

A Victorious People

Colossians 2:14-15

Pastor Duane Smets

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- I. No More Debt
- II. No More Devilry
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Good morning. Happy Mother's Day to all the mama's out there. Thank you for all you are and do. I'm a regular eyewitness to this thing called motherhood and I'm convinced it's one of the most demanding, self-sacrificial, time consuming, servant hearted job anyone could ever undertake. What an honorable thing it is all you mother's have given your lives too. Thank you.

One of the most famous battles in all of human history is the Siege of Orleans during the hundred year war between France and England over King Henry V's attempt to sit on the throne of both countries. The French were losing the war until they decided to lay siege to the city of Orleans, which had become a main base of operations for the English invasion.

The siege lasted for about eight months and ended in a climactical battle called the Battle of the Herrings. The French had cut off supplies to the city, attacking any convoy's going in or out. So the English in desperate need of things like food and water deployed hundreds of troops to protect the convoys and began to overpower the attacking French armies.

The French were losing until a nineteen year old girl named Joan of Arc showed up. Joan was raised as a devout Catholic girl and at the age of 13 claimed to begin having visions from God. When her family's village and farm was attacked Joan believed she received a message from God that she must travel to be with the army in order to help them.

Something either having to do with the spunk of this young girl or the seemingly supernatural divine favor over her rallied the French troops. She would ride into battle, typically carrying a banner with the risen Jesus on it instead of a sword and she would encourage the troops. One time, she took an arrow between the neck and should while holding the banner in a trench, but she rallied, got up and ran ahead encouraging a final assault that won the battle. If it weren't for Joan of Arc there probably wouldn't be a France today, it'd all be England.

Joan of Arc was amazing woman. During respites from the battle she would walk through the villages handing out food and words hope to the children. But in the ensuing months following the war Joan was captured and imprisoned by the English who put her on trial as a prisoner of war and for cross dressing due to the male clothing she preferred to wear during battle. She was condemned as a heretic for it and was burned at the stake.

Joan of Arc is well known for her visions and the several purported miracles she performed. Whether or not any of that is true and was from God I don't know. What I do know is the lesser known story of Joan of Arc's mom.

Her mom was Isabelle d'Arc and following Joan's execution she made it the rest of her life's effort to get her daughter's name cleared. As a devout God fearing Catholic woman, to have her daughter be damned to hell by the political and church leaders was the worst possible thing. So she fought to have her vindicated and finally after twenty-four years, when she was seventy years old, Isabelle strode into Paris to the Cathedral of Notre Dame and pleaded her case to the Pope's judges. They listened and exonerated John of Arc and in the years following went on to venerate her as an official Catholic Saint.

I'm telling this story this morning as my sermon opener because the next couple lines we're looking at today together as a church in our study of the book of Colossians in the Bible are all about the victory Jesus won on the cross for us. Since it's mother's day I was looking for a story about mom's and victory and this one seemed to uniquely fit the bill.

Isabelle d'Arc, mother of Joan of Arc, one of the most famous women in all of history who led one of the biggest military victories in human history because she believed in God and believed Jesus was the victorious risen Lord who came to give people life. What do you guys think? Did it work for today? Women, victory, moms?

Well, let's get into our text from the Bible today on this. We're in Colossians 2:14-15 today. Why don't you stand with me today as we read God's Word that He's given to us.

Colossians 2:14-15

"...by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its 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."

In our text for today there's three pieces I want to pull apart and focus in on in our time together in looking at the victory Jesus won on the cross. I'm calling these points, "No More Debt", "No More Devilry" and "No More Disgrace" and in each of these points the theme I hope we pick up on is "Jesus won for us."

I. No More Debt

This first point, "No More Debt" is from what's said in verse 14. We're told there's a debt, a legal record of it and that somehow on the cross Jesus does something about it. Let's work through it in that order.

Debt. How do you all feel about debt?!!! No one's excited about that right? There may be a handful of you who are doing well and have escaped the debt monster but my guess is most everyone in this room is pretty in debt or on their way to being in pretty deep debt. The average American carries \$140k in debt.

I'm in debt. It's bad. I've got debt from going to college. Debt from buying a house. Debt from starting this church. Debt from car and house repairs. Debt from dumb stuff I put on a credit card. Lots of debt.

