

The year was 1965. It was a good, so I'm told. Muhammed Ali fought and defeated Sonny Liston for the second time. People accused Liston of taking a dive, but Ali was a master of discerning distance and would get opponents to pull in, and he'd be ready to counter. Just over a minute into the first round. So it was an anchor punch that put him down, but I think he stayed down. Smart man. So did Ali, which led to **this iconic photo**, taken by Neil Leifer, who was only one of two photographers with color film in his camera that night. Another smart man. It made the cover of the Sports Illustrated special issue, "The Century's Greatest Sports Photos." Ali is shouting "Get up and fight sucka." Two words: public humiliation.

We have been in a series on the cross and for Advent we are focusing on one particular facet of the work of Christ: *Christus Victor*. Christ wins the victory. Turn to Col **1:13-14** [924]. Two main points: Because of the cross of Christ, you have been delivered from the domain of darkness and because of the cross of Christ you have been transferred to the Kingdom of the beloved Son.

I. Because of the Cross of Christ, you have been delivered from the Domain of Darkness. This word for "domain" can be translated dominion, authority, or power. The NLT goes with Kingdom: the kingdom of darkness. What is that? What is the domain of darkness? It is the realm of Satan. As we saw last week, it's the house of Beelzebul. You see, the cosmic powers of darkness gained control when humanity sinned.

We don't really think this way but before being in Christ, you were under the domain of darkness. Again, not many of you explicitly worshipped the devil. Most of you don't spend your Friday nights out at Fort Phantom sacrificing chickens and doing seances. But, before Christ you did live for the Self. LaVey is the founder of the church of Satanism. He likes Target. He explains that the heart of Satanism is the worship of the self. He says, "We don't worship Satan, we worship ourselves using the metaphorical representation of the qualities of Satan. Satan is the name used by Judeo-Christians for that force of individuality and pride within us."¹ **Eph 2:1-2.** Calvin said, "Everyone flatters himself and carries a Kingdom in his breast."²

We were citizens of the Kingdom of darkness, but now, you have been delivered. In Acts 26, Luke records what Jesus said to Paul: "I am sending you to open their eyes, so that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God that they may receive forgiveness of sins and a place among those who are sanctified by faith in me" (Acts 26:17-18). You are freed from slavery to Satan, self, sin, death, and hell. Rescued by the cross of Christ. The powers had gained control, but now God is dealing with sin on the cross, usurping authority from the powers.³ Gal 1:4: Christ "gave himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age." The cross is the great exchange and the great turning of the ages. John 1:5: "The light shines in the

¹ *The Secret Life of a Satanist* in Tyson and Silk, 21-22.

² John Calvin, *Golden Booklet of the Christian Life* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1977), 28.

³ Wright, *The Day the Revolution Began*, 358.

darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.” You have been delivered from the domain of darkness. Next, you’d expect him to say something about light. From darkness to light. But he doesn’t say that:

II. Because of the Cross of Christ, you have been transferred to the Kingdom of the Beloved

Son 1:13-14. From the power of darkness to the Kingdom of the Son. Jesus is the King who brings a Kingdom in his first Kingdom. Already, not yet fully consummated. The Kingdom of Christ is a cosmic reclamation project. The Kingdom is the restoration of God's rule over all creation and all of life. God’s saving reign. God’s kingdom can be defined as God’s people in God’s place following God’s precepts enjoying God’s presence all for God’s praise.⁴

As I said last week, the Kingdom is not so much about people going to heaven as it is the rule of heaven coming to earth. Scripture is a cosmic reclamation story.⁵ He is restoring his good rule over a world that rebelled against him. Jesus comes to accomplish a reclamation project. He is reclaiming and redeeming a people for himself and bringing all things under his good rule, summing up all things in Christ, things in heaven and on earth. / **1:15-20**

How? 1:14b – Through redemption. Again: deliverance. This of course points back to the Exodus. **6:6-8:** “Say therefore to the people of Israel, ‘I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from slavery to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment. I will take you to be my people, and I will be your God, and you shall know that I am the LORD your God, who has brought you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. I will bring you into the land that I swore to give to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. I will give it to you for a possession. I am the LORD.’”

He basically defines redemption as the forgiveness of sins. Redemption deliverance forgiveness. Jesus died for our sins. Friends, he has met our greatest need. If you are here and wondering what Christianity is about, it is about a lot of things – all of life, this life and life eternal. But here is the heart of it all. We are sinful. God is holy. Our sins have separated us from God. . . . G

Jesus died for our sins. All of them. Past, present, future. Jesus paid it all. “My sin, oh the bliss of the glorious thought, my sin not in part but the whole, was nailed to the cross and I bear it no more, Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord! O my soul.” Good news. Dearly Beloved, there is no wrath left because the Son of Man put death to death so we can now rest as blessed. Gospel.

We are transferred from the domain of darkness to the Kingdom of the Son through his substitutionary death on the cross. How else? Flip over to **2:13**. Contrary to what one church growth writer says: “I don’t think that anything has been done in the name of Christ and under

⁴ Graham A. Cole, *God the Peacemaker* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 25.

⁵ This language is from Joshua P. Howard, *The Exorcism of Satan* (Conway, AR: Free Grace Press, 2022), 113.

the banner of Christianity that has proven more destructive to human personality, and hence counterproductive to the evangelistic enterprise, than the unchristian, uncouth strategy of attempting to make people aware of their lost and sinful condition.”⁶ Clearly, the Holy Spirit through Paul disagrees! The Bible often shows the depth of our depravity so that we will see the grandeur of God’s grace. Remember, the diamond shines brightest against the black cloth.

1:21-22.

It seems like there is a revival of interest in zombies in our day. Lots of zombie movies, novels, and shows. Even adaptations of classic books, so you can read *Pride and Prejudice Zombies*. I did one of my graduate degrees in Louisville, KY, which is known for their baseball bats, whiskey, and horse races. They are demonstrably not known for their Tex Mex! But there is a less known event that happens every year on Michael Jackson’s birthday. Around 15,000 zombies descend on Bardstown Road and wander the street for an hour. It is the world’s largest annual gathering of people dressed as the living dead. Pretty gross. But zombies are not the only creatures that are the walking dead. So were we before Christ. He says we were dead in our trespasses. Not sick, but dead in sins. 1 Cor 15:22 in Adam all die.

People may be physically alive and well. Sharp. Intellectually bright. Marathon shape. Balanced blood pressure. Controlled cholesterol. Outside of Christ: dead even while living. Sometimes folks will use the analogy of us drowning and Jesus comes along in a rescue boat and offers us a safety float. All we have to do is grab it and we’ll be saved. Sounds good, but the biblical picture is much bleaker. We are not drowning. We are dead at the bottom of the ocean floor. We are fish food, but Jesus dives in, brings us up, and raises us from the dead.

We were totally unable to help ourselves. Corpses don’t respond. They don’t request a helping hand. They don’t need CPR. They need new life. Death means inability. 1 Cor 2:14 says that the natural person, meaning non-Christians, do not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolish to him and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritual discerned. He is not able, apart from the Spirit’s work. Rom 8:7 says the same: the mind set on the flesh is hostile to God, it does not submit to God’s law; indeed, it cannot. We were dead, spiritually helpless and unable.

Sometimes people will dismiss Christianity as only for the weak. They call it a crutch. If we get offended by that we may not understand Christianity because *it is a crutch for the weak*. Christianity is only for those who know themselves as weak. In fact, they overestimate us. We’re not just weak we’re dead. We need more than a crutch! We need a resurrection from the dead! / We have been made alive together with Christ. Resurrection life because we are united to the risen One. In Christ, we are already raised, living in two ages, between the already and the not yet.

⁶ Schuller in *9 Marks*, 143.

Once again forgiveness is mentioned. How? **2:13-14** On the cross, Jesus cancelled the record of debt that stood against us. Because all people are sinners, every person has a record of debt that stands against us. Most Americans are in debt of some sort. We all know how that feels, but most can see the light at the end of the tunnel but not this kind of debt. All humanity owes God obedience to his will and all have fallen short. Every sin is counted against us. God requires perfection and he is holy so he does not wipe sin under the rug.

