



Sermon – February 28, 2021
Phillip Bethancourt

Verses Covered This Week

Colossians 2:13 – 14

Hebrews 2:14 - 15

Let me invite you to open your Bibles to Colossians 2, verses 13 and 14 this morning. Colossians 2:13. If you're a guest with us this morning, maybe in the room or watching online or even in our overflow room this morning, welcome home. We come to God's word every week because we believe that the blood of Christ is our only hope in this broken world. And we're going to spend our time working our way through this passage. But before we do this, I want to bring an update to you from our Central Family Celebration we had this past Wednesday. We had an incredible time on Wednesday night celebrating all the work that the Lord has been doing in and through our church over the last several months. We had that chance to recognize and to pray over the 26 people who had been baptized since we gathered back together in June. Isn't that encouraging to see God moving in that way in our people. And then in addition to that, we got to recognize new members and welcome them into our faith family. But we also got the chance to give a financial update; to celebrate some of the good news of what God is doing in our church during this season. If you remember, a few weeks ago, I brought before you the fact that because of COVID our giving had tapered down and we were seeing some shortfalls that we needed to find a way to correct before we had to take more significant action. And you responded in amazing ways. You're going to see on the screen that we launched a Commitment Sunday where we had those commitment envelopes for you last week. And our goal coming into last Sunday was we wanted to see 150 of our families in the church make that step of commitment. We were praying that God, through that, would provide for us in terms of gifts and commitments over \$300,000 and we were blown away last week to celebrate what God actually did. Because on Wednesday night, we put in front of y'all and I want you to see this morning that we had 193 families and \$536,000 committed. Man, we are so overwhelmed by the fact that yet again, God has done abundantly more than we could ask or imagine. And how did that all happen? Amongst this 190 plus families, there were over 90 of you who said, "We're going to take a step of faith as a family and increase our ongoing tithe to the church." You don't even see those numbers factored in to that \$500,000 that was committed. That's stuff that will come in as we go on, as people take that step of faith. But then I love that in addition to that, there were over 30 of you who committed to give for the very first time to our church. And we're trusting that God will cultivate that rhythm of giving in your life in a way

that will bear fruit in your own heart and in the life of our church. We had over 50 that made those one-time gifts that led to that \$536,000 of committed or given financial support. And then I love the best this, more than 100 of you, your families, committed to pray for our church in the days ahead. And what I can tell you is that because of your financial faithfulness, we are in a good position now. There are no additional immediate steps we need to take in terms of our budget. What I had said to you a few week ago is if we had to take more steps, we'd have to look at making personnel reductions or other adjustments. And what I can tell you right now is none of that's on the table for financial reasons. God has met us in our need and we're trusting Him to do it again in the future.

And that's why we're coming to God's word today. As we turn our attention to Colossians 2, we see the centerpiece of our faith. If you remember last week, we talked about the sign of our spiritual freedom; that of baptism. And now what we're going to notice this morning is that in Colossians 2, verses 13 and 14, we see the source of our spiritual freedom. And that is the cross of Christ. So follow along with me here and see what Paul has to tell us.

¹³And 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, ¹⁴by cancelling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This He set aside, nailing it to the cross.

Let's pray together.

Father, in this moment as we come to Your word, as we see Your Son nailed to the cross, would You fix our eyes on Jesus and not the things of this world? And we ask this in Christ's name. Amen.

Well, as we're all making a full recovery from the winter storm that came through our world just a couple weeks ago, I've been reminded of one that our family experienced up in Nashville in the years before we moved down here. It was a similar event where there was a winter storm that came through and then it was freezing cold the rest of the week. Nothing thawed; nothing left. But there was one big difference. Instead of getting several inches of snow, we got a significant amount of ice. And what happened is that ice froze everywhere. Including in all the gutters of the homes all around those houses in our community. And what happened is that when things thawed, the rooftops thawed much more quickly than the gutters. And that began to form something that is known as an ice dam. An ice dam is whenever your gutter is frozen such that the proper mechanism for washing away the water from your home is blocked and therefore that water has nowhere to go. And what began to happen is that water didn't just flow off the side of the house onto the dirt, but in many homes, including our own, began to flow into the ceilings of those houses. And that water began to pool and it began to turn those ceilings brown and perhaps do other damage in the house. And every home that went through that during that ice storm was faced with a choice. What do we do with the damage that's been done? For some, the damage was so significant they had to repair it. But for others, it was more cosmetic in nature. You could walk into your bedroom and you saw a brown spot there, but there was nothing really that had to happen other than to address the appearance of it. And so for many people in that community, that's exactly what they did. They didn't fix the underlying issues. They didn't address the problems that it created. They simply made a solution that fixed the appearance.

