondage. Hebrews chapter 2 says that it's through fear of death men are subject to bondage all their lifetime. Think about this: how many people do things to preserve their life? It's amazing. Jesus said the exact opposite: "If you want to come after me, you lose your life. You don't save it." Satan puts this fear of death in the heart of every man, so men seek to preserve their life, to preserve their days, to make themselves live longer, happier, and at the end of the day, when they see themselves deteriorating, they ignore it. We don't want to use the word "death." People pass, gone to a better place, whatever we might say, trying to ignore the results of the curse and of the fall and all its consequences. And so, the fear of death is something that keeps men subject to satanic influence also. But also, Satan, or the word "the devil," is the word "ac-

cuser." And he also accuses men, accuses men not in the sense that he points out their sin that they might run to Christ, but he accuses them to condemnation. When people take their lives, as it were, there's no point of living anymore. There is no hope in the world. Why do people get to such places of despair? This is not of God; this is of the devil and of his workers. Convincing men that there is nothing in the world that can satisfy, there is nothing in the world that can provide hope. The truth is, yes, there is nothing in the world of Satan that can do that, but there is something in God that can. But they say, "Oh no, no, that's all just fairy tales." And so, you can see how these things are real; these are the weapons of his warfare, and they work so well, if I could say, in the hearts of the unbelievers.

But God has done something about this. The Bible says that He disarmed the principalities and powers by the death of Jesus Christ. You see, He stripped them; that's what it means. He stripped them, He put off their strength. He blunted their swords, as it were, and broke their arrows and cut off the ends of their spears. Yes, they have not been finally and ultimately dealt with, which will happen when Jesus finally returns to destroy all the enemies forevermore and cast the beast and the false prophet into the lake of fire forever and ever. But there was a great victory wrought at Calvary that secured the ultimate defeat and damnation of all principalities and powers. You see, what Jesus did for His people in His death is that He gave them a new rule. You see, these people were living under the realm of darkness, but look with me in Colossians chapter 1, verse 13. It says that He has delivered us from the power of darkness and has conveyed us, or translated us, or transferred us into the kingdom of the Son of His love. You see, what Jesus has done in His death is that He's moved people out of the realm of Satan, which means also out of the dominion of Satan, for he is the king of his realm, and moved them into another realm, the realm of light, the realm of the kingdom of God and of Christ, and has given them a new rule. No longer are we enslaved to sin because it says in John chapter 8, He says that whoever commits sin is a servant of sin, and they said, "Oh, we've never been enslaved to anyone." He said, "Abraham's our father," they said, and He said, "No, you are of your father the devil, and the lust of your father you will do." You see, the unbelieving world has a father that is not God; they have a father that is the devil, and that is marked by the deeds that they do. You see, they are under a rule; they resemble their father; they are under the rule of Satan and living in the realm of Satan. But it's the children of God that have a heavenly father, that are under the realm of God's rule, and therefore they have the seed of righteousness in them, and they cannot sin or continue in sin because they have been born of God.

You see, the Bible is very clear regarding this: that He has moved us from that realm, He has moved us from that rule, but He's also given us a new confidence that the men, that the fear of death that we once experienced,

we no longer have to experience. You see, because we know and have hope, and it is the hope of eternal life. You see, for the believer, the grave is not the end. We look forward to the day when Jesus will come again and raise us in resurrected bodies that we might be forever living in His presence and the glory of the Father. And so, the believers in Jesus Christ have a new confidence. You see, we are not under condemnation to despair, but as we looked at previously, our sins have been nailed to the cross, and we have been forgiven. So, the accuser of the brethren has been cast down. In a sense, his accusations and arrows don't stick to the forgiven. You see, his rule and reign don't relate to us. His fear doesn't apply to us. In fact, the world system doesn't even necessarily appeal to us as we walk in the power of the Holy Spirit. And the Bible teaches us in 1 John 3:8, and it says, "For this purpose was the Son of God manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil." You see, God did not just send His Son into the world to save us, although He did, but He did more than that. He was doing something in the spiritual realm. He was destroying the principalities and powers; He was disarming them. And that's something that we need to recognize, understand, and ultimately believe.

Look what it says in Colossians 2:15, "Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it." This is a beautiful statement here. He triumphed over them in it, that is, in the cross of Jesus Christ.

You see, He began, or should I say, we first see in the life of Jesus Christ, in His ministry on earth, this great shaking, if I could say, of the kingdom of darkness. You know, the day that Jesus was born in Bethlehem was a day that the gates of hell trembled. He had to get Herod there to try and kill Him, and you know, let's just get rid of this Jesus because the Son of God was destroying the powers of darkness. And so, when Jesus starts His ministry, what do we see? That He's tempted by the devil, and in His temptation and in His life, He triumphed over him. The devil left Him.