We are guilty. We are guilty of all kinds of sins. Sins of commission – bad things we have done – and sins of omission – things we should have done but didn't. Those instances we were angry, we lusted, we gossiped, we lied, we put our own name above God's, we sought other things to give us only that which God can. Those times we knew we should do good, but didn't. On and on we could go. *Yet* Jesus has taken this certificate of debt and nailed it to the cross. He paid our debt! We came here from Dripping Springs, which is a fairly small town and more often than not, Alicia and I would go out to eat there and inevitably see folks from the church and when we'd go to pay our bill, the server would say "That's been paid. You guys are free to go." That's what Jesus did on the cross. Fully paid. You owed a debt but no more. You are free to go.

One time Martin Luther had a dream that Satan came to him and brought with him a record of his own life. Scroll after scroll, a seemingly endless list of offenses. Then Luther turned to the Tempter and said

"It is true, every word of it, but write across it all: 'The blood of Jesus Christ, God's own Son, cleanses us from all sin'."⁷

One of the ancient practices was to nail a list of crimes for which the person was being executed. God is nailing the accusation against us to the cross of Christ. In my place condemned he stood. Jesus takes this certificate of debt that we all owe, this IOU, and he sets it aside. He sets it aside and nails it to the cross. He cancels it, which means to cause something to cease by obliterating any evidence. "My sin *had left* a crimson stain, he washed it white as snow." Here is how JB Phillips paraphrases it: "He has forgiven you all your sins: Christ has utterly wiped out the damning evidence of broken laws and commandments which always hung over our heads, and has completely annulled it by nailing over his own head on the cross." / But not only that.

15 – He disarmed the rulers and authorities. These are demonic rulers and authorities. These are our ultimate enemies. We don't wrestle against flesh and blood (people), but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places." Satan prowls around like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, which among other things shows us that the Satan is part of the feline family: a lion. Just saying. A lot of things went wrong at the Fall and cats are what happened to dogs at the Fall. J/k. Don't email me. We used to have a couple cats. RIP, Woody and Buzz.

⁷ KH 282.

So, we still have an enemy but what we see in this passage is we have a *defeated* enemy. A fangless serpent. A toothless lion. Christ has disarmed him. Our foe is defeated and disarmed. No weapon formed against me shall prosper, because Christ has snatched them out of his hands. *Christus Victor*. On the cross, Jesus defeats the devil. Matt 12, Jesus says he has bound the strong man and plundered his house. That same word “bound” is used in Revelation 20 where Satan is bound and can no longer deceive the nations. Because of Christ’s victorious work, the gospel is going all over the world. Satan can’t stop it. Rev 12 says that the great dragon, the ancient serpent is thrown down. 12:10 says, “Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony.” Our testimony is that we overcome because he has overcome his blood. 1 John 3:8 says the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. John 12:31, Jesus says “Now will the ruler of this world be cast out. Luke 10:18 says Satan fell like lightning. Victory is ours.

Here in Col 2, there is a word play on a word translated “strip” or “put off.” Everyone thought Jesus was stripped. He was stripped naked and hung on a cross. In Col 2:11, Jesus strips (*apekdusei*) off our body of flesh through his cross. And in the stripping of Jesus, the rulers & authorities are stripped (*apekdusamenos*) of their power to accuse because all our sins have been nailed to the cross (Col 2.11,15). The irony is thick. Jesus was stripped and exposed as powerless before the crowd on the cross but what was actually taking place is that Jesus was stripping the rulers and authorities of their power! What looked like defeat was victory.

Stott writes, “Overcome there, he was himself overcoming. Crushed by the ruthless power of Rome, he was himself crushing the serpent’s head (Gen 3:15). The victim was the victor, and the cross is still the throne from which he rules the world . . . the cross secured the conquest of evil.”⁸

On the cross, Jesus puts the powers to open shame, triumphing over them by the cross. Paul is here referring to a well-known Roman practice, that of the Triumphal Procession. This word refers to a Roman victory parade. After a war, the victorious general would return home showing off all the goods they had acquired and then behind that would be the defeated enemy. They would lead them through the city, mocking them, then executing them. There was no better way to visually communicate to your hometown that the army is returning in victory. When the home army comes in shouting and singing, followed by hundreds of war-torn and weary prisoners of war being dragged by chains – everyone knows who the victor was.⁹ There is no longer any need to fear this once haughty army.

⁸ Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, 224.

⁹ Dick Lucas, *The Message of Colossians and Philemon* (Downers Grove, IVP Academic, 1980), 110.

Jesus put these enemies to an open shame. He publicly humiliated them. Like Ali standing over Liston. Christ has defeated, disarmed, and displayed the rulers and authorities. The *Kingdom New Testament* says,

“He stripped the rulers and authorities of their armor, and displayed them contemptuously to public view, celebrating his triumph over them in him.”¹⁰

Jesus has disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them. And how did he triumph over them? The last two words in verse 15. The ESV has “in him” but there is a footnote with an alternative reading, which I think is better: “in it”, that is in the cross. Jesus triumphed over them by the cross! What a striking irony! The cross is the place where the King triumphed. The cross, a symbol of utter disgrace, shame, and defeat, is now the triumphal chariot! What a glorious paradox!

How does the cross triumph? How does Christ crucified “disarm” Satan and the powers of darkness through the crucifixion? He disarmed them *by* nailing the record of debt we owed to the cross. The fiery darts of the devil are extinguished by the shield of faith in what Christ has done. About the devil, Jesus says, “he has no claim on me.” Makes me think of Rocky Balboa talking to Clubber Lang. “You aint so bad. You ain’t nothing.” And because we are united with Christ our King, Satan has no claim on us!

Satan is called the accuser. And we are sinners so some of his accusations hit home. Often, he’s right! “Embracing Accusation.” “I hear him saying cursed are the ones Who can't abide. He's right, Alleluia he's right! Oh the devil's singing over me An age old song that I am cursed and gone astray, singing the first verse so conveniently over me, He's forgotten the refrain, Jesus saves!”

So, *Christus Victor* has meaning because of substitutionary atonement. Vicarious victory. The powers are disarmed through the payment of the legal demand that stood against us. Gal 3:13: Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us! I mentioned that some today want to deny PSA and replace it with *Christus Victor* but notice that substitution is the basis of the victory. Graham Cole writes, “Christus Victor needs the explanatory power of substitutionary atonement.”¹¹

As Garry Williams puts it, “Deny penal substitution and *Christus Victor* is hamstrung.”¹² He cancels our debt and defeats the enemy.¹³

Through Christ, we have victory over our enemies: Satan, sin, and death. Satan has been

¹⁰ Wright, *Kingdom New Testament*, 411.

¹¹ Cole, *God the Peacemaker*, 184.

¹² Garry Williams, “Penal Substitution,” in *The Atonement Debate*, ed. Derek Tidball, David Hilborn, and Justin Thacker (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 187.

¹³ N.T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 111.

vanquished, disarmed. Who shall bring a charge against God's elect. (Rom 8:33)? In other words, who shall accuse us? No one. Sin has been forgiven. All of it. Nailed to the cross. Death has been dealt with. We were dead but have been made alive together with Christ. If you are not a Christian in here this morning, God offers you forgiveness through Jesus, freedom, deliverance. What are you waiting for? Trust him. Give him your life today.

What does this mean for us? We are citizens of the Kingdom of Christ. We are an outpost and embassy of the Kingdom, a tangible, visible sign, poster, preview, trailer, signpost, trailer, trace, foretaste of God's new world. Sign and instrument. We show forth his sovereign reign in all areas of life, showing the world what it looks like. Model what it looks like to live under the reign of King Jesus. Through our new lifestyle, the saving rule of God is brought to bear upon the world: **3:17, 3:23**. All of life for King Jesus.

Dearly Beloved, you have a King, you have a Victor, you have a deliverer, you have a Redeemer. Victory is mine! I told Satan, get thee behind because victory today is mine. Christmas is about cosmic reclamation. A day of victory. A day of glory. As we sing, "A day, a day of promise, a hope to end our woe. A day that tells of triumph against our vanquished foe. In flesh His entrance humble, the swaddling clothes His robe. The meek displayed in power, the Prince of Peace now known. Let angels shout the triumph as mortals raise their voice. Behold the Son of heav'n and earth, the King of Kings is born."

Benediction: Now may the High King of Heaven, the risen and reigning Lord Jesus Christ, the One who dissolves your debts and disarms the devil, be with you, comfort you, use you, and guide you all your days – for your good and His glory.