They painted over it. They attempted to cover it up on their own so that no one could see the blemishes that were underneath it.

And as we come to our text this morning, what Paul is going to be showing us is that on our own, we are wired to do the exact same thing spiritually. That we all know that we have sinned and fallen short of God's design for our life and the temptation is to cover it over. To address the appearance rather than the actuality. But what we're going to find in the text this morning is that Paul gives us a window into what it looks like for God to set us free from our sin. Now we're coming to the heart of Colossians. This is the high point of the way that Paul describes the work of Christ on the cross and the danger for us this morning is we can just yawn our way through this text. The crucifixion of Jesus is just too familiar. We've heard it all before. But my prayer is that rather than having a familiarity with the text that instead we would be fixed on the text. Because what we're going to find this morning as we look at Colossians 2 in these two verses that Paul is going to show us that the cross of Christ sets us free from our two enemies in this world: death and sin. And let's look at the way that he walks us through that. You'll notice first in verse 13 that Jesus saves us from our death. We know if you've read your Bible going all the way back to Genesis with the fall of Adam and Eve, from that point forward death is undefeated. There is no one that can conquer the grave. But what Paul is going to show us is that Jesus saves us from our death. And the way that he does that is by drawing this contrast in verse 13. Where he begins by showing that our sin is the source of death. Look back at how he says it there.

[You, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh,](#)

That term trespasses, another word the New Testament uses for our sins. It means to take a false step or a transgression. Perhaps a lapse in what we are doing. And we know what it looks like to trespass. I remember back to this winter storm coming through here a couple weeks ago. I heard stories coming out of on campus at A&M that some of our college students jumped the fences at Kyle Field so they could have a snowball fight right there. They were in a forbidden place and they took a physical step into somewhere forbidden. When Paul speaks here of our trespasses spiritually, he's talking about how in our sin we do a similar thing. We take a spiritual step into a forbidden place. Or like Adam and Eve, we eat of forbidden fruit. And how is it that that sin is the source of our death? Well, do you remember when God spoke to Adam and Eve in the garden? He said to them that if you partake of this fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, that on that day you will surely die. And once that forbidden fruit was consumed, ever since then, every one of us taste death every time that we sin. Paul speaks here of the way that sin ushers death into the world. But I want you to notice the way he describes us. He says, you were dead. He doesn't say that our sin leads to sickness, but our sin leads to death. That all of us stand before God spiritually dead. There is nothing that we can do on our own because the Bible teaches us the wages of sin is death. And I want you to hear the way that the author of Hebrews talks about this in Hebrews 2, verses 14 and 15. He speaks about how that sin leading to death causes a fear of death in us when he says this.

[¹⁴Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood, he himself, speaking of Jesus, Jesus likewise partook of the same things, that through death He might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil, ¹⁵and deliver us all, deliver all of us who through fear of death, were subject to lifelong slavery.](#)

So the power of death is held by the devil. He has gripped each one of us in our sin and as a result of that, there is this underlying fear of death that in the quietness of our heart every one of us has. And Colossians 2 is showing us this morning that that source of death is our sin. You know but the danger is we live in a world in which it seems like everyone is alive around us. You might have the intelligence of a scholar. You might have the athletic prowess of an incredible athlete. You might have the significance or fame of a movie star. But all of those realities that seem to show vitality to the world around us are simply masking a truth that Colossians 2 says is the case for every one of us. We are dead in our sins. But notice this contrast. Because Paul is showing us how Jesus saves us from our death. He begins by saying, "You were dead in your trespasses." But now he contrasts this back in verse 13 when he says,

But God made us alive together in Him.

