

Spiritual Resurrection, Disarmed Powers

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[0 : 0 0] I'm the pastor here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church, and it's my joy to bring God's word to you today. A special welcome if you're new or visiting with us. We're glad that you're here.

And we're glad that you're here not because we're trying to fill seats, but because we're following Jesus together as one community. And as we follow Jesus together, we've become convinced that there's no one so good they don't need God's grace, and no one so bad that they can't have it, which is why we come back week after week to hear what God has to say to us in his word.

This week and next week, we're taking a break from the Gospel of Mark as we celebrate Palm Sunday this week and Easter next. And instead, we're taking a look at the book of Colossians, because our focus in these two weeks is Jesus as our king, Jesus as the one who's risen from the dead.

And Jesus as king is especially a focus on Palm Sunday as he enters Jerusalem on a donkey rather than a war horse, signaling the type of king that he's going to be.

The book of Colossians is a letter, and it's written by the Apostle Paul to the city of Colossae, which is in modern-day Turkey. And Paul writes it in the 60s AD while he's in prison, and he is fighting against false teaching in the church.

[1 : 2 0] It's in the context of that that he talks about these two issues, these two things that we're going to look at this morning. First of all, what it means to go from spiritual death to spiritual life, and also what it means that Christ has triumphed over his enemies.

What it means in verse 15 that he's disarmed the rulers and the authorities. And so with that, I invite you to turn with me in God's word. You can turn in your Bible. You can turn on your phones.

You can turn in your worship guide. No matter where you turn, remember that this is God's word. And Proverbs chapter 30, verse 5 tells us every word of God proves true.

He's a shield to those who take refuge in him. And so that's why we read now Colossians chapter 2, starting at verse 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 by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands.

This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in him.

[2 : 4 0] I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word. Our Father in heaven, we thank you this morning that you have taken us from death to life.

And we thank you that Jesus is not just a savior but a Lord, that he comes as a conquering king. That he triumphs over powers and authorities. We thank you for your word that instructs us and teaches us and shows us.

And we ask that you would do those things this morning. That you would use your words to speak clearly to us. That you'd show us Jesus Christ in all his beauty and glory and holiness and power and authority and love.

That you'd grow our love and affection for him. You'd grow our reverence and awe for him. That you'd grow our obedience to him. We thank you that you've promised to do these things.

And so we ask you to do them. We ask them in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. The story is told of a man named Dr. Erwin Lutzer who was the former professor of preaching at Gordon-Conwell.

[3 : 53] and each semester he would take his preaching students out to a cemetery. So he would take a field trip and he would tell them, look, pick one of these stones and pick the name on the stone, read it out, and I want you to preach to that name.

And I want you to say to that person, you know, let's say it's John Smith. Say, John Smith, I want you to believe in the gospel and trust in Jesus Christ. And his students would look at him, dumbfounded.

What a crazy idea, right? This preaching professor is going to take them to a cemetery. And so he does it because they won't. He stands in front of his students and he preaches to this tombstone.

And he says this in instructing them, this is no different than preaching the gospel to unsaved people. The Bible says that they are dead in their sins.

You can preach your heart out. But nothing will happen unless God does a miracle to give them the life to listen. That's the very same image, the stark image that Paul gives us here in Colossians in verse 13.

[5 : 07] He says, you who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive. You were dead if you were a Christian.

God took you from the dead and he made you alive. Now, this is easy for us to understand in a physical sense. It's easy to understand, at least at a conceptual level, what it means for someone to be physically dead or physically alive.

Things perhaps get a bit more confusing, though, when we talk about what it means to be spiritually dead or spiritually alive. In fact, it's tempting for us to think of physical death as the ultimate enemy.

When in fact, the way the Bible presents us, spiritual death is our primary enemy. Physical death is the result of spiritual death. Physical death is downstream of spiritual death.

It is spiritual death that led to physical death. It was Adam and Eve's rebellion in the garden that led to the curse. So what does it mean for someone to be spiritually dead?