The thing that is so hard about debt is that it feels like it sort of hangs over your head. It puts you in this obligatory relationship with this other party that you cannot get out of until the debt is fully paid. If it weren't for debt then there'd be so much more financial room in our month to month budgets. But the debt keeps us from that freedom and puts us in bondage.

Back in Bible times they didn't have credit cards but they did record certificates of debt. People loaned other people money and records were kept of it. And the Bible has a lot to say about debt.

In the Old Testament times, every fifty years they had what they called a "Year of Jubilee" where all debts were cancelled. Wouldn't that be nice!

In the New Testament we're given specific instructions on what to do with debt. Romans 13:8 says this, "Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another (NIV)."

What our verse is getting at in Colossians is a spiritual analogy based on financial debt. We're actually breaking into the middle of a sentence we started last week. The first part of the sentence in verse 13 ends by talking about being forgiven of trespasses, which we said last week was sinning against God by hurting Him in turning away from the righteousness, peace and joy He offers and calls us to.

The view of God in the Bible is that He is omniscient, meaning He knows and sees all things that ever happen. He is watching over all that happens in His creation and sees everything and everyone with intimate detail. Think about that. Each of our days from the time we wake up, go to work, and then lay down again, God sees it all and He not only sees everything that happens but He even sees all our thoughts and feelings.

Hebrews 4:13 says it this way, "No creature is hidden from his sight, but all are naked and exposed to the eyes of him to whom we must give account."

That's kind of scary isn't it? Especially when Jesus said this,

"35 The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. 36 I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, 37 for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned." - Matthew 12:35-37

That's pretty scary. There's so many things I've said with my mouth and felt in my heart I know are not pleasing to God. Then when I read this in the Bible it's even worse.

Revelation 20:12 tells us what it will be like when we die and are stand before the heavenly throne of God. It says this, "I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done."

So God. You're telling me that you see and hear everything and that everything evil we've ever felt or done is recorded in a book that you're going to open up and read in front of me when I die?!!!! I thought my financial debt was bad. This is far worse.

Our verse in Colossians says this spiritual debt we owe to God hangs over with a "legal demand". The demand is to pay up with our lives. If we live a life apart from God, rejecting Him, the goodness He offers and we continue in our way, giving into the evil of our hearts and we do not turn to Him then there will be a day of reckoning when we have to give an answer. But when everything is uncovered and laid bare there will be no answer and we will have to pay our debt for eternity.

What our passage from Colossians wants to tell us today is there is another answer, that through Jesus Christ dying on the cross He did something about the debt for all who believe in it and receive it. The end of verse 14 says He "nailed it to the cross." He nailed the debt to the cross, where He "set it aside", which means He wiped it out.

Many have thought this is perhaps referring to the piece of paper Pilate had nailed to the cross above Jesus' head, a typical practice which would state the charges against the person executed. In this vein J.B. Phillips, the Bible translator and commentator said, "Christ has utterly wiped out the damning evidence of broken laws and commandments that hung over our heads and annulled it by nailing it on his own head on the cross."

Nailing the spiritual record of debt to the cross could very well include that little piece of paper, but it was also surely more for the heart of the good news message of Jesus is that He paid the price for our sins in blood. As Colossians 1:20 said earlier in the book, Jesus made for "...peace by the blood of his cross."

Our sins, both of our heart and hands are many, incurring a great debt we owe to God. But in Jesus, divinity enters the world taking on human flesh and on the cross Jesus sheds His perfect, sinless, unique divine-human blood, worth more than millions and millions of human souls and pays a price to God for the debt His friends incurred.

Think of it this way. Imagine that piece of paper above Jesus head and imagine that on it is written everything you've every evil, sinful and hurtful thing you've felt, thought and done listed out on it in dark black ink. But then imagine looking up at it and in bright red see the words "paid in full" written over all of them with Jesus blood.

Can you imagine having all of your financial debt erased in one stroke? Imagine coming to know someone really rich who just decides out of the generosity of their heart to pay off everything you've ever owed. How much would you be grateful for and love that person? A lot.

This is what Jesus has done for us, for all His friends. Jesus won back everything we foolishly lost and went into debt for. Jesus was victorious and won huge for us. He paid the price for every single sin, past present and future. How freeing?

Because of what Jesus did there is nothing hanging over our heads. Because of this anytime we feel fearful about our future and what God will say all we have to do is remember the cross. The debt of

every one of our sins has been paid in full and is wiped out, no longer in the book for God to see and judge us by.