Sin is the source of our death, but what he's going to now show us is that our Savior is the source of our life. He begins to speak there about how it is that we come to know Christ. How it is that we are to experience life. And he speaks there being made alive together. This is in the past tense. For those of us that know Jesus, this is something that has already taken place. Our spiritual vitality is assured. He writes there and speaks about how this comes about. That it's something not that we do on our own, but that we are made alive together with Christ. It is through our union with Him so that in salvation, Jesus' resurrection becomes our resurrection. During this winter season with COVID going on and not as many opportunities to travel, there have been more and more people enjoying the outdoors including skiing, especially in back country places. There were two skiers back in early February, Chris and Steve, that set out with some friends to go out in the back country into fresh powder. They're highly experienced and they were having an incredible time until all of a sudden they heard a loud noise that sounded like an earthquake. When they looked up the hillside, what they discovered was that an avalanche of snow was rushing right at them. And in the moment of instinct, one of them, Chris, reached for the nearest tree, bear hugged it, and clung on to it as that wall of snow pressed across him and all of the other skiers in that area. They were covered. They were buried. The only thing that saved him from the fall of that snow was by clinging to that tree for life. And in a similar way, that's how Paul is speaking here of our salvation. That the fall towards sin that each one of us encounters, we can only stand against the reality of certain spiritual death because we are clinging to the tree. Because we are clinging to the cross. And after Chris was overwhelmed by that snow, he was able to get himself free. He discovered that his friend Steve was alive and they immediately went on a rescue mission in search of the two that were with them. There were transponders that they used in the back country where you can find location. And what you do is you take a pole and you press it down into the snow point by point to see if there is anything there like a body. And they discovered two people. Assuming those were the two friends that they were there with. And when they uncovered the snow using their shovels, they realized that it wasn't their friends after all. It was two other skiers. And then the additional group began to go out from there. And the reason that they went in search of the rest is because they knew they had not just been saved, but they had a mission. Because they were alive, they needed to seek and to save those who were lost. That day they were able to find and save several. But others lost their life in what this year has marked one of the deadliest avalanche seasons in recent memory. And I just can't help but think of the mission that God has called us to as a church. God has made us alive together with Christ. We have clung to the tree when the weight of sin has collapsed all around us. And now that we've been rescued, we have been sent out on a

mission to seek and to save that which was lost to bring this reality of the life-giving truth that Jesus is the only one that can save us from our death. Don't you remember the story of Lazarus? Jesus comes, but He comes later than His friends would want. He gets this report that this close friend of His is sick. But yet He waits for several days before He goes to see him. And by that time, He discovers a friend who is not sick, but dead. And He stands before that tomb and He brings a dead body back to life physically. And here's the reality I want us to think about this morning is that we are in the same position as Lazarus before we know Christ. That Lazarus was made alive together with Him and that same reality is true for us. He was bound by grave clothes; we were bound by our sin. There was a stone rolled before the tomb of his burial. For each one of us there is a stone rolled before the tomb of our heart. By the time Jesus opens that grave, the stench of several days of decay was all around Him. For each one of us it's the stench of several decades of disobedience. And yet in our spiritual death, God seeks us. He sends His Son. He rescues us through the blood of His cross so that as Paul shows us here, Jesus saves us from our death.

But this text goes on now beginning at the last part of verse 13 and into verse 14 to show us something else that Jesus does. That Jesus doesn't just save us from our death, He also saves us from our sin. Those are the twin enemies that each of us face in this life in a broken world. And how does Jesus save us from death? By saving us from that sin. It is the means by which He delivers us from death. And as we work through this portion of the text, we're going to see several aspects of the way that the cross of Christ saves us from our sins. So look back at the end of verse 13 where he tells us that the cross of Christ forgives our sins. So how does God make us alive together with Christ? Verse 13 tells us: having forgiven us all our trespasses. Do you see that word us right there in the text? Up until now, Paul has been talking about you. These are things that are happening to you. But as he begins to speak of forgiveness, he talks about us. That this is something that God does for all of us who have met Jesus. And what is it that we are forgiven from? Well look at what he says at the end of verse 13. Of all our trespasses. God doesn't just forgive us of some of those sins; but all of them. Every blemish is wiped clean. Every brokenness is made new. What does this forgiveness look like? We hear about forgiveness all the time in the church. And the danger can be just to move on. But don't miss what God does in His gift of forgiveness by His Son. This is the God of the universe, the holy God who is perfect. Who looks at you and me. He sees us in our sin, in our failures, in our shortcomings, in our trespasses, and He has offered us freedom, forgiveness, deliverance, that we did not deserve, that we did not earn. Yet by the blood of His Son He sets us free from the penalty of sin, the condemnation of sin, and one day, let it be soon, the power of sin in this broken world. That is the forgiveness he speaks of there. And the danger that we face as believers is we can have forgiven the unthinkable forgiveness of this holy God and yet still harbor unforgiveness towards others. That He could forgive us of so much and yet we can hold over the head of others so little. We miss the picture of forgiveness that Paul speaks of here when that happens. Because the cross of Christ is the foundation for our forgiveness. But Paul goes on here beginning in verse 14 to show us something else that the cross of Christ cancels our debt. So how is it that we're forgiven? Right there at the start of verse 14. By cancelling the record of debt. Now in that time period, this record of debt would describe something that we would think of today like an IOU. When you go into debt with somebody else and you rack that debt up, it is a written document in which you are committing to them that you acknowledge what you have done to build this debt. You acknowledge what you owe and you affix your signature to that written document in order to commit to its full payment. And Paul speaks here

of the spiritual reality that every one of us, because of our sin, are debtors to God. That the wages of our sin is death and that we must pay for that spiritual reality. We've heard a lot of talk about debt and forgiveness in our culture throughout this pandemic. If you remember, one of the earliest measures that the government took to help restart the economy after the shutdown were the payroll protection program loans. And so businesses, non-profits, churches like Central, could apply for that loan, receive funding to help float them during this time of financial hardship. But the good news of this program was, if you did certain things, if you completed certain steps, if you met all the criteria required, then you could earn the forgiveness of that loan. And that's the way so often that we think God works. God, just show me the path and I'll follow it. Just give me the rules and I'll keep them. Just let me be good enough to earn that position. But what Paul is showing us here is that is not the way God works. That instead of us earning our salvation, earning our forgiveness, His Son offers Himself for you and for me. If you look back at the Old Testament, they also sought forgiveness of God. Every year on the day of atonement, they would have a sacrificial celebration in which the high priest would enter the Holy of Holies and make atonement for all the sins of the people for that year. Their sins would be, in a sense, washed away. But the moment they walked out of that place, their spiritual IOU just began to build again for the next year. It was never enough to fully satisfy God. But what Paul shows us here is that in this text, He is demonstrating how in Christ, God cancels our debt once and for all. This has been done. It is finished. God has set us free. He has wiped it away. That word cancel in the original language was one that would be used when you've written on your papyrus or on your scroll and you, in a sense, need to erase it. What they would do is they would take two portions of the paper, they would rub it together, and by doing that it would wipe away what was written there so that it could be replaced. The picture is one in which the scribe would remove what is written and replace it with a different reality. That's the image that God is giving us about how He works for us in Christ. That He cancels our debt. That He removes it from us and instead replaces it with Jesus' righteousness. That is the gift of the gospel that we have in Christ regardless of the amount of debt that we owe. If you were fortunate enough to have power this past two weeks during the winter storm, you probably kept it on in order to keep things heated just in case you had another one of those rolling blackouts that drove the power back down. And for some people, at the end of this week of the winter storm, when they got their electric bill, they were in for a bit of a shock. I came across a story of a man names Scott Willoughby who lives in the DFW Metroplex area. He was able to keep his power, he had it cranked up throughout the week, and his bill showed up not long after that. In a typical month Scott has an electric bill that's roughly a little over \$200. But when he opened up the bill that included this week of the winter storm, he was shocked to see that it was more than 70 times his normal bill. \$16,000 for one month of electricity. Because of the way that his electricity partnership works when the price of electricity spikes, the price he pays spikes. You could imagine being overwhelmed by the debt you owe when you get that bill, right? When we stand before God, there may be many of us who are shocked by the amount of debt that we owe for our sin apart from Christ. You might think that you live a good enough life. You might think that you're doing better than others. You might be a cultural Christian that shows up to church that does the type of right things. But what we find in Scripture is that any sin is enough to separate us from God. That any sin brings us a debt that we cannot pay. And yet God, through His Son, has offered to cancel it for us. To remove it in order to replace it. But the beauty of the cross keeps going here in this text because we see as we turn our attention in the middle of verse 14 that the cross of Christ changes our standing.

So he says there that, in verse 14, that this certificate of debt stood against us with its legal demands. It was our adversary. It was our enemy. Imagine it like an aggressive debt collector who is knocking on the door of your home seeking to collect what you rightfully owe. It stood against us. And how does it do that? He tells us there, it stands against us because of these legal demands. Perhaps you've heard the word dogma before. That comes from the word in the original language that gives us this term legal demands. Its decrees, obligations, ordinances, and most often in the Bible it's a reference to God's law. That the law of God, His expectations for how it is that we are to live, it stands against us in judgment, in condemnation. It separates us from Him. And Yet what Paul is showing us here is that God reverses our standing. That before we know Jesus we are separated from God in our standing. But when we know Jesus we are united with God in our standing. That the law of God once stood against us, but in Jesus now, the love of God stands on behalf of us. He speaks there of how the cross changes our standing. But he finishes by speaking of how the cross of Christ secures our deliverance. Notice how he ends this verse. This He set aside nailing it to the cross. This term to set aside means to raise and remove, to pick up in order to move away. And perhaps some of you can resonate with that after trying to figure out how to shovel snow for the first time in several years the past couple weeks. You launch into that now, you raise it up in order to remove it. You pick it up in order to put it away. And if it's anything like me, you didn't have the tools you need. And by the time you finished, when you got up the next day it looked almost like you'd done nothing at all. In fact, it probably looked worse than when you started as that ice began to cover over it. Or as new precipitation began to fall. There is this sense in which there was nothing we could do that would ever be enough to set us free from that which we were shoveling. And when Paul speaks here of the way that Jesus set aside the sin for you and me, he's reminding us of the reality that it doesn't matter what we try to do. Every effort we make to set these things aside on our own is never enough. In fact, our striving before God simply makes things worse. But in Jesus, God changes everything. He takes our sin, He takes our debt, He picks it up in order to put it away. He lifts it in order to remove it. He sets it aside and how does He do it? Do you see the way that this verse ends? By nailing it to the cross. Think about that vivid imagery with me for a moment. There is Jesus, He's strapped to a Roman instrument of torture, His hands and feet are pierced, right above Him stands a sign like it would on anyone who faced a crucifixion that declared their crime. Remember what His said? The King of the Jews. Jesus dies as an insurrectionist with His crime nailed so that people would know why He was receiving the punishment He deserved. And when Paul speaks here of what God does for us in Christ, that He nails our sin to the cross, He is saying, that sign was not the only thing nailed to the cross that day. That God took our sin, yours and mine, and He nailed it to that cross so that we might be set free from it for a lifetime. I remember when I was a college student at A&M. There was an evangelistic event in Reed Arena. It was called After Dark. A man by the name of Joe White that led Kanakut Camp for years. He came. There were thousands of students that showed up at Reed Arena to hear a gospel presentation that night. And while he was there he was working his way through his message. And what he was doing was not just speaking to the crowd, while he was sharing the gospel, he was also constructing a cross. He brought the tools that he needed. He had these big beams. He was hacking at them with axes. He was fastening them together. And over the course of his message, he was also constructing this cross. And at the conclusion of that time, that cross was stood upright near the stage. And that speaker that night challenge for each one of us in the crowd to take a piece of paper and to write their sin on that cross, write on that page the IOU that they owe before God, the debt that they could not pay. And then those students began to bring their pages to the foot of that cross. And I had the privilege of being part

of a team that was right there that day at that cross. And when someone would hand over their sin, we would take it and with small nails, we began with hammers to nail each one of them to this cross that he had built. At first that task was easy. There was plenty of space to do it. But as more and more, as hundreds came forward and we nailed those, those letters to the cross, there was fewer and fewer spots to place them to the point where we began to have to nail through the sins of someone else in order to reach the cross. And as we look at this text, we're reminded of this reality. That God has taken our sin, He has taken what is red and made it whiter than snow. The way that He has done that is by setting it aside, nailing it to the cross, so that you and I can be saved from our deepest enemies: death and sin.

As we look at the text this week I'm reminded of that hymn that we all know so well from It Is Well With My Soul. Where at one portion in the song, it says, my sin, oh the bliss of this glorious thought. My sin, not in part, but the whole is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more. Praise the Lord. Praise the Lord, oh my soul. That's what Paul's calling us to, Central family. To keep pressing on knowing that we have been delivered from our two biggest enemies in this world: death and sin.

Let's pray together.

Father, as we come to You in this moment, I pray that if there are people here that are broken down by the heavy load of sin, by the weight of guilt and shame that you would set them free today, God. That they would take up Jesus knowing that His yoke is easy and His burden is light. That all the ways that they seek to find forgiveness they cannot find on their own. But You meet us in our need to set us free. And if there are those here that have encountered Christ in a saving way, Lord, I'm asking You now that as we take a fresh look at the cross, that You would enable each one of us to live a cross-shaped life that honors You with all our hearts. And we ask these things in Jesus name. Amen.