

Accomplished at the Cross of Christ

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[0:00] Please take your Bibles and open them up this morning to the book of Colossians. We've been working our way through the book of Colossians. It's our normal practice here as a church, really usually just to take a book and walk straight through it.

So we've come this morning to Colossians chapter 2, verses 11 through 15. So if you would open up your Bibles there, Colossians 2, verses 11 through 15.

If you don't have your own Bible with you, that's okay. We provide them in the seat back in front of you, but I would encourage you please have a Bible open as we look to God's Word together this morning.

And when you've found that, let's stand in honor of the reading of God's Word. Again, our passage is chapter 2, verses 11 through 15, but I'm going to start reading in verse 8 for the sake of context as we hear what Paul is saying to us this morning.

He says,

[1:54] Father, would you bless now the preaching of your Word, and would you make it fruitful in the hearts of all who hear this morning?

We pray in Christ's name. Amen. You may be seated. One thing that becomes abundantly clear as you read through Paul's letter to the Colossians is that Paul is deeply impressed with this man, Jesus.

He believes that Jesus Christ is worthy of our full and our total devotion, and he believes that the gospel of Jesus Christ, this message of what he has done, is sufficient.

In other words, we don't need to add to it any man-made tradition, or man-made law, or man-made ideas. A healthy church insists on the gospel.

It's not just in Colossians, though. If you flip through his other letters in the New Testament, you'll notice this is a common theme with Paul, isn't it, in 1 Corinthians? He says, 1 Corinthians 2.

[3:31] Paul says he decided to know nothing except for Christ Jesus and him crucified. Galatians 1. He pronounces a curse upon any who would preach a different doctrine, any different gospel, even if it was himself or an angel from heaven.

May they be accursed. Romans 1.16. He says, I'm not ashamed of the gospel. It's the power of God for salvation to any who believe it.

2 Timothy 2. We've been reading through 2 Timothy in our Grow Class Hour. His last recorded words. The dying words of a man who's nearing death.

What does he say to Timothy? Remember Jesus Christ, risen from the dead. The offspring of David, as preached in my gospel.

Paul believes that there is no greater man than the man Jesus Christ. And there is no greater work than the accomplishment of the cross.

[4:33] There is no greater message than the message of the gospel of Jesus Christ. And this morning, as we look to Colossians chapter 2, I want to ask Paul, why? What actually happened there on the cross some 2,000 years ago?

What actually was done that has so captivated Paul's heart that this is all he wants to talk about? And what was accomplished that has so captivated so many hearts of so many men and women ever since?

Why is this gospel such good news? We can see externally what happened there on the cross with the naked eye. We can see that Jesus bled and he suffered.

We see that he prayed and he spoke. We see that he bowed his head and we see that he died on the cross. This is visible to anybody who was there. But this morning, I want to ask what was actually accomplished in this moment of suffering and death?

Paul gives us five answers to that question here in Colossians chapter 2. Five answers to that question. This is going to be our outline this morning. If you're taking notes, try to make it easy for you to follow along this morning.

[5 : 46] He wants us to understand what was accomplished at the cross so that our minds being so fixed on Christ and his accomplishment at the cross, we would not be taken captive by any dark teaching that is not according to Christ.

So five accomplishments of the cross this morning. First, he brought his people from the physical to the spiritual. He brought his people from the physical to the spiritual.

Look there to verse 11. Paul says, In him, that is in Christ, in him also, you were circumcised. Now why in the world are we talking about circumcision?

If you are not really familiar with your Bible, you may wonder, Why does this keep coming up time and time again? This is kind of strange. We were just talking about Christ and the glory of Jesus and who he is.

And now Paul is back on circumcision. Well, we recently walked through the book of Genesis together as a church. And we saw there that God made a covenant with Abraham.

[6 : 53] He made promises to Abraham and his descendants. And as he often does when God enters into a covenant, he gave a covenant sign. A representation of the promises made in the covenant.

