



Sermon – March 07, 2021  
Phillip Bethancourt

**Verses Covered This Week**

*Colossians 2:15*

*Colossians 2:8*

*Hebrews 3:13*

And as you grab your seats, let's grab our Bibles. We're going to be in Colossians 2:15 this morning. And after the message is over, we're going to be, during our response time, partaking of the Lord's Supper. I just want to remind you that as we have that response song, you can make your way to any of the tables around the room in order to pick up those elements.

What a joy it was today to be led by Robyn Higdon in worship. Robyn leads our student ministry worship team on a regular basis. Will y'all express your appreciation for her serving like that?

If you're a guest with us, whether in the room or online or even in our overflow room this morning, welcome home. We're coming to God's word because we trust that His spirit meets us each week to make us more like Jesus. If you remember, last week we spent our time talking about our victory that we have in Christ. And the way that He brings it about by defeating sin and death. And this morning, what we're going to find in Colossians 2:15 is Paul is continuing this trajectory. To show us not just that Jesus saves us from sin and death, but that He also saves us from the spiritual enemies who seek to destroy us. So let's notice the way that he speaks about it here beginning in Colossians 2:15.

*<sup>15</sup>He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.*

Let's pray together.

Father, in this moment I pray that You would clear the distractions, that You would overcome the discouragements, that You would help us to fix our eyes on Jesus so that we might see and savor Your goodness in the gospel. And we ask these things in Christ's name. Amen.

Well, it was one year ago this Sunday that was our last normal Sunday here at Central. If you go all the way back to March 2020, it was that particular Sunday, March 8<sup>th</sup>, that was our last time to meet together in person, if you can believe it. It's already been a year since that time. And we know what happened in that week afterwards. I remember seeing in the news Tom Hanks diagnosed positive. There was an NBA game that got cancelled. The SEC basketball tournament was supposed to happen up where I was in Nashville and that collapsed around us. And it seemed like our whole world unraveled in a moment. All our plans, our work, our hobbies, our connections were gone. It was as if they were stripped from us. And we remember what that felt like in that moment. This sense of isolation and uncertainty. I remember a friend of mine was leading their family through a family devotions during the shutdown that happened. And they asked their kids the question, how are we saved? And the response was, by staying indoors. That was the kind of experience that we were having at this time a year ago. And what we felt in that moment was a sense of anxiety. We felt disoriented. Maybe even the best way to describe it is, we felt disarmed. All our plans were unsettled. All of our power was undone. What we had set before us as a path where we were planning to go was now shaken by something outside of ourselves that we could not control.

When we come to the text this morning in Colossians 2:15, Paul is showing us a similar reality. But it's not something that's happening on this earth to those of us who are living in the midst of a global pandemic; he is speaking of a disarming. A stripping of power that takes place in the heavenly places; through the global rescue mission of His Son. When you look across the entire Scripture, you see it's a story of an unfolding kingdom that has its centerpiece at the cross. And what we're going to find this morning in Colossians 2:15 is that the cross and the kingdom come together to accomplish the victory of Christ. This morning, as we look at Colossians 2:15, we are going to recognize, we're going to celebrate the victory that God has provided us through His Son as we unpack the nature of that spiritual victory that Christ has achieved for us over our enemies. And we'll see that beginning back at the beginning of this verse. Where you'll notice first the way that Jesus saves us from our enemies through a personal victory. It's a personal victory. You're familiar with the author, C. S. Lewis. And in one of his best works, *The Screwtape Letters*, he has this to say about the demonic forces that are around us.

There are two equal and opposite errors into which our race can fall about the devils. One is to disbelieve in their existence. The other is to believe, and to feel an excessive and unhealthy interest in them.