[6 : 14] We know what it means for them to be physically dead. Their heart doesn't work. Their pulse stops, right? They can't breathe. Something that was there is lost.

Well, spiritual death is very similar. Those who are spiritually dead cannot respond to God. They can't hear God. They can't love God.

They can't do anything of spiritual value. They're unable to give glory to God, unable to do the right thing for the right reasons, unable to love righteousness and holiness.

We might say when it comes to God, they are dead. Sin is a rebellion against God. And so if we're spiritually dead, it means that's all we can do.

That's the only thing we can do. We can only rebel against God. Now he makes this odd reference here to circumcision. He says, you were dead in your trespasses, meaning you're dead in your sins.

[7 : 18] You're dead in the things that you do that violate God's law and the uncircumcision of your flesh. Now he could be saying two different things here. He might be saying you're uncircumcised in the sense that you're separated from God's people because circumcision was a sign of belonging to God's people in the Old Testament.

Or he might be saying what circumcision symbolizes is not true of you. Your sinful nature has not been cut away. Either way, Paul is speaking here of spiritual death.

And he's saying there's a stark difference between those who are inside of Christ and those who are outside of Christ, those who believe on him and those who do not. And so what I want us to do for a minute this morning as we think about what it means to be spiritually dead or spiritually alive is just to get a picture of what the spiritually alive person looks like.

What is it that you can do if you are spiritually alive? I'll give you one thing you can do. You, if you are spiritually alive, are able to thank the giver for his gifts.

If you are spiritually alive, you are able to thank the giver for his gifts. Remember Matthew 5, verses 44 and 45, Jesus says the rain falls on the just and the unjust, which is Jesus' way of saying there are good and wonderful and beautiful things in this world that Christians and non-Christians both receive.

[8 : 44] Christians, though, are able to thank the giver of the gifts. They know where the gift comes from. They're able to praise God for his provision in the world, and they know they are going to end up eternally in the place of that gift.

Spiritually alive people are going to experience those gifts forever. Spiritually dead people experience them now. They will not experience those gifts one day.

There will be a time where the rain falls only on the just and not on the unjust. And so a spiritually dead person, if they go to the Grand Canyon and they look out on it, they might recognize, wow, there's a tremendous amount of beauty here.

And they do not know where the beauty comes from. They are not able to thank the artist. In fact, they might give thanks not to God, but give thanks to themselves.

Take a self, I'm so great that I'm close to this. This is what happens a lot with people who love the outdoors. Look at how great I am that I am here.

[9 : 57] No, look at how great God is that he made it. That's what the spiritually alive person is able to do. They're able to say with Psalm 8, O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth.

You have set your glory above the heavens. They're able to agree with Psalm 19, the heavens declare the glory of God and the sky above proclaims his handiwork.

In short, the spiritually alive person worships the creator. The spiritually dead person worships the creation.

If you're alive, you are able to worship the creator. Of course, it's more than that. It also gets at how we respond when we do things that we know are wrong.

Paul talks about in another place the difference between true sorrow, true repentance, and simply merely sorrow over sin. The spiritually dead person is sorry because of the consequences of sin.

[10 : 59] The spiritually alive person is sorry because of the sin, that it has grieved and offended God. They know how dark and terrible it is, and they have a hope that they can turn to.

So it's not just this ability to see God's goodness and his gifts at work in the world, but also it affects what happens when we look inside our own hearts and our lives and see the evil and the wickedness that is there.

In other words, the alive person has hope. They are able to see change and a way out. The spiritually dead person cannot.

All they can have is regret. All they can do is try to pull themselves up by their bootstraps. The person who has life, who has God's power at work in them, is changing day by day and week by week and year by year.

As they grow older, we see in them a softening, a growing in love. There is more and more mercy that flows out of their life.

[12 : 09] There is more and more holiness that comes out of their life. There is a greater and greater joy. That's what happens as the person who's alive ages and walks in life.

What happens when the person who's dead increases in age? Well, they grow bitter, right? They grow cranky. Their temper is shorter.

Not so with the person that God's made alive. Goodness and love and joy flow out of them more and more each year. And so the person who God has made alive has this conviction of sin, this ability to change, this love for God and his gifts, this joy that extends and transcends the circumstances around them.

We can say in a true sense, wow, that person is really alive. Jesus tells us in John chapter 10, my sheep know my voice.

The spiritually alive person can hear the shepherd's voice. In fact, they don't just recognize it. They love to hear it. They want to hear it. They're drawn to it.

[13 : 22] They respond to it. If and when those things are true of you, it is because of spiritual resurrection.

It is because God has worked a miracle. It is because God has taken you who were dead and has made you alive. He is the only one you can praise and thank.

If you're a Christian, all of those things that I described to you should sound familiar. You should be able to say, yes, I know what that's like. I know.

I can sense that. Yeah, that makes sense because I experience spiritual life. This passage then points a question at us. Do those things describe you?

Do those things describe you? Are you a person who can say, yes, God's at work in my life. He is growing my love, my joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, and self-control.

[14 : 35] Yes, I look around at the world and I'm able to give praise and thanks to God for it because I know that it comes from him and not me. When you look at your sin, are you able to confess it and repent of it as a sin against God and then move forward to the new future that he has for you?

Are those things true of you? Because that's what God does. He takes people who are spiritually dead and makes them spiritually alive.

Has God resurrected you? Do you experience that resurrection in your life now?

That is meant to be the experience, the life of the Christian. Not only does Paul tell us about this resurrection power, he also tells us how it happened, which is part of why we're talking about this on Palm Sunday.

Verse 13, he tells us this death to life happened because of resurrection power. God made alive together with him, which is Paul's way of saying that you are alive because Jesus is alive.

[16 : 00] Jesus rose and he took you with him. So I want you to think about it in this way. You're probably familiar with the idea of a payload, right? A satellite is carried by a rocket.

Passengers are carried by a plane. Why does the satellite rise? Not because it has this power inside of itself. No, because it's attached to the rocket. When you fly from one place to another, why do you rise from the ground?

Well, because you're attached to the plane. We might say you're hidden in the plane, right? Why is it that you were taken from spiritual death to spiritual life?

It is because you were connected to Christ. You are his payload. Jesus' power, resurrection power, is so great that it is able to take someone who's spiritually dead and make them alive.

It is so powerful that it is able to take the weight of your sin and raise you from the grave. And in fact, that's the only power that's able to do that.

[17 : 14] It took resurrection power to bring you back from the dead. That's how great, on the one hand, our sin is, and how much greater, on the other hand, God's power is.

He raised you together with him. You are spiritually alive because, and only because, you are connected to Jesus Christ.

We're told even more, though, it's not just that we are alive with him, but there's this forgiveness here. Having forgiven us all our trespasses by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands.

I'm sure we have a general idea of the concept of forgiveness, which is when you say, I'm not going to hold this against you anymore. Whatever debt or weight there is, I'm going to receive that weight.

I'm going to pay that debt. And Jesus does that for us and our sins in his resurrection, but it doesn't just tell us that he forgives us here in verse 13.

[18 : 23] It tells us how he did it. Canceled the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. In other words, legal demands is speaking about the ways that we have disobeyed God's law.

And that debt is saying, look, we have these transgressions. We've disobeyed God's law. We've rebelled against him. We've refused to worship and follow him as he deserves. And so there's a record that's standing there.

That record of debt lays out what it is that we owe to God. And what do we owe to him? Well, we owe him our very lives, right? The book of Romans, Paul tells us the wages of sin are death.

And you can't just take that. We can't honor God's justice and the reality of the world and simply clear that. Now he tells us that it's cleared, right? It is cleared, but it's cleared by a specific act.

He canceled it. He scraped it out. It's kind of what the Greek says here. But he did it by nailing it to the cross. Now, why is it important that he nailed it to the cross?

[19 : 28] In ancient times, when someone was hung on a cross, their crimes were often posted on the cross so that someone would know why it is that they had to be crucified.

There's an explanation of what they've done. So their crimes, their punishment. What Paul is telling us here is it's our crimes and Christ's punishment.