It's like a wedding ring on your finger if you're married. This wedding ring symbolizes and it represents the promises that you've made to your spouse. The union, the covenant relationship that you have with your spouse.

Well, in the same way, in the Bible, covenant promises are represented by covenant signs. And the sign of the Abrahamic covenant was circumcision.

This marked off the people of God. Not to get too graphic, but the male foreskin was cut off and removed. And why it had to be exactly like that, I do not know.

Okay, but that's what we're told. It was a physical sign of being in covenant with the Lord. And every Jewish male had to be circumcised. But isn't it interesting?

[7 : 54] As we come to Colossians, remember again who it is that he's speaking to here. These aren't Jews. There may have been a small Jewish pocket there, Jewish believers there in Colossae.

But by and large, for the most part, these are Gentile believers. Which means they are very likely not physically circumcised. They weren't part of this old covenant with Abraham.

They're not descendants physically of Abraham. They are outsiders to that old covenant. But Paul tells them, in Christ, you were circumcised.

How? Not with a knife and not with a flint. But rather with a circumcision made without hands. By putting off the body of the flesh.

By the circumcision of Christ. In other words, he's telling them, you have received a greater, truer, spiritual circumcision.

[8 : 57] Now there was tremendous pressure in the first century for believers to continue to submit themselves to Jewish laws. And apparently here in Colossae, this was no exception.

We saw last week that this false teaching in Colossae, it had several distinct elements. It had elements of humanism, man-made thoughts, human tradition.

It had elements of legalism, do not taste, do not touch, do not handle. It had elements of mysticism and asceticism. But I think we can add another this morning.

I think it's clear that there are elements of Judaism mixed in with this false teaching here in Colossae. We'll see you next week, Lord willing. That these false teachers are insisting, they pass judgment about questions of food and drink.

Questions about observing festivals and new moons and Sabbaths. And here, questions about circumcision. Paul says all of that had its place in its time, but don't you understand, these are shadows of things to come.

[10 : 00] The substance belongs to Christ. These are temporary, fading, passing pointers of the glory of Christ to come. But now He has come.

Now He is here. And you need not submit to any of these rules and regulations anymore in order to belong to God. What you need is to be truly, spiritually circumcised in your heart.

This is spiritual regeneration. And it happens simply by hearing the gospel of Jesus Christ and by receiving Him by faith.

This is a spiritual work of God's grace by the power of His Spirit through the preaching of the gospel. Physical circumcision is made with hands. That's human effort. Spiritual circumcision is a work of God's grace.

Regeneration in your heart. This is how you truly belong to the Lord. Anyone, man, woman, boy, adult, child, grown man, it does not matter, Jew, Gentile, by hearing the gospel and receiving Him by faith.

[11:16] Paul says this has happened to you. The gospel has come to you. And the Spirit of God has cut your heart and cut away the body of the flesh.

He has cut away the old self with all of its selfish and fleshly motives. And He has brought you into covenant with the Lord. And if this has happened to you, why in the world would you submit to anyone who would lay an extra burden on your back?

At the cross, Jesus brought His people from physical placeholders now to spiritual truth.

He has brought us from shadows now to substance, second accomplishment. He has brought His people from death to life.

At the cross, second accomplishment, Jesus brought His people from death to life. We see this in verses 12 and 13, if you look there with me. He says, Having been buried with Him in baptism, in which you were also raised with Him through faith in the powerful working of God, who raised Him from the dead.

[12:31] And you, who were dead in your trespasses, in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive together with Him. This is incredibly good news, church.

And it starts with the incredibly bad news, doesn't it? That we are all by nature spiritual corpses. Dead is the word that He uses. And this is why, for one thing, it is so wrong and so empty to treat Christianity as just some sort of self-improvement program.

Like, you just need a little bit of Jesus added into your life. Everybody by nature is pretty good. They just need a little pick-me-up, a little spiritual bump. Paul says we're dead.