Beyond that, we see in Mark 1, when Jesus entered into the synagogue, there was a man who was demon-possessed, and he says, "What would you have to do with us, Jesus, Son of God? Have you come to destroy us? We know who you are. You are the Holy One of God." And so, the demons were trembling at the presence of the Son of God that had come here on earth. There was this, as it were, fierce battle raging when Jesus was walking here upon earth, marked by exorcism. Jesus was going about not only healing the sick but delivering men from demonic slavery, breaking the chains that bound them for years, like the man of the Gadarenes that was enchained and enslaved, and everyone feared him in the community, but Jesus set him free, put him in his right mind, and he was free.

Jesus made a major blow, if I could say, in His lifetime on the kingdom of darkness. In fact, so much so that the Pharisees accused Jesus of casting out Satan by the power of Satan. And Jesus said to them, "Is Satan's kingdom divided against himself? If I cast out Satan by Satan, then who did your children cast out Satan by?" And then He says, "Hang on a minute, but if I do what I do by the finger of God, by the power of the Holy Spirit, then you know that the kingdom of God has come upon you or is here."

You see, what Jesus was essentially saying is that He was the one that was having power over the kingdom of darkness. In fact, He sends out His twelve and He sends out the seventy, and what did He give them? Power to tread upon serpents and to cast out demons, preaching the kingdom of heaven, showing that this was the triumph of the Son of God. And although it is disputed, I believe that it refers to when they returned and said, "Even the devils are subject to our name," Jesus said, "I saw Satan fall from heaven." And it's in the imperfect tense; it's saying, "I was watching Satan fall from heaven." Some say it refers to the time at the beginning, but I think it's referring to the time when they were, in even a spiritual sense, as they were casting out demons and they were conquering the evil one, Jesus recognized that there was a great triumph over the kingdom of darkness that day.

And so, we can see that when Jesus was coming onto the scene, He was attacking the kingdom of darkness and threatening them. And it climaxed in the cross. In John 12:31, Jesus said, "Now is the ruler of this world, now will the ruler of this world be cast out." And then He says, "When I be lifted up, I will draw all men to myself." This was talking about His death. Satan was going to receive a mighty blow upon the cross by the Son of God. He was, in His death, fulfilling the prophecy of Genesis 3:15, that the seed of the woman will crush the serpent's head, even when His heel would be bruised, as it were. And as Satan sought to destroy the Son of God, it was in Jesus' death that Satan was destroyed. It was in Jesus' death that the kingdom of darkness was crushed. And the fulfillment of that prophecy was come to pass.

You see, the passage says that He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it. And "in it" is referring to the cross. You see, for it is in the cross that Jesus dealt with sin. It was at the cross that Jesus dealt with the law and with its curse. It was at the cross that Jesus dealt with our condemnation. It was at the cross that Jesus dealt with our fear. It was at the cross that Jesus dealt and made a final, decisive victory over the powers of darkness so that we, as God's people, may go free. He set the captives free.

And the Bible refers to that as a triumph. Listen to the words: "He tri-

umphed over them in it." Think about that. Triumph in the cross? Is that a paradox? What is that? A contradiction to our mind? Yes, Christ is the victor, even in His death. He triumphed, the Bible says, over them in it.

And the word "triumph" is a word that has a word picture. And the word picture of the word "triumph" is this: In the Roman armies, when they would go out and fight and conquer their enemies, they would return from the battle, and the soldier, the conqueror, would be at the front, leading a procession. That's the word "triumph," what it means, this triumphant procession. He would lead a triumphant procession, and all his enemies that had been disarmed and now taken captive were tied, as it were, to his chariot. And he would have all his hosts behind him, and all the captives would be stuck there between the hosts. And they would walk into the city, and it would be a glorious day of victory. And the Roman emperor would show that he has conquered his enemies and he has defeated them and show that they are enslaved under his power. That is the very word that is used here to speak of the triumph of Christ in the cross.

The captive enemies would be put into a public spectacle, as it were, as the Bible says here. They were made a public spectacle to the community, as it were. They were walking and ashamed, an open shame the enemies received that day that the Roman emperor walked into the town. And what Jesus and what the Word of God is saying to us is that when Jesus died on the cross, the very same thing happened. Jesus was leading a triumphant procession on the day of His death. He was chaining the princes of darkness. He was overcoming the powers of darkness. And He was bringing a victory and crying out, as it were, "It is finished!" He was dealing with sin and Satan and his dominions once and forevermore.

You see, my friend, the bleeding hands, the broken and bruised body of the Son of God, the nail-pierced feet, the thorn-crowned brow, was in fact the triumph of the Son of God. It was not the defeat of the Son of God; it was the triumph of the Son of God. And as the princes of darkness thought that they had got Him, little did they realize that it was the day of their doom. When the rulers, even of this physical world, thought that we had got Him, this blasphemer, little did they know that He was triumphing over them in it. The Bible even goes so far as to say that if they had known the wisdom of God and the cross, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. Why? Because the cross destroyed the powers of darkness like never before. The world has never been the same since the cross. The gates of hell have never been the same because of the cross. The world looked at the cross that day as defeat, but to the eyes of faith, they saw the greatest day in the history of mankind: the triumph of the Son of God.

And my challenge to us this morning is, how do you see the cross of Jesus



Christ? Maybe you say here today it's foolishness to me. I don't understand all this. All this Jesus dying on a cross, God dying on a cross as it were, the Messiah. This is a stumbling block. How can these things be true? My friend, I pray that you would see what the Bible says of the cross this day, that it is the wisdom of God and is the power of God. That on that day, Jesus Christ was saving sinners. On that day, He was destroying the works of darkness. On that day, He was providing forgiveness and forgiving His people. Do you understand the gloriousness of that day, the wonder and the splendor of that day?

You see, men today repulse the cross and say we don't want anything to do with that cross. My friends, but those who are wise bow to the cross. They repent from their sin and they believe on Him that died on the cross. And my friends, if you are without Jesus Christ here this day, why should you live under the power of darkness any longer? Why should you continue to be enslaved to sin and under the guilt of sin and under the fear of death? Your answer is not in doctors and trying to prolong your life. Your answer is not in finances or in money. Your answer is not in gaining more wealth. Your answer is not in making life more comfortable for yourself. Your answer is in the cross. The power over your sin will not come as it were from education. It will come from salvation, from deliverance, from the power of the cross.

So believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved and delivered. You see, but as believers, we have to also realize that Christ's triumph is ours. He triumphed over them in us, for us, with us. We died with Him. We were raised with Him. Which means that we, as believers in Jesus Christ, are not to be a fearful people, but to recognize, to recognize and always remember that the battle belongs to the Lord.

That you see, before we were ever in the cross, before we were ever on the cross, that you see, before we were ever on this earth, God was accomplishing victory for us. You see, when we receive Christ as Savior, we enter into that which God has done for us in Christ. We enter into triumph. We enter into victory. We, in our experience, know the chains of sin that are broken. We, in our experience, know that the fetters have been broken apart, and we're no longer under the bondage and slavery of sin. It is the day that we come to Jesus Christ that we realize that we're not under the fear of death. We understand eternal life, eternal joy, eternal peace. It's the day where our consciences are cleansed. It's the day, as it were, of our victory in Him.

And we need to realize, dear people of God, that we have overcome him, listen, by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of our testimony. You see, it says of those people in Revelation, "and they loved not their lives even unto the death." We overcome him not by the carnal weapons of our

own flesh, but we plead the blood of Jesus Christ as our weapon, of our stronghold, of our rock upon which we fight. We also have the word of our testimony. This is the word of the gospel. This is the word of God that we hold to, that we stand upon, that we believe about Jesus and about what He's accomplished for us.

You see, it's one thing to hear the things that I say to you today and to be a believer, but it's another thing to hold fast to the word of your testimony, to believe the word of God and what it says about what Jesus has done for us. You see, that's a very important part of our Christian experience that we have to remember. It is by word and it is by blood. We must entrust ourselves to the Scripture. We must entrust ourselves to the word of God. We must entrust ourselves to the blood of Jesus Christ because Satan has not finally yet been put away, and the battle still rages. Disarmed, yes. Power loosened, yes. His works made inoperative in that sense, destroyed, yes. But he still seeks to deceive and to destroy. And as God's people, the only power that he has over us is that which we give to him because of our failure to plead the blood of Jesus Christ and to hold fast to the word of our testimony and to the word of God.

And so my encouragement to you today is that when you are accused by the evil one, remember the words that were read to us this morning: when he accuses your conscience, we must reply, "Who shall bring a charge to God's elect? It is God who justifies." Oh, when he condemns you and makes you feel that there is no hope, you must reply, "Who is he who condemns? Who is he who condemns? It is Christ who died." Oh, when he causes you to doubt the love of God for you and causes you to doubt the connection that we have with God in Christ, you remind him, "Who shall separate us from the love of God? So tribulations, no. Persecutions, no. All these things, no. But you know what's added to there? Shall angels, no. Shall principalities or powers, no. Nothing shall be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus."

When you sin and when you yield to temptation and you fall, it is then that you must remind yourself that we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, that He defends us by His blood. When you are confronted with death and fear of death, we must remind ourselves, "Oh death, where is your sting? Oh grave, where is your victory?" You see, my friend, we no longer need to yield and submit to the powers of darkness. A victory has been wrought for us by the blood, and its assurance is given to us in the word of God, and we must fight the good fight.

What shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? For He that spared not His own Son for us but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things? Do you

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understand, my friends, when Jesus died on the cross, the principalities and powers lost their reign, rule, and power over you? Therefore, stand, resist, fight. Don't yield to lust, don't yield to the appeals, don't yield to the flesh, do not yield to the lies. Hold fast to the cross of Jesus Christ, hold fast to the blood of Jesus Christ, and plead His victory as your own, claim it as your own. His death has vanquished all our foes.

It's Martin Luther that wrote in the hymn that we're about to sing, he said, "And though this world with devils filled should threaten to undo us, we will not fear, for God has willed His truth to triumph through us. The prince of darkness grim, we tremble not for him; his rage we can endure, for lo, his doom is sure. One little word shall fell him, shall chop him down like the tree." Isn't that confidence that we can have because He has triumphed over them in the cross of Jesus Christ? Amen. Let us pray.