The explanation for Jesus' crucifixion is our sin. That's what it means that Jesus nailed them to the cross. He added your expense, your charges to his account.

Someone had to pay. Jesus did. And he paid for it specifically on the cross. That is how Jesus made you alive.

He made you alive because of the power of his resurrection. He made you alive by canceling the debt of his sin, of your sin.

[20 : 33] And this highlights something important for us. It's tempting at times to think of the Christian faith as merely intellectual assent. Yes, I believe that I'm a sinner and Jesus paid for my sins.

And I know I need to live a life that is consistent with that, right? Paul is telling us, okay, yeah, it's not less than that. It is so much more than that.

It is not simply that God has forgiven your sins because of the work of Christ, but instead that the very power of the resurrection is at work and giving you a new life now.

That's why in the book of Ephesians, he says the same power that raised Christ from the dead, that's the power that's in work in you. It's resurrection power that gives the Christian the ability to move forward in this life.

It is not that God says, look, I've paid for your sins and now go figure it out. But he says, I've paid for your sins and I've given you the life that you didn't have. I've given you the power that you didn't have.

[21 : 34] I've given you the ability to see when you were blind before. You were raised with him. Because there's a power here, because it is more than God forgiving sins, we see also his act as a king in verse 15.

Yes, he is bringing life to you and he is restraining and conquering all his and our enemies. And that's what we see here. We're reminded of what we saw in the book of Daniel, for example, that there are real demonic powers and forces at work in this world, referenced here as rulers and authorities.

That as we walk in this world, yes, we have Christ's life in us who has brought us back from the dead spiritually. And we also live in this world where real evil forces are at work.

And so what are we supposed to do with that? We see it all around us, right? We see evil in the news every week. We see it in our hearts every day.

And so we have this word of encouragement, and even more than encouragement, declaration and truth. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in him.

[22 : 53] So there's two things going on. First of all, he disarmed them. Second, he puts them to open shame. And we're told triumphing over them is a type of way in which he's put them to shame. Disarmed means this.

Yes, there are real evil forces in this world, and they no longer have power. Their bite, their teeth have been removed.

I think I told you a couple years ago on Palm Sunday or Easter, death is like a snake with no poison. God's removed the poison.

Yes, it can bite you. No, it can't kill you. That's what happens in this world. Yes, we see snakes around us. They're toothless snakes.

They're venomless snakes. They're poisonless snakes. Whatever evil we see in this world, it has lost any ability to have final and ultimate power.

[23 : 56] Jesus has won the victory over them. And so we need not fear them. Jesus wasn't just content to defeat them, though.

He also decided to put them to open shame. You're familiar with this idea, right? You hear that someone has resigned from a job, and what's your first thought, especially if this is in the news?

Well, did they resign? Or were they nicely fired, right? Well, why do you wonder that?

Because if they were nicely fired, their employer decided not to put them to open shame. They were given a way out. They were allowed to keep their honor.

Jesus does not give the devil the opportunity to resign. No, instead, he shames him in front of everyone. Jesus at the cross really embarrassed the evil forces of this world.

[25 : 01] He beat them at their own game. He used their weapons against them. It is embarrassing to be a demon after Jesus' resurrection. It is embarrassing to be part of the evil forces of this world after Christ has risen from the dead and is seated at the right hand of God the Father.

That's how badly he beat them. You don't want to show your face in public. Shouldn't surprise us then, right, that Satan is a liar and the father of lies.

He has to be. Because to tell the truth would be to say, look, I got trounced at the cross. I got beaten so badly, I cannot come back.

Triumph is part of this shaming. And to understand what's meant by triumph, we have to go back a little bit and understand Roman history. If you were a Roman general and you conquered another nation, you conquered an enemy, you would then return back to Rome.

And you wouldn't just return back and receive a fanfare or applause. No, you would put on a triumph. Now, we don't use the word triumph, so instead I want you to think of this as a parade. You would put on a parade.