Jesus won. He was victorious. And He won a lot for us. As the old hymn we sometimes sing says,

*My sin, oh the bliss, of that glorious thought
My sin, not in part, but the whole
Was nailed to the cross
And I bear it no more
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord
Oh my soul*

My friends, Jesus is good, really good, it's good to be His friend. Well, Jesus was not only victorious in freeing us from our debt but He also freed us from the devil. Let's talk about that for a few minutes in our next point, "No More Devilry."

II. No More Devilry

Verse 15 in our passage from Colossians says on the cross Jesus "disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them." Now if you're reading this in a physical Bible, like mine here, there's a little footnote after the words "rulers and authorities." My footnote says this, "Probably demonic rulers and authorities" and I agree.

The reason is in the first chapter Colossians 1:16 mentions God's power over invisible dominions or rulers and in the sister book to Colossians, the book of Ephesians in the Bible outlines more specifically who these invisible rulers are. Ephesians 6:12 says this, "We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places."

Ephesians goes on giving more instructions on how to stand against these forces of evil it explains that there is one "evil one" at the top who puts his evil officers to work wrecking havoc in people's lives. The story of the evil one, otherwise referred to as Satan, the devil or Lucifer in different parts of the Bible has one main thing he is always trying to do and that's to put distance between human beings and God, corrupting their relationship.

He started doing it with the first man and woman in the Garden of Eden promising them power, happiness and wealth and suggesting that God was holding out on them and he has been doing the same thing with everyone else ever since. When it comes to the devil it seems to me there are two unhelpful extremes.

One extreme is to completely dismiss the devil. A well known skeptic named Rudolph Bultmann is famous for saying, "It is impossible to use electric light and the wireless, and to avail ourselves of modern medical and surgical discoveries, and at the same time believe in the New Testament world of demons and spirits."

The other extreme is to blame everything on the devil. One woman named Cassidy McGillicuddy reflected on her experience growing up as a Christian. She writes,

“I moved through a world chockablock full of demons, angels, and other supernatural agents who could—and very often did—meddle with the visible world and its people on a constant basis. Every single day, everything that happened could reasonably be seen as the product of that meddling. If something good happened, an angel or “God” himself had made it happen; if something bad happened or someone got caught doing something terrible, demons or “Satan” had personally brought that about. Demonic attacks could come from any angle, so parents and leaders had to “pray a hedge of protection” around their loved ones.”

I think these are the two extremes to avoid: (1) To completely dismiss the reality of the devil and his demons and their destructive influence. (2) To assume demonic activity in everything everywhere and be afraid of it.

What I think drives a wedge of wisdom between these two extremes is our verse from Colossians today. It’s actually my favorite verse in all of the Bible on the devil.

Throughout the Bible the devil is not pictured as some sort of co-equal cosmic power in an eternal battle between good and evil. That’s the teaching of an ancient religion called Zoroastrianism not the Judeo-Christian teaching from the Bible. In the Bible God is always bigger and better than the devil and keeps him on a very short leash.

A whole book of the Bible, the book of Job, emphasizes this that the devil cannot do anything but what God gives him permission to do, which God always uses for a good in His grand plan and scheme. In the New Testament, all the books written after Jesus came, give a very small role and attention to the devil.

At the beginning of His ministry, Jesus resists and defeats the devil’s temptations in the wilderness. Throughout Jesus three year ministry on earth he takes the battle to the devil, casting out demons, healing people, refuting lies and Jesus wins every time. Then at the end of His life in a grand spectacle Jesus completely strips the devil of all His power and authority on the cross.

This is what our passage in Colossians is driving at. He disarmed the devil, put him to open shame and triumphed! So how? How did He do that and what’s it mean for us?

To disarm is to strip naked. It’s a picture of not only having all your weapons confiscated but to be stripped of all your clothes and seen for what you really are.

Several scenes in the life and ministry of Jesus seem to indicate the devil knew he would be defeated at the cross. Many think Jesus’ temptation by the devil in the wilderness was an attempt to get Jesus just to use His divine power, which would have circumvented Him going to the cross. In Jesus’ healings, the demons are scared of Him and say things indicating they knew they would be defeated in the future.

