

Lord over Darkness

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[0 : 0 0] We are in part eight of our walk through the book of Colossians. This was a letter written by a man named Paul, who, as far as we know, never even visited this church in a town called Colossae in present-day Turkey.

But he was very passionate about the gospel of Jesus Christ and his church. And so what was happening was this church was pretty young. They were enthusiastic. Man, they heard the gospel of Jesus Christ.

It transformed their lives, and then as may happen to us, even in present day, we get kind of beyond the gospel, and we start thinking, man, there's something more than the gospel.

And you start taking advice from people who say, well, maybe you need, you know, this kind of thing in your life, this newest, latest, greatest book, you know, that's going to take you a step closer to becoming more like Christ.

And so Paul kind of wrote this letter to kind of bring them back to where it all begins and ends, which is the gospel of Jesus Christ. So we've been looking at why Christians think Jesus is worth following.

[1 : 0 4] This book is very short, but it's packed full of theological truths that form the very foundation of our faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord. And I want to say, you may be here because, you may, you might have been forced to be here by your parents, a significant other trying to impress somebody, those kind of things, or you may be at the bottom and there's nowhere else to go.

So I hope what you actually walk away with is a clearer understanding and appreciation of who Jesus is because that's what we all need.

Those of us that are new and those of us that have may have been Christians for decades, we all need more of Jesus. So I think today can answer a lot of questions about why we need Jesus, what God did for us, how God did it, and even how we may respond to that truth.

The passage today is found in Colossians chapter 2, and it's just three short verses, verses 13 through 15, and I'm going to read it to you now. And you who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, that's a very popular word, God made a life 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 : 3 8] This is the word of God. Okay, I'm going to give you the bottom line up front, and then we're going to dive deeper to explaining the passage. This is it. Because Jesus died and was raised, he has declared victory over our personal sins, your personal sins, my personal sins, so we can step out of the guilt we have for anything we have ever done.

Out of the shame we carry for our failures, we can be forgiven completely. And because Christ died and was raised, he has declared victory over the powers of darkness in this world.

So we can step out of the old way of living in this world, which was under the powers of the forces of evil, and step into God's new way of living under his rule and ring.

There you go. Everybody be blessed. Have a great day. Adios. Just kidding. You know better than that. This is good news.

This is great news. But I think many of us don't really get why. Paul is describing such good news here that we are prone to miss it because it doesn't immediately seem to make our lives more comfortable or enjoyable.

[3 : 53] We simply don't get it. That's why passages like, you know, the ever popular, I can do all things through Christ Jesus or the Great Commission, you know, become inspirational for us.

Passages like the one I just read, they seem to fall by the wayside. You're not likely to see this one tattooed on someone's arm or pass a car with a bumper sticker with these scriptures, this verse is written on there.

What, think about this, what if this was unequivocally better than anything we could ever imagine it being, but we were just missing it? What we're going to talk about today is the good news of all good news.

The blessings of all blessings. However, good news works best when it triumphs over terrible news. How can so many people be indifferent to the gospel?

Think about that. How many people are like, I don't need this? You know, because mainly I think because for most of us life is good. Why do we need it? I have a spouse, healthy kids, house, job.

[4 : 56] I live in one of the most beautiful places in the world. All those kind of things. I live in America, you know. Amen. Others, however, treat discovering the gospel like their entire life depends on it.

Even like the air we breathe. You know, we have to have it or we're going to die. Read you a little passage in Luke 7, 47 through 48. This is talking about the lady who was, everybody knew, was just full of sin.

She was a very sinful lady. And she came into this Pharisee's house. And this is what, this is the response from Jesus to what she did. It says, therefore I tell you, her sins, which are many, are forgiven.

For she loved much. But he who is forgiven little, loves little. And he said to her, your sins are forgiven. What Jesus is pointing out here is not that one person needed him more than another person.

But that one person, that lady, she knew she needed him. The other person, the Pharisee, didn't have a clue. One person thought their problem was under control, if you will.

[6 : 02] I can relate to that. I think my life is under control. I don't need anything else. Thank you so much. Maybe Jesus could give some pithy quotes to help them live while the other person was in a desperate place.

They were full of sin. They knew it. And everyone else did. She was labeled a woman of the city who was a sinner. She fell at Jesus' feet in total humiliating desperation.

Jesus consistently points this out in parable after parable. Our biggest problem isn't our sins. It's our pride. But it's not that we are dead or guilty.

It's that we think we are. It's that we don't think we are. I'm sorry. Our pride is what keeps us from being like that woman. We're more concerned with our reputation than our condition.

But what if we are all equally sick and in desperate need of him? There are things that really humble people. You know, serious health problems, marital problems, bankruptcy, sudden death of close family members or friends.

[7 : 05] All of these are right on the brink of affecting our lives every day. And some of you may be walking through this as I speak. But most of us, most of us are worse off than we really think.

As many of you know, I was gone the last couple of weeks. If you didn't, I'm glad I made such a lasting impression of you over the last year. My son was on the Newport All-Star team and we went to the regional tournament the first weekend I was gone.

And the first three games we played, we just, we smoked it. I mean, we really did. The team, their 8U team, they scored 58 runs in three games and just totally crushed it.

Everybody that was in the area was like, oh, your team is the team to beat. And nobody's going to touch Little Newport. And then the first game, the first game we played, it was a tough game.

We played Havelock, 8U team. We went up about nine runs and then they came back and actually took the lead. And then we were down two runs in the last inning and we came back and won in the last inning.

[8 : 09] And I was like, man, this team has got hearts. We blew out the next two teams and that was that. We were like, man, we're on top of the world. Everybody's high-fiving, hugging. We got it, we got it, we got it. And then we went to the state tournament, which was last weekend.

And we got our butts kicked. I told you we scored 58 runs the first three games. The last three games, we scored a combined six runs. They were just toast.

It was just, and Liam and I, my son and I were talking about the difference between the first three and the last three and what happened. And I was talking about all these fundamentals of the game. And he just looked at me and said, what?

What are you talking about? I said, well, we stopped hitting the ball. Our offense made up for our defensive errors in the first three games. But when we stopped hitting the ball, those errors became very obvious and we paid the price.

And it was like it clicked right there. He understood. I kind of made it simple terms for him. So what I'm trying to do here is help you understand what reality is compared to my slash your concept of life.

[9 : 12] So let's have a look at these conditions Paul lays out. The first one is, you were dead. The word dead here is the same as a dead body.

Figuratively, it's the inability to respond to impulses or perform functions, unresponsive to life-giving influences. This is really serious. We aren't just sick.

We are dead. Dead people can't do anything to help themselves. They can't decide to stop smoking, to eat healthier, to make better decisions. It's too late because they're dead.

Right? Spiritually, dead people are the same. We weren't sick in our trespasses. We were dead in them. Dead people don't will themselves to be alive.

Dead people don't have the capability to respond to positive influences or to turn themselves to God. They're just dead. It's great news. This says we're dead in our trespasses.

[10 : 10] Trespasses or transgressions equals sins we've committed. These includes the ones you actually knew about, those you premeditated, those you considered but didn't follow through on, those you've long forgotten about, and even those you didn't know you were doing at the time.

That's comforting. Sins both unintentional and intentional belong to you. Notice he says your trespasses. This isn't how we think.

When we think about us before God, we comfort ourselves thinking about how bad off other people are. You know, look at that drug addict over there. I don't do drugs. You know, look at that over there.

He left his wife. He left his kids. He's selfish. Those kind of things. Right? But when God considers us, he's concerned with our sins.

He's concerned with my sin. He's not grading on a curve. He sees, he knows, and he counts them all. Okay. So we are dead and guilty.

[11 : 19] Can it get any worse? Paul carries on here. He's just saying more of the same. Nope. The uncircumcision of your flesh. Man, now we're getting to the really popular stuff, guys.

Right? Everybody, all the guys are like... She didn't know I was going to do that, so please don't talk to her about it. Many of us may read this and keep right on moving, struggling to not visualize what the word just was.

I know that's what I do. But this one is indeed much worse than the previous. Circumcision in those days was a sign that you were one of God's people. They were inside of God's covenantal love and promises.

It's why Isaiah prayed such bold prayers like he did in chapter 64 when he said, I know we're all guilty and have been for some time. But now, O Lord, you are our father.

We are the clay and you are our potter. We are all the work of your hand. Be not so terribly angry, O Lord, and remember not iniquity forever. Behold, please look.

[12 : 31] We are all your people. But uncircumcision was a sign as well, an opposite sign. It was an indication that you were not one of God's people.

It was a sign that you were outside of God's covenantal promises. This is graphic language, but imagine seeing someone on the news who's been hurt in a tragic way.

And then imagine that being your loved one. Which one has a bigger effect on you? We weren't just dead in our sins. We weren't even his people. That's what Paul's saying to them.

You weren't his own. He owed you nothing. You had no leg to stand on. Wow. Well, it certainly can't get worse than that, right? Ever heard the old phrase, when it rains, it pours?

Yep. And he says there's a record of debt with legal demands. Literally, this was a legal document, a bond, that contained the record of your outstanding debt. If you couldn't pay it, you were thrown into prison or worse.

[13 : 28] So we weren't just guilty of sin. Our sin accrued a vicious debt. That debt piled up and piled up to an insurmountable proportion. We had no chance of ever even coming close to paying it down.

That record wasn't a neutral document either. It was hostile. That stood against us. It shouted shame over us publicly. More courtroom language here.

This is an adversary who, like a pit bull, won't let go on the nonstop assailing of your character. Imagine the embarrassment. This is a powerful element of sin that we often don't understand on the front end.

We aren't just guilty. We aren't just outside of God's people. We are covered in shame because of our condition. Well, that's got to be the bottom of the bad news, right? The last one that Paul mentions may be the most terrifying.

That's the rulers and authorities. Who were these rulers and authorities? They were demonic powers. The name Satan means the accuser. This is why Satan and his demons, this is what Satan and his demons do best.

[14 : 33] They accuse us. But this isn't as simple as, get behind me, Satan. I mean, he's tried that. I've tried that. He doesn't. All of these things that they are accusing us of are legit.

According to Paul, we aren't just in a bad way. We have demonic powers constantly accusing us of our guilt, reminding us of it. Ever tried to take your relationship with God seriously and heard something like, you know, you fail every time?

What makes you think this time is going to be different? And here's a good one. Why would God still love you? Why does he still love me?

It's not just us and God here. We have some real enemies who are terrifyingly persistent and long to see us die in our sins. The prognosis here is bleak.

Really guilty and dead. I imagine for some of you this might be the first time. Again, like a terrifying medical diagnosis, it's sad and sobering. But that's not where the story ends.

[15 : 37] It's only the beginning. However, the rest of the story doesn't make sense without the reality of the bad news and getting an understanding. So with this understanding of the bad news, what's the good news?

Through Jesus, God does more than we could ever imagine. The gospel is this. We are more sinful and flawed in ourselves than we ever dared to believe.

Yet at the very same time, we are more loved and accepted in Jesus Christ than we ever dared hope. What does God do for us as guilty, dead sinners? Well, first, he sends his son.

The gospel is not just a list of things we should strive to do. It's wrapped up in one person. Jesus is the gospel. He's the good news of what God has done.

The good news is the arrival and actions of Jesus. John 3, 16. God so loved the world, he gave his only son. You can't get the gospel without getting it's about Jesus.

[16 : 41] In the very, very beginning, when he was first born, Luke 10, verses 10, 11. And the angel said to them, the shepherds, Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all people.

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord. He had not done a thing yet, and it was still good news.

He's a newborn baby, and the heavens are erupting with praise. He's that good. Why? Because he's just not any old baby. He's the Savior.

He's the promised one from old has arrived. The promised one from old has arrived. Colossians 1, 16 says, For by him all things were created in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities, all things were created through him and for him.

This is incredible. The creator steps into his creation. The unstoppable fullness of God puts skin on and enters. We've all heard, Jesus saves us from our sins.

[17 : 48] Everybody's heard that. Jesus saves us from our sins. What does the Father do through Jesus to save us from our sins? Paul lays this out in brilliance. You were dead, but he makes you alive.

Think about the miracle of this. You're not barely alive. You're not on life support. You are totally alive. More alive than you've ever been. John 10, 10 says, I came that they may have life.

Have it more abundantly. This is what God gives us through what Jesus has done. Romans 8 and 11 says, If the spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, in you, in me, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his spirit who dwells in you.