We don't need spiritual remodeling. We need a spiritual resurrection. This is exactly what Christ has accomplished for us at the cross.

[13:32] Paul says it like this in Ephesians 2. He says, You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience, among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, all of us carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, all of us by nature children of wrath like the rest of mankind.

Who's excluded from that? But God, being rich in mercy because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, God made us alive together with Christ. By grace you have been saved. The gospel is the good news. That Jesus Christ, the perfect Son of God, the only one who never transgressed, bore the wrath of God and died a sinner's death in our place and was resurrected from the grave so that now any who come to Him in faith will be raised with Him to live this resurrected life.

Christ's work on the cross accomplished the resurrection that dead sinners like us need. And as a sign, as a sign that this has happened to us, He has given us a new covenant sign.

He has given us the new covenant sign of baptism. You see that there in the text. Now, I have to be very careful here in a passage like this because I can take this and I will, I almost made like three other sermons about this passage and I still may do it, church.

[15:21] Be warned. Because the connection here between baptism and circumcision and the old covenant and the new covenant, this is not minor, easy listening stuff, okay?

So if this goes above your head, that's okay. Come find me afterwards. I'll take a couple hours and explain it to you. But I'm going to do my best here to chase a quick rabbit trail and then get us back on track because I would be completely irresponsible to preach this text and not show you how this is one of those places where we take a different interpretation than some of our closest living relatives in the broader church.

So bear with me here for one minute. I want to show this to you. And remember Paul's argument here. What is he arguing? He's telling us, you do not need to submit to circumcision.

You don't have to do that. And our Presbyterian friends who we love and respect, who we may have some in the room this morning, would argue, well, of course you don't need to be circumcised because baptism replaces circumcision.

This is their understanding. This is why they say, well, in the old covenant, circumcision is the sign of the old covenant. And in the old covenant, we circumcise the children.

[16:43] And now in the new covenant, baptism replaces circumcision. And so why would we not continue to apply the sign of baptism to the children of those who are in the covenant community?

Baptism directly replaces circumcision. I want you just to notice a couple of truths in this passage very briefly that I don't think work in favor of that argument.

For one, it's clear that Paul is connecting circumcision and baptism, but not physical circumcision. Isn't that the point? He is connecting baptism with non-physical circumcision.

He is connecting baptism with spiritual circumcision, which we just saw is spiritual regeneration of the heart. And so when our Presbyterian friends, who we love, argue that baptism in the new covenant is the direct parallel to circumcision in the old covenant, we say, no, physical circumcision anticipates spiritual circumcision, regeneration, which is then represented by baptism.

So that's one reason. Baptism is linked here with spiritual circumcision, not physical circumcision. Another is the clear connection here between baptism, spiritual circumcision, and this word that I can't get over, which is faith.

[18:11] Paul says, you were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith. The powerful working of God who raised him from the dead.

How is one raised up to new life in Christ? It is through faith in the message of the gospel.

Who is to receive the sign of being raised up with Christ? It is those who have faith in the risen Savior, Jesus Christ. So that's the end of my rabbit trail on baptism.

Paul's point, bringing us back, is that if we have come to Christ in faith, then we are risen with him. That's what our baptism represents. We are resurrected with Jesus.

When you put your faith in Christ, you are spiritually united to Christ, so much so that his death to sin is your death to sin.

[19:13] And his burial is your burial. And his new resurrection life is your resurrection life. You can say with Paul, I have been crucified with Christ, Galatians 2.20.

Therefore, I no longer live. Jesus Christ now lives in me. The life I live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

If you've heard the gospel and you have not put your faith in Christ, see what Christ is holding out for you here? If you are still spiritually dead, Christ offers you new life if you would simply come to him in faith.

So Christ at the cross has brought us from the physical to the spiritual. He has brought us from death to life. Third, we see he brought his people from condemnation to forgiveness.

From condemnation to forgiveness. Look there to verses 13 and 14. How did he make us alive? How did he resurrect us? What did he do?

[20:26] It says, having forgiven us all our trespasses by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands, this he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

This is another look at the bad news outside of Christ, isn't it? Paul says, outside of Christ, not only are we spiritually dead, but we are also spiritually indebted.

We are debtors outside of Christ. There is a record of debt that stands against us. And it's a record, he says, that carries legal demands.

If you're not in Christ by faith, the fact is, you are deep in the hole in tremendous and terrifying amounts of debt. Some people say, well, that can't be true.

I've been pretty good. I mean, do you realize, first of all, that's not true. But even if it were, even the smallest transgression against a holy God is a damnable offense.

[21:35] That's not just our transgression. It's also who we are transgressing against. If you were to come up here and punch me in the face this morning, you might get in a little bit of trouble.

I don't know. Maybe someone would take offense to that. But if you were to come and to try to punch the President of the United States in the face, guess what would happen to you? The sentence and the charges against you would be that much greater.

Our sin, we need to understand that our sin is against the highest authority in all of the universe. Our rebellion is against the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords.

And from the moment we took our first breath, we have plunged ourselves headlong into debt against a holy God and this is a bill that will come due.

And it's a bill that we cannot pay. No matter how hard you try if you cleaned up your act from this moment forward, you tried your best and lived your absolute best life from this moment forward to the moment of your death, you would remain a debtor and the courtroom of heaven will demand payment.

[22:46] Several months ago, we received a notice. I can't remember if it was a phone call or if we got something in the mail. I want to tell the story correctly but whatever it was, we had fallen behind on a bill and I have no idea how that happened.

Someone went to the doctor and this was the first notice for us but this was the last notice for them. It was about \$50 copay that we owed to these people but they said, if we do not pay this debt, we are getting sent to collections and they're coming for us quick.

So we did what we should do and we promptly called the office and we were reconciled. Church, if a medical provider is going to send you to collections over \$50, why should we be surprised that God Almighty would demand that all of our debts be paid?

The gospel is the good news that for all who simply trust in Christ by faith, that bill is paid in full. God forgave all our trespasses, Paul says. Everyone. Past, present, future.

[24:10] Every sinful thought, every sinful deed, every sinful motive, forgiven, wiped clean. Not swept under the rug, that wouldn't be just, would it? Paid in full by who?

Paid in full by the death of Christ in our place. Says God Himself has canceled the record of debt that stood against us with His legal demands.

How? This He set aside, nailing it to the cross. We often sing, Jesus paid it all.

All to Him I owe. Sin had left a crimson stain. He washed it white as snow. The gospel is the good news that the greatest sinner in all the world can receive full forgiveness of all our sins simply by faith in Jesus.

Fourth accomplishment. At the cross, Jesus brought Satan from armed and dangerous to disarmed and humiliated.

[25:21] He brought Satan from armed and dangerous to disarmed and humiliated. Look there to verse 15. He says, He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in Him.

These rulers and authorities are all of the demonic spiritual forces of evil that rebel against Christ and that wage war against His people.

This is Satan and all of His horde of demons that would seek to deceive and destroy and attack and accuse all of God's people. And we've seen this language before in Colossians, by the way.

He told us in chapter 1 that through Christ all things were created whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities. In other words, these are not equal forces with the Lord.

They are creatures. They are under His sovereign rule and now because of the cross Paul says Jesus has disarmed these demonic rulers.

[26:32] He has disarmed these authorities. He has put them to open shame. He's triumphed over them at the cross. At the cross of Christ a decisive fatal blow was delivered to Satan and to hold his kingdom.

Yes, our enemy still exists. Yes, he still prowls around like a roaring lion. He still is out there seeking someone to devour but this is a lion on a leash.

He has been declawed. He's a toothless tiger where once he had the ability and the power to deceive and to accuse now because of the full and finished work of Christ.

He no longer has this weapon in his arsenal. If you are in Christ by faith, you are forgiven. Point blank. Your debt is paid in full.

You are resurrected. You are united to Christ by faith. You are spiritually circumcised and regenerated in your heart. The schemes of Satan can take none of that away from you.

[27:43] This canceling of our debt and full forgiveness of our trespasses, past, present, future, it empties the clip from Satan's gun. So when Satan stands to accuse you before the throne of God, Christ Jesus and his perfect righteousness, it clothes you and it shields you so that he has no case to make, the judgment has already been rendered.

He's arguing a case that he's already lost. And when he whispers in your ear that you're guilty, guilty, guilty, you say, you know what, you're right, I am a sinner, but the gospel of Christ tells me there is therefore now no condemnation for any who are in Christ.

Christ is my righteousness. Christ is my confidence before the Lord. Christ is my assurance that I'm going to make it to glory. Christ is my salvation.

I love the song before the throne of God above. I have a strong and perfect plea, a great high priest whose name is love, whoever lives and pleads for me.

My name is graven on his hands. My name is written on his heart. I know that while in heaven he stands, no tongue can bid me dense depart.

[29 : 10] When Satan tempts me to despair and tells me of the guilt within, upward I look and see him there who made an end to all my sin. Because the sinless Savior died, my sinful soul is counted free for God the just is satisfied to look on him and pardon me.

Just think about that scene of the cross again, church. On the surface Jesus is stripped of his clothes, but under the surface Satan is stripped of his power.

On the surface Jesus is humiliated and mocked, but under the surface Satan is put to open shame. On the surface Jesus has lost, but under the surface the truth is that Satan was defeated at the cross of Christ.

St. Augustine says, the blood of Christ was shed and the devil's bond was canceled. The debtor was set free and the captor was bound.

The cross became a tribunal, the executioner was executed and the victim triumphed. The great Puritan Thomas Watson says it like this, he says, Christ has given him his death's wound upon the cross.

[30 : 33] The devil may roar against a child of God, but shall not hurt him. He could not touch Job's life, much less his soul. Therefore, fear not, resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

Satan is a conquered enemy. He knows no march but running away. The cross is the accomplishment of the defeat of all of our greatest enemies.

Satan powerless to destroy you. Death has lost its sting. Sin has lost its enslaving authority over you. Your debt has been paid.

Your dead heart has been revived. This is what Christ has done at the cross for you, Christian.

Therefore, fifth and finally, this is where we close.

The reason Paul is telling us this. At the cross, Jesus has brought us from slaves to human opinion to free servants of Jesus Christ.

[31 : 45] He has brought us from being slaves to human opinion to free servants of Christ. Do you remember the charge? See to it that no one takes you captive.

Verse 16, Lord willing, we'll see this next week. Therefore, in light of all that Christ has done at the cross, therefore, he says, let no one pass judgment on you. Therefore, verse 18, let no one disqualify you.

Why? Because at the cross, God's judgment has already been rendered in Christ. And at the cross, your qualification has already been determined.

It's not in your submission to any human expectation. You are qualified already in Christ. So, church, do not submit to any additions.

Do not accept any distractions. Be free of slavery to human opinions. Be free of the rules and regulations of man and the expectations of others if those opinions are not according to Christ.

[33 : 00] And when others would seek to enslave you to human opinion, you look at what Christ accomplished at the cross and say, I'm free. I belong to him.

Church, let's insist on the gospel of Jesus Christ. And like Paul, let's let our hearts be so deeply captivated by Jesus that like Paul, we decide to know nothing else but Christ and him crucified.

Amen. Father, we praise you for the cross of Christ. We praise you for the finished work of Jesus.

We praise you that our very best efforts can't add a thing to the finished work of Christ. We praise you that because Jesus has disarmed the rulers and authorities, Father Satan and all of his attempts against us will fail for all who belong to you.

We praise you, God, for the victory of Christ at the cross. We praise you for this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. may