But what Paul does here in this text is he gives us a different picture. He affirms the reality of our personal enemies, but he also affirms the victory that has happened in Christ. He saves us by disarming the rulers and authorities. You see those two terms: rulers and authorities. They've shown up now for the third time in Colossians. If you remember back in Colossians 1:16, Paul praised Jesus for creating all rule and authority. Then earlier in Colossians 2 back in earlier in the text in verse 10, he talks about, He is the head of all rule and authority. And now he speaks of the way that through Christ, God has disarmed all rulers and authorities. He's speaking here of these spiritual forces. These fallen angels. These demonic beings that now live amongst us in this universe and seek to upend the kingdom of God. When he speaks of these forces, he's not talking about systemic factors in the structures all around us. He's not even speaking of things in the way that we might usually hear someone talking about, someone talking about having to battle the demons inside them. What he is saying here is that there are personal beings seeking

to destroy each one of our lives. They are filled with power. And yet what Paul is unpacking for us today is that God brings us a personal victory over these enemies by disarming them. You see that word in the text there at the start of verse 15. That he disarmed the rulers and authorities. It's this idea of stripping off, of setting aside, of removing in order to replace. There's this idea of him taking captive those who are enemies. It's the same word that was used back in the story of Jesus when before His crucifixion He is stripped of His clothing and it's replaced with a robe and a crown of thorns. This idea of removal. It's the same idea as if a soldier is in battle and he captures an enemy combatant and he strips them and disarms them of all their weapons. They've not just been defeated; they have been disarmed. And that's the picture that Paul is giving here of what God has done for us through the cross of Jesus Christ. A spiritual victory that has disarmed the rulers and authorities that have set themselves against us.

As we know, last year graduation here at Texas A&M was upended by the pandemic. They couldn't have it in person. But that wasn't the first time that a global crisis had caused an unusual graduation experience here at Texas A&M. If you rewind the clock a hundred years to 1917, World War I had been going on for years. And in the spring of '17, the United States declared its entry into that war. And that upended everything here at Texas A&M. Because all of that senior class of 1917 immediately left their training and went to be trained to head off to war. And so the administrators at the time, knowing that they could not graduate a class that wasn't here, instead went to them. They showed up in Leon Springs, Texas where most of them were training. And they had that graduation ceremony there before those soldiers were then shipped off to the war. If you look back at the history books, one of the things you'll find is that Texas A&M contributed more than 2,000 officers to the American army in World War I. More than any other school, even the service academies at that time. And as the Americans entered the war, it totally turned the tide in the battle. And they launched that 100 days' offensive that culminated in the surrender of their enemies. And if you remember, after their enemies were defeated, a settlement was determined at the Treaty of Versailles. Where they not only acknowledged that they lost, but they agreed to be disarmed. It wasn't enough to defeat them. They had to be disarmed in order to ensure that for the next season of the world's existence, they could not return to the battlefield.

And when we look at what's happening here with the way that Paul describes the cross, he pictures it as a great disarmament. That He doesn't just defeat God's enemies, He takes away their powers. He subdues them. He brings them to open shame. And as a result of that, He doesn't just defeat them, He disarms them. They don't just surrender, they are stripped. The exultation of Christ in His cross leads to the humiliation of His enemies. It is a personal victory for you and me. And one of the ways that we experience that victory is by recognizing what were these powers that Jesus disarmed on the cross. We see Paul talk about two of them throughout Colossians. Look back with me at verse 8. Because we'll see the first of these powers that Jesus disarms on the cross when we see the way that He disarms the weapon of deception. So notice what he says there in verse 8.

<sup>8</sup>See to it that no one takes you captive by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the world, and not according to Christ.

One of satan's greatest weapons is the power of deception. It is the weapon of temptation. He seeks to lead us astray from all the way back in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve. He appeals to our appetites in order to convince us to satisfy them with forbidden fruit. And Paul speaks about it here in Colossian 2:8 as empty deceit. We talked about this a few weeks back when we looked through this passage. That one of satan's great powers is the power of temptation. And there is a danger in that deception. You don't need to turn there, but notice on the screens with me the way Paul, the way the author of Hebrews speaks about it in Hebrews 3 in verse 13. He says this about deception:

<sup>13</sup>But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.