[26 : 16] We're familiar with Macy's Thanksgiving parade, and there's floats, right? You might have a Thanksgiving turkey or whatever the popular cartoon character is for that year. And so that was what would happen when a Roman general came back, except instead of a Thanksgiving turkey or a cartoon character, he would have these floats, essentially, of what he had captured from his enemies.

So you'd have this parade coming in, and people would cheer, look, we captured all their gold and all their silver. And then after the goods of the people they captured came in, the people themselves would be displayed.

He might have a float with the soldiers that he's conquered on it. And what would come at the very end, the very end would be the chance to see the king himself, humiliated and disarmed.

Oh, that was the scary person that we were afraid of. And there he is, a joke for us to laugh at on a float. When Jesus rose from the dead, ascended to heaven, and sat at the right hand of God the Father, he made the evil forces of this world look silly on a float in his parade.

That is how powerless they are. Now, if you're hearing all this, one thing you might be thinking is, well, it certainly doesn't feel like that.

[27 : 48] We grieve, right? With the Covenant School in Nashville, doesn't feel that day as if Jesus has conquered the powers, as if he has embarrassed and shamed the devil.

One illustration that's given, that's in your worship guide, actually, on page 8. It talks about the difference between D-Day and V-Day.

And that, in a sense, is what we live in right now as Christians. D-Day, the final, the decisive turn of the war in June of 1944, right? The invasion of Normandy.

That's the breaking of the enemy powers. And yet, V-Day, Victory Day, comes a year later, when official surrender happens. As it says there, in your worship guide, V-Day is the second coming of Christ, when the enemy shall totally and finally surrender.

That's what we look forward to when Jesus comes again. But, and, D-Day has already happened. The parade has already happened.

[29 : 01] The disarming of evil forces has already happened. And so, when we see evil at work in this world, we know its ultimate power is gone. We know it has already been disarmed.

We know, on the final day, we will see that fully. And so, what do we do? What do we do with things like this school shooting this week that Britt mentioned in his prayer?

That we can say, this is an act of pure evil, right? This is what the powers and authorities that we thought would be disarmed, that we wish were disarmed. And in that, Britt mentioned in his prayer, one of the victims was the daughter of a pastor in our denomination.

A man named Chad Scruggs, who's the pastor of that church. His daughter is one of the nine-year-olds who was gunned down this past week. Speaking of his daughter, Hallie, he said this, we are heartbroken.

She was such a gift. Through tears, we trust that she is in the arms of Jesus who will raise her to life once again. The powers and authorities have been disarmed.

[30 : 16] Jesus will raise her to life again. The snake can bite, but it has no teeth. And it can bite, but there's no poison. Jesus has already beaten them at their own game, right?

Looking to bring evil and destruction and carnage, her father has used as an opportunity to remind people of the hope of the gospel. And as we live in sorrow and sadness now, we know how the story ends.

We know that Jesus will beat and has beaten death at its own game. He has shamed it for Hallie Scruggs and for us.

Yes, V-Day hasn't happened. D-Day has. The power of evil in this world has been broken truly and really.

He has disarmed the powers and authorities. And it's that knowledge that grows our love of Christ. Remember, we talked the last few weeks about what it means for our love of Jesus to grow.

[31 : 29] One of them is this, to know that he has defeated evil. No matter what evil does right now in this world, its power has already been broken.

It has already been disarmed. The day is coming. When Jesus returns to this world. So we're reminded of Jesus' words of comfort in John 16.

I have said these things to you that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation, but take heart. I have overcome the world. In 1 John 4, he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

And so that's why we're gonna sing the power of the cross, which tells us this, curtain torn in two, dead are raised to life, finished the victory cry.

Because the powers of evil have been disarmed, Jesus has shamed them and triumphed over them. We know the victory in part now, and we will know it fully one day.

[32 : 44] Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we praise you and thank you that you have disarmed the powers and authorities, that you've put them to open shame and you've triumphed over them.

And we thank you that you have brought us from death to life. We ask that you'd remind us of that, that you'd stir up our love and affection and our obedience to you as we see you as our great and victorious king.

We ask these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen.