

First Baptist Church Merritt Island
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What Happened at the Cross
Colossians 2:13-15

Here's an easy question for you: What do we celebrate on Good Friday and Easter?

That's Christianity 101. On Good Friday, we celebrate the death of Jesus. On Easter, we celebrate His resurrection from the dead. Jesus, the eternal Son of God, lived a perfect life. He died an agonizing death on the cross. His body was placed in a borrowed tomb where it lay lifeless in death. Then came Sunday and the power of God was put on full display as Jesus came out of that tomb alive and well, never to die again. Christ the Lord is risen today. Hallelujah!

But what if I told you Easter is the celebration of someone else rising from the dead, as well as Jesus? What if I told you that the power of God is put on full display because someone else came out of a tomb alive and well with life that will never end? Have you heard that part of the Easter story?

If you haven't heard, you might be surprised to learn who that person is. If you are trusting in Jesus, that person is you. Christ the Lord is risen today and so are you in Him. Hallelujah!

And that brings us to our next passage in our study of the book of Colossians.

Colossians 2:13–15

And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, 14 by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. 15 He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

In these verses, the Apostle Paul gives us one of the best descriptions in all the Bible of what happened on Good Friday when Jesus died on the cross. And he includes one of the most startling declarations about what happened through the resurrection of Christ from the dead. Verse 13 says God made us alive together with Christ.

And before we take a closer look at our text, let me give you the big idea for today.

Big Idea: Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, we are given a new life of forgiveness and freedom.

1. WE NEED NEW LIFE

2:13 And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh,

Paul says we used to be dead. But how can we be dead even though we are alive? Well, the word "death" basically means "separation." Physical death is the separation of the soul and spirit from the body. But Paul clearly isn't referring to that kind of death here. He's referring to spiritual death. Spiritual death is the separation of the soul and spirit from God and the life that can only come through relationship with Him.

When God created man, He gave Adam one command: don't eat the forbidden fruit. And that command came with a consequence. God said, "in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die." (Gen. 2:16-17) You know the rest of the story. Adam ate the forbidden fruit. Physical death entered the picture because of Adam's sin, but his physical death didn't happen for a long time after his sin. So, in what way did Adam die on the same day he ate the fruit? He died spiritually. He was instantly filled with shame as he was separated from God and the life that can only come in relationship with Him. Genesis 3 says Adam actually hid himself from God. He was so separated from God that he was actively running from God.

And that paradigm has passed on to all of Adam's descendants.

Romans 5:12

Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned—

Romans 5:15

... many died through one man's trespass...

With Adam's sin, humanity fell into a state of separation from God. We all have chosen to sin. That's what's wrong with our world today. Our world is trapped in sin. That's why, in our text, Paul says that we were dead in our trespasses. We aren't just dead in Adam's sin, we are dead in our own. All of us are spiritually dead as a result of our sin.

Being dead means we are lifeless. We are separated from the life of God, the life of true joy and peace and satisfaction. Being dead also means we are helpless. There's nothing we can do in our own power to change ourselves or our lives. We are dead apart from Christ.

And perhaps when you hear that it starts to make sense out of your life. You long for joy that won't fade away. You want meaning and purpose and satisfaction that will last for more than a fleeting moment. Deep down, you know there's something more that's always just beyond your grasp. You know there's a kind of life you desperately want to have. And you know that, no matter how hard you've tried, you've never been able to get there on your own. In the deepest way possible, you are lifeless and helpless.

To quote the great coroner of Oz – we aren't only merely dead, we're really most sincerely dead. We need new life. That's why we need Jesus. And the good news is that we don't just need Jesus, we have Him. Because God so loved this world that He gave His only Son.

That brings us to the next part of our text.

2. WE ARE GIVEN NEW LIFE IN CHRIST

Colossians 2:13

And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him.

The "him" in verse 13 is referring to Jesus Christ. Even though we were dead in our sins, God has done something for us that we can't do for ourselves. He has made us alive together with Christ.

How does that happen? The answer is in verse 12.

Colossians 2:12

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.

Our New Life Begins through Faith in Jesus

We are raised up in Christ through faith. When we come to believe and trust in the powerful work God has done in Jesus, God miraculously unites us to Christ in a way that His death becomes our death, and His resurrection becomes our resurrection.

In a very real way, Easter was our resurrection morning. When we trust in Jesus through faith in Him, we aren't dead anymore. When Jesus came out of that grave, He brought us with Him.

That means we are no longer lifeless and helpless. We have access to the life of God Himself because Jesus lives in us and through us by the power of the Holy Spirit.

- Perfect peace can now be ours.
- Lasting joy can now be ours.
- Meaning and satisfaction and abundant life can now be ours.

Do you want a new life today? It's yours for the taking if you will place your faith and trust in Jesus.

But, if you've been paying attention, you might be asking a really important question: if my sin separates me from God, then how is my sin no longer separating me from God? If Jesus is God in the flesh, then how can I be united with Him when I've clearly sinned?

Our New Life includes Forgiveness of Sin

Colossians 2:13

And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses,

We can be united to Christ because our sin has been forgiven. In Christ, God forgives all our sin.

Some of us live with a list in our heads and hearts of the worst things we have done. It haunts us. It's always there. When we look in the mirror, we see that list – I've lied, so I'm a liar. I've cheated, so I'm a cheater. I've failed, so I'm a failure. It's what I've done so it's who I am. And we know God sees that list better than we do. So, when we imagine God looking at us, what could He possibly see but a liar or a cheater or a failure? And, since God is also the Judge who punishes sin, many of us live with this sense of justice hanging over our heads, like we are just bracing for the moment God decides to pay us back for the worst things we've done wrong. Or, more accurately, we are waiting for the moment God decides to make us pay back the worst things we've done wrong.

If God is a righteous Judge, how can He just forgive sinners who really are guilty?

Following World War 2, the world learned of the atrocities that had been committed by the Nazi regime. And the world rightly called for justice. So, in a series of 13 trials, known as the Nuremberg Trials, high-ranking Nazi officials were brought to court. Details of their crimes, like operating concentration camps, were laid out so they could be tried, and justice could be satisfied. What would the world have done if those people were proven to be guilty, but a judge simply swept their guilt under a rug and declared them all forgiven? There would have been an outcry of historic proportions. Why? Because it wouldn't be just. It wouldn't be right.

So, how can God essentially do that with us? The answer is that He doesn't. He doesn't sweep aside justice and ignore our sin. He deals with it all.

Colossians 2:14

by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

In the ancient world, a record of debt was a document that recorded exactly how much someone had borrowed and any legal obligations that were attached to the repayment. And it was written by the person who was in debt. So, if in the future that person tried to get out of repayment, there would be a legal document written in their own handwriting to prove beyond any doubt that they were legally obligated to repay it.

And Paul says there is a record of every sin we've ever committed along with the legal demand for what that sin deserves. You aren't wrong to think there's a list of all the worst things you've done. And you aren't wrong to think God will demand payback for them.

But Paul says something has happened to that record of debt with its legal demands. Verse 14 says it's been canceled. That word "cancel" means "to wipe away and erase." It's what happens when you erase writing from a white board...well, it's kind of like that. When I do it, there's always a little residue left behind where I can faintly see the writing. In my experience, that writing won't come clean without a cleaning agent that wipes it perfectly clean so you can't see it anymore.

And that's exactly what happened at the cross of Christ. Jesus shed His blood to provide forgiveness for our sins.

1 John 1:7

the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.

Jesus shed His blood to wipe away our sin. What is the legal demand for sin? It's death. And that's what Jesus did in our place. He died in our place. He paid the debt for our sin.

2 Corinthians 5:21

He was made to be sin for us so that we could become the righteousness of God in Him.

God has demanded that your list of sin be repaid. And, in Christ, He has provided the payment Himself. God doesn't forgive us by sweeping our sin under the rug. He deals with sin by providing a substitute as a sacrifice. Jesus stood in our place. Jesus paid our debt. Jesus atoned from our sin.

And notice the picture we get at the end of verse 14. ***"This he set aside, nailing it to the cross."***

In His death, Jesus took hold of that record of our sins and the repayment the law demands. He held it in His hand and as they drove the nails through His hand, God was nailing our sin to the cross.

JESUS CAME DOWN FROM THE CROSS, BUT THE RECORD OF OUR SINS IS STILL THERE!

It's set aside. It's no longer standing in between us and God. If you are trusting in Jesus and His powerful life, death, and resurrection – there is NOTHING standing between you and God the Father. Your sin and every demand for repayment is taken away. Psalm 103:12 says it's as far from you as the east is from the west. And, although there may still be consequences in this life for the sins we have committed against others, in our relationship with God there is no condemnation and never will be for all eternity.

So, when that list of sins comes into your mind and you get that sense of fear and foreboding that one-day God will bring down His anger and justice on those sins, look to Jesus and rejoice. That day of anger and justice has already come and gone. On Good Friday, Jesus endured the payment for our sin. And, though Jesus came down from the cross, the record of our debt is still there, and it's marked "Paid In Full." Welcome to your new life in Christ. It's a life of complete forgiveness of sin and total acceptance by God.

Some of you may be hearing this for the very first time or at least in a very new and personal way. If that's you, I want to invite you to trust in Jesus today. Even now, in the quietness of your heart, acknowledge that you have sinned against God, believe the truth that Jesus died for your sin and rose again to give you new life, and call on Him to save you and you will be saved and forgiven and set free. Please don't leave this place today without knowing the forgiveness and restoration that only comes through Jesus.

And I know that many of you are trusting in Jesus. You've received the gift of salvation and rejoice in your forgiveness. I could stop here, and it would be enough for you. But our text doesn't stop here. Our new life in Christ not only includes forgiveness of sin.

Our New Life includes Freedom from Satan

Colossians 2:15

He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.

The phrase "rulers and authorities" is a reference to the spiritual forces of darkness that are at work in the world around us and are led by Satan himself. It's the same phrase Paul uses in Ephesians 6 where he says we "*wrestle...against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.*"

This world is at war and our lives are under attack by the forces of evil that operate according to the schemes of the devil.

But, when Jesus nailed the record of our sins to the cross, He disarmed Satan and His forces of darkness. Essentially, Paul is saying that Jesus stripped Satan of the weapons that could do us harm. What does he mean by that? Let me quickly give you just two ways Satan has been disarmed and defeated by the work of Jesus at the cross.

First, Satan cannot accuse you of sin.

Revelation 12:10

[speaking of Satan] the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God.

The only real threat Satan has against us is his ability to accuse us of the things we've done in sinning against God. He can bring up our record of sin and say to God, "If you are going to throw me into hell for sin, then you have to throw them into hell because here's a list of sins they've committed just like me." But Satan can't do that with those who are trusting in Christ because the list of our sin is nailed to the cross of Jesus and the payment has been made in full.

So, the next time you are overwhelmed at the thought of your own sin and how awful it is, look to the cross of Jesus in faith and tell the devil he lost his battle on Good Friday and your sin is nailed to the cross.

Second, Satan cannot make you fear death.

Hebrews 2:14–15

Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he 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.

We naturally have a fear of death, not just because we have a God-given desire to care for ourselves but because we have a Satan-induced fear of what will happen after death. But Jesus has taken the basis of that fear way by removing every trace of sin that would separate us from God. He has secured heaven as our home. We will live forever in the house of God our Father. Our future is guaranteed in Christ.

Here's what that means. The worst threat the enemy can make against you in this life is that you will die, and you'll immediately be in the presence of God heaven for all eternity. Satan has no power over people who aren't afraid to die.

At the cross, Jesus triumphed over Sin and Satan and Death and Hell. How do we know He triumphed and is victorious on our behalf? Because, on Easter morning, Jesus walked out of the grave by the power of Almighty God, alive and well, and took His seat at the right hand of the throne of God where He rules and reigns this very minute.

So, rejoice and be glad today. If you are trusting in Jesus, though you were dead in your sins, God has made you alive with Him. You were brought out of the grave by the power of Almighty God, alive and well, forgiven of sin and freed from the power of Satan. So, enjoy your new life in Jesus because Christ the Lord is risen today and so are you!