That over time the power of the weapon of deception can lead to a hardness of heart. We all remember what it was like a few weeks ago when that winter storm came through. And on the first day that snow fell, it was beautiful. It was fresh. It was delightful. It was new. It was fun to be out there and experience something that we had never encountered before. But the more that period passed, when it thawed a little bit and then refroze overnight. And as it was driven over or walked over, what happened, what happened to that nice, loose snow? It was hardened into difficult ice. And what was once a delight had now become a danger. It had become a risk and a threat to us. And the author of Hebrews is reminding us of that same reality when it comes to the deception of sin. That at first, it appears new, delightful, pleasant, desirable. And yet it comes a moment where when we fall into those patterns of sin, when we cave to the weapon of deception, where it begins to harden us towards God. We are hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. There is a callousness to our hearts. And I can't help but wonder, do some of you find yourself in that position today? Maybe you had a vibrant faith with the Lord in the past, and yet you are walking away from Him in a way that shows your heart is hard towards Him. Maybe you've never come to know Him. You've been so disappointed by the church, or disillusioned by spiritual things in the past and there's this hardness towards Him. Paul is warning us back in Colossians 2 that there is a danger of deception and yet there is a delight in the defeat of our enemies that comes through the cross. That Jesus has disarmed the rulers and authorities through this personal victory. The weakness of the cross has destroyed the power of our spiritual enemies.

But notice how he goes on here. Because he gives us a second picture of this victory when he shows us that Jesus also saves us from our enemies through a public victory. So notice right there in the middle of the verse. He says, and He put them to open shame. And what happens is that as Jesus puts them to shame, He is disarming the second weapon of our spiritual enemies. We've already talked about that weapon of deception. But the second one that Paul speaks of here is that weapon of shame. I don't even need to describe it for you. You know what shame feels like. You know the ways that you have fallen short and the way that makes you react. And that shame that we experience in those moments is a result of the ammunition of accusation. That satan deceives us and tempts us towards sin and then once it occurs, he smothers us with shame. And where does that shame come from? Well look back just one verse prior with me in Colossians 2:14. We see the way that Paul speaks there and we talked about it last week about the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. Our spiritual enemies know the perfect standard of God. They know the way that every one of us has sinned and fallen short of that perfect standard. And when that occurs, they swarm us with shame. There is this attack on

our hearts. “How could you do that? I can’t believe you would find yourself back there again.” When sin comes, it brings with it the twins of guilt and shame. Guilt is when you sin and you feel like you’re unforgiveable. Shame is when you sin and you feel like you’re unlovable. How could God ever forgive me? How could I ever be made right with Him? There is that sense of accusation that comes upon us that overwhelms us and Paul is reminding us that Jesus has defeated that shame.

Yesterday I took my boys up to Olsen Field to watch some Aggie Baseball. And we were there with Tim Skaggs and his grandson. So there was five boys roaming around with the two of us. And let’s just say his grandson was having a different experience than my boys. His grandson was getting the grandparent treatment; my boys were getting the parent treatment. You know the difference between the two? So, we were in the shade. It was windy and it was cold. And so when my boys complained about how they were cold, I said, “I told you beforehand. You should’ve brought more clothes.” When his grandson told him he was cold, they got up and walked to the gift shop and he came back with a new sweatshirt. When my boys were complaining that they were hungry, I told them, “You should have eaten more food at lunch.” When his grandson tells him he’s hungry, I see him whip out a \$20 bill and he says, “Go get whatever you want.” There is a different experience there while that game was going on. But I remember as we watched it, there was a routine fly ball to right field. The team we were playing, New Mexico State, the right fielder approaches it, should be an easy catch. There’s only one problem. It got caught up in the sun. And as he gazed up at that ball, he lost sight of it and it fell right at his feet. And you could just see that the ball wasn’t the only thing that fell. His shoulders slumped over and his heart fell too. That sense of embarrassment, that sense of shame. And you’ve got the new setup at Olsen Field where all the students are out in right field, just 30 feet away from where he’s at. And I imagine he heard about it the entire rest of the game. About his failure. They’re constantly before him. They’re always in front of him. And we might not have experienced that in the past on a baseball field, but every one of us has experienced that sense of shame in our own hearts. How could you get back here? You said you were never going to do this again. You put forward this front to everybody else as if life is good. And yet, inwardly you know that you are falling short of what God wants you to. And that shame can eat us alive. And it’s the shame that speaks of here. That shame that makes us feel unlovable. I wonder if some of you even feel unlovable this morning. That you’re too far gone for God. And yet what Paul reminds us of here in Colossians 2:15 is that our spiritual enemies that seek to put us to private shame have been defeated by a Savior who was put to open shame. That in the cross of Jesus Christ, think about what happens at a crucifixion. It was the most humiliating of deaths. You were stripped of your clothing. You were strapped to a cross. You were nailed there right on a major thoroughfare where crowds would gather and mock you. Where passersby would walk by and scorn you. You were there undone, exposed, for all the public to revel in your shame. Jesus goes to that place of shame for you and for me. So that He might crush the power of shame that these spiritual enemies seek to wield in our life. And what that means is that as He does that, Paul tells us, He puts them to open shame. And in the original language, the way that it speaks about this is that it exposes them, it reveals them, it’s like someone who watches a magician perform a magic trick and then tells you how it happens. He reveals the mystery behind it. It’s like in the Wizard of Oz when you see the man behind the curtain. What seems so unbelievably difficult to overcome, when you see it for what it actually is, when it is now exposed, it loses that power in your life. And that’s what Jesus does for our shame. He sets us free from that judgment by making a way for us. By bringing our enemies to

their open shame. That's why Romans 8:1 tells us there is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. That at the cross, He has defeated Satan's powers in our life. That as we are raised from the dead, He disarms the power of deception. And as we are united to Him by faith, He overcomes the power of accusation and shame. Paul speaks here of the victory of the cross.

But I don't want you to miss the way that he finishes this passage. Because at the end of this text, we also find him speaking about the way that Jesus saves us from our spiritual enemies through a permanent victory. That's why he says there at the end of verse 15; by triumphing over them in Him. There's this idea of a lasting victory. That the cross was not something that had to be repeated; it gave us the deliverance we were craving. We live in a culture that is surrounded a pull towards equality and inclusion. So when your kids or grandkids kick off Little League later this season, chances are you might be in a league where everybody gets a participation trophy. We don't like to celebrate one over the other in our push for equality and inclusion. But back in this ancient culture, what was championed was not equality and inclusion, but authority and domination. That when a battle was waged, there was a winner and a loser. And Paul speaks here of the way that through the cross, God triumphs over our enemies and He has a very specific historical reality in mind. So in that time period, when there was a military battle that took place, let's imagine the Roman army went out in order to wage war against someone else and they were victorious. What would happen is that when the announcement of the good news of that victory returned to the city, there would be a call for a celebration. And as the military returned, they would host a victory parade. At the front of that parade would be the general who led the army to victory. He would be dressed as the god, Jupiter, the greatest god of all the gods. And what they would do is they would parade their victory through the people in order to celebrate the decisive way that they had defeated their enemies. They would bring the plunder back and they would parade that through the crowds. They would bring back the prisoners of war and they would be humiliated. They would be put to open shame. They would be scorned by the crowd around them. And most of the time that victory parade finished in the final defeat of their enemies that had been fully realized in the battle that had already been won. Isn't that what God does for us in Christ on the cross? Paul speaks here of the way that through the cross God triumphs over our enemies. That He takes them captive. He plunders them. He leads us in a victory parade that has been fully accomplished at the cross that will be finally realized at the second coming of Christ and that triumph is now ours. I had the chance a few years back to lead a group of seminary students over to Greece to do a study abroad trip when I was teaching as a professor. And we went to many of the places that Paul went that we read about in the Bible in the area of Greece: Athens, Philippi, Corinth. And as we travelled around I just had to think to myself, "Man, Paul was a beast. This guy travelled all over the place in dangerous circumstances, in dangerous terrain, in order to advance the gospel." And I'll never forget, we were standing there in Corinth in the ruins of this ancient merchant city with the hilltops in front of us, with the pagan temples, with the marketplace there in front of us. And they took us into this museum and they showed us an ancient breastplate that a soldier had previously wore. And on this breastplate, etched into it for centuries to see in the years ahead, was a picture of what Paul speaks of here in Colossians 2:15. On that breastplate is an image of the triumphant warriors marching in victory parade. They are carrying poles. And on the top of those poles, they had placed the spoils of victory that they had won. They're leading their defeated enemies behind them in judgment for what has happened. And in that picture, it speaks to the nature of what God has done for us that Paul is speaking about here in Colossians 2. That

He has brought together the kingdom and the cross so that Jesus is not just our Savior, He is our substitute. That He is our rescuer because He is our Redeemer. That through the cross God has triumphed over our enemies.

But I don't want you to miss something before we close. There are two little words hidden at the end of your verse that help us make sense of it all. It speaks about how this triumph happens. What you'll see in your passage, if you'll look back there, is that it says that he triumphed over them in Him. You see that phrase? In Him. That the way that we experience the victory of Jesus, that permanent victory over all of our enemies is because we are united to Him by faith. So that what's true of Him is now true of us. This about it like newlyweds. We had some friends just get engaged yesterday. Every Sunday night right now for the Spring we've got dozens of couples meeting for our Merge premarital class. And when those couples get together and they say, "I do," they become one flesh. They're now united together. And when she says, "Yes," when she says, "I do," now his story becomes her story. His past becomes her past. His failures become her failures. His victories become her victories. That's what God does for His bride. His victory becomes our victory. His triumph becomes our triumph. But if you're anything like me, sometimes my spiritual life feels anything but triumphant. It's like, "Oh, that sounds great. Colossians 2 sounds like we've got this victory won, that things should be easy now." And yet we don't always see it that way. We feel the tension of living still in a broken world. Like Adam, we still hear the voice of the serpent. Like Noah, we still see the flood waters rising around us. Like Moses, we still see the enemy pressing against us. Like David, it still seems as if Goliath is on the other side of the battlefield. Colossians 2 is reminding us of the reality that even though our enemies have been fully defeated at the cross, we do not yet see all things under Christ's feet. But one day He will return in glorious splendor to secure the victory that is already His. And in this time between those times, where he is already secured this victory but it is not yet fully realized, we still wrestle against these enemies that have been defeated. That power of deception still seeks to lead us astray. That pull towards shame still seeks to drive us away from God. And what helps us to stand firm in the spiritual hardship that we face every day of our life is to remember what God has done for us in Christ. To remember the triumph that He has carried out on the cross and to know that He has fully disarmed our enemies; led them in open shame. He has triumphed over them by the victory that can only be found in Jesus Christ.

That's why it's so fitting that we're coming to the Lord's Table today. Because every time we take the bread and the cup together, we are reminding ourselves of this victory that has come for us in Christ. And in this moment, I want you to remember what we're doing. That each month when we take of the Lord's Supper, we're not just hearing the gospel proclaimed. We're tasting the gospel through the broken body of Christ and His shed blood. And in just a moment, we're going to come to these tables during the response song to grab those elements. And I want to invite you to be a part of this family meal. If you know Jesus in a saving way, if you walked with Him in baptism, this is a meal for you that reminds us of what God has done for us in this victory He has given us in Christ. As we prepare our hearts to respond to the Lord in this way, I want you to hear this word from 1 Corinthians 11, verses 27 and 28. Paul says:

<sup>27</sup>Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and the blood of the Lord. <sup>28</sup>Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup.

Let's pray together.

Take a moment in the quietness of your own heart right now to examine yourself.

Father, as we come to You in this moment to take of the bread and cup, I pray that You will press upon our hearts in a fresh way the victory that we have in Christ. And if there are people in this room that have never experienced Jesus in a saving way before, God, I pray that You awaken their hearts right now. That the hardness that can come from the deception of sin would melt away and be replaced by the heart of flesh that comes from newness of life. Lord, we long to follow You. We know the enemy has been defeated. So in our dark days when it seems like his power is too much for us to bear, I pray that You would strengthen us by the power of Your Spirit. We ask all these things in Christ's name. Amen.