So it seemed like the devil knew he couldn't stop it, Jesus was going to the cross. Since it was happening it seems like he decided to do his worst, falsely accusing Jesus, trying to trap him, get him to be prideful, to stand up for himself, tried to get him to fight, beating him up repeatedly, mocking him and making sure the crucifixion was as bloody and painful as it could possible be.

What we see in the scenes of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ is hatred and evil on pure display and it rubs right up against love and goodness on pure display in front of everyone. John Stott wrote, in my opinion, the best book ever written on the cross, simply titled, "The Cross of Christ." In it he says this,

"Had not Jesus been rejected by his own nation, betrayed, denied and deserted by his own disciples and executed there, spread-eagled and skewered on his cross, robbed of all freedom of movement, strung up with nails, pinned there and powerless. It appears to be total defeat. If there is victory, it is the victory of pride, prejudice, jealousy, hatred, cowardice and brutality.

Yet the Christian claim is that the reality is the opposite of the appearance. What look like the defeat of goodness by evil is also, and more certainly, the defeat of evil by goodness. Overcome there, he was himself overcoming. Crushed by the ruthless power of Rome, he was himself crushing the serpent's head (Genesis 3:15). The victim was the victor, and the cross is still the throne from which he rules the world."

You see, when Jesus was hanging there on the cross He knew He was doing something cosmic. That's why He turned to one of the thieves who repented while hanging there, "Today, you will be with me in paradise." That's why He cried out with a loud voice on the cross for all to hear, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

At every turn, every time He didn't open His mouth to defend Himself, every time He refused to use His divine power to fight back or call His angel warriors, every time He resisted the way of fallen humanity He was winning and winning and winning, stripping the enemy of all the tactics he'd been deploying on weak humans since the garden. But Jesus was not weak. He was strong and by being willing to be weak and vulnerable He stripped the enemy of His power and said your way will not win the day. You are done. And He nailed the power of sin and Satan to the cross!

You see, the real power of the devil is in deception. He's a liar and his lie has been the same since the beginning. His lie is that life is better without God. His lie is that doing our own thing apart from God will be better. His lie is that pridefully seeking power, prosperity and pleasure will pay off. But at the cross we see clearly that it doesn't. There we see Satan for what He is and we see true goodness and grace on prime display shining in glory!

At the cross Jesus won the greatest battle of all, the battle for the human soul, and He was victorious. He won for us and for all who believe it and receive it, His victory is ours!

Martin Luther was a pastor, church planter and theologian of the 1600's. One of my personal heroes. I've read a number of biographies of his life. Luther suffered from a lot of nightmares, often feeling like he was tormented by the devil who would frequently and repeatedly remind him of his sins trying to heap guilt upon him. What Luther discovered was the power of the cross and how it frees us. For some Satan loads guilt upon their backs for their faults and failures, for others they feel shame in the

night like they are always not enough and for others he gets them with fear, fear of the next day and the future and whether or not they will be okay. What Luther discovered at the cross was how strong Christ was and how little and weak the devil really is and he wrote a song about it. The whole song is called “A Mighty Fortress Is Our God.” This is my favorite verse in it.

*“For still our ancient foe doth seek to work us woe;
His craft and power are great, and, armed with cruel hate,
On earth is not his equal.*

*Though this world, with devils filled,
Should threaten to undo us,
We will not fear, for God hath 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”*

One little word. Jesus. At His name every knee must bow and recognize that He is the victorious King and Lord of all! At the name of Jesus Satan must flee. Is there an area in your life you feel like devil’s been getting you down. The answer is to turn to Jesus and see the victory He won for you at the cross. Jesus has freed us from Satan and His destructive power so we might move forward with life in His name.

III. No More Disgrace

Well, I have one more short point for us today, “No More Disgrace” that I’m mainly taking from one word, the word “triumph” at the end of verse 15. Putting an enemy to shame and triumphing over them is most likely a reference to what’s called the “triumphal procession.”

Basically it’s a citywide parade and party for the victors in battle. There’s lots of documents and accounts of triumphal processions. One famous one is when Roman General Aemilius Paulus returned from capturing Macedonia. Scaffolding was erected for spectator seating and the triumph parade lasted three days. On the first day all the military victors came down the street with their chariots, horses and weapons. The next day they came down the street showing off all the loot, the gold, the art, the swords, oxen and everything they won in the battle. Then on the third day they traipsed the conquered king and his servants, beat up and in chains being dragged down the street in disgrace and defeat.

Now I could be wrong here, but I think the “triumphing” in our verse in light of that cultural background is actually a reference to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The context of the triumph begins in verse 13 which says all who believe in Jesus have been “made alive together with him” meaning Jesus rose from the dead and we have that new life power at work in us.

If I'm right then when Jesus rose from the dead and showed himself to hundreds of people for a period of forty days it was basically the triumphal procession saying, "Look devil and all your followers. You couldn't kill me. I'm alive. Your way is done. A new era has dawned."

Jesus who was stripped naked, disgraced and shamed at the cross rose victorious. In doing so has shows us who the devil really is laid bare and every time we walk forward in that newness of life, we are walking in the resurrection parade, carrying on the triumphal procession, rejoicing in the devil's defeat and the victory of our Lord.

The section I read earlier from John Stott was a piece out of a chapter in his book titled, "The Conquest of Evil." He begins that chapter by saying this,

"It is impossible to read the New Testament without being impressed by the atmosphere of joyful confidence which pervades it, and which stands out in relief against the rather jejune religion that often passes for Christianity today. There was no defeatism about the early Christian; they spoke rather of victory.

For example, 'Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory! (1 Corinthians 15:57) 'In all these things (adversaries, dangers) we are more than conquerors!' (Romans 8:37) 'God...always leads us in triumphal procession!' (2 Corintiahns 2:14)

Victory, conquest, triumph, overcoming - this was the vocabulary of those first followers of the risen Lord. For if they spoke of victory, the knew they owed it to the victorious Lord Jesus!"

His victory is our victory! Jesus has risen and triumphed! So we no longer walk around in darkness, defeat and disgrace. We are champions! And we are free.

Our challenge is to live into that reality and not get dragged back down into despair and disbelief. Jesus won and because He won we win and are meant to walk forward in joyous victory.

I've been quoting an old hymn in each point, so I figured I'd make it a trifecta and close this point out with hymn quote as well. One we sing regularly here is titled, "In Christ Alone." Here's the last two stanzas:

*There in the ground His body lay
Light of the world by darkness slain
Then bursting forth in glorious Day
Up from the grave He rose again
And as He stands in victory
Sin's curse has lost its grip on me
For I am His and He is mine
Bought with the precious blood of Christ*

*No guilt in life, no fear in death
This is the power of Christ in me
From life's first cry to final breath*

*Jesus commands my destiny
No power of hell, no scheme of man
Can ever pluck me from His hand
Till He returns or calls me home
Here in the power of Christ I'll stand*

In and through the person and power of Christ, we are victorious and have reason for great joy. We are victors who stand and walk forward in life with Him and His promises in front of us making our way in the triumphal procession that takes us from here up into the throne room of heaven. It's our victory lap and we're almost home, thank be to God!

Conclusion

Well, I started out the sermon today talking about John of Arc and her mom. Both were incredible servants of Christ who took hold of the victory Jesus purchased and moved forward with a strength and confidence in His name.

I imagine John of Arc in battle waving that banner with the risen Jesus depicted on it and I imagine her mom in the now burnt down courts of the Notre Dame cathedral championing her daughter's faith...and I find courage welling up in my soul to grab that banner too. To grab hold of the banner of Christ and walk forward in the strength and confidence that He was victorious and because of that no amount of fear, guilt or shame could ever undo me because I'm free. He's freed me and my debt, the devil and death and all its disgraceful forms has been overcome and I'm free.

Free. Mmmmm. Free. Where and how do you need the victory of Jesus Christ to free you today? Is your spiritual debt weighing you down? Do you feel tormented by the devil and fear, guilt and shame driven lies? Are you walking in defeat and need to join the triumphant resurrection parade?

Wherever you are at today I want you to know that God loves you and wants to minister His love, hope and assurance to your soul. He sent Jesus to fight the battle we could never win on our own. Jesus came and He won. He was victorious and He shares that victory with us.

Let's take some time to follow Jesus in being weak and vulnerable. Pull out those response cards and take a minute or so to write down what you sense God may be inviting you into in how He wants to encourage you today. If you aren't sensing anything that's okay, here's one response we can all endeavor to follow this week...in the "This week I resolve to:" section, just write down, "...to walk in the victory of Christ."