Jesus was totally dead. This confirms. It's a medical fact. He was dead. And then he was totally alive. Eating food. Having people touch him.

And hundreds verified it. Yes, we are totally dead in sin. But he doesn't make us a little bit nicer of a dead person. He makes us totally alive. You were guilty.

[18 : 57] But he declares you're innocent. Now, I think this one we all, I think this is one that we all can understand. But at the same time, miss. One of my favorite theologians, C.S. Lewis, wrote this.

One part of the claim tends to slip past us unnoticed because we have heard it so often that we no longer see what it amounts to. I mean the claim to forgive sins. Any sins.

Now, unless the speaker is God, this is really so preposterous as to be comic. We can all understand how a man forgives offenses against himself. You tread on my toes and I forgive you.

You steal my money and I forgive you. That's easy. We can all get that. But what should we make of a man himself, unrobbed and untrodden on, who announced that he forgave you for treading on other men's toes and stealing other men's money?

Asinine fatuity is the kindest description we should give of his conduct. Yet this is what Jesus did. He told people that their sins were forgiven and never waited to consult all the other people whom their sins had undoubtedly injured.

[19 : 57] He unhesitatingly behaved as if he was the party chiefly concerned, the person chiefly offended in all offenses.

This makes sense only if he really was the God whose laws are broken and whose love is wounded in every sin. In the mouth of any speaker who is not God, these words would imply what I can only regard as a silliness and conceit unrivaled by any other character in history.

It's him who forgives, and he's the chief one offended by the sin. Imagine that. You're guilty. I'm guilty. Everyone knows it.

All the evidence is there. All we're waiting on is the sentencing. But then you move from totally guilty to totally forgiven. That's what Jesus does. He doesn't say, strike two, one more and I'm going to get you.

I'm going to bring the hammer on you. No, he declares us totally innocent. How does he do that? We aren't there yet. Steal more. You were in debt to sin, but he cancels your debt. Cancel means wipe out.

[21 : 04] It means obliterate. Jesus' last words, it is finished. Tetelestai means paid in full. There's no single shred of evidence here. Psalm 103 says it like this.

For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him. As far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions, our sins, from us.

Right? His love is higher and his forgiveness is further than we can wrap our heads around. But it's true. It's gloriously true.

So that's what God does to set us free. But how? Jesus suffers the bad news to give us the good news. God set aside our record of debt.

But what about all that debt? God forgave us all our sins. But what about all those sins? We've got to remember, God is a perfect judge. He cannot be bribed.

[22 : 05] He cannot be in the presence of sin. He can't look away or wink at sin. There is no good old boy club when it comes to God. All of us, all of it must be dealt with.

And the penalties of any of it are death. Verse 14b says, This he set aside, nailing it to the cross.

Someone had to pay. But the scandal of the gospel was that the one who paid it all is the one who didn't deserve any of it. That cross that our sins were nailed to, where we found forgiveness, that was our cross.

That was my cross. That was your cross. And he took it from us. We were dead. He is the author of life. We were guilty.

He has never even thought about sinning once. We were outside of the covenant. He is the only son. We were drowning in guilt and shame. He is as pure as snow.

[23 : 05] He is the sinless, spotless, debtless, only beloved son. And he willingly exchanged all that to take our place. 2 Corinthians 5.21 says, For our sake he made him to be sin, who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.

This is grace. This is mercy. This is the gospel. We get what only Jesus deserved because Jesus got what we deserved.

Our sin was obliterated because Jesus allowed his own body to be obliterated. That's where our sin went when it left us.

The full, vicious, righteous wrath of God was unleashed on him. He drank it all. The whole cup of wrath that we deserved.

And then he burst out of the grave, holding the keys to death and hell. Sorry. Making the dead alive.

[24 : 13] Making the unclean clean. And making the outcast a child of God. We were outcasts.

We are now children of God. How's that for good news? But what about our enemies? We have enemies. Jesus doesn't just deal with our sins.

He deals with our enemies. Verse 15 says, He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in him.

1 John 3.8 says, The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. We are likely to sort of get the point. He did something to them.

He won. That's true. But we missed the level to which he beat them. And when we miss that, when we miss that truth, we are more likely to think that they may have the ability to remount a campaign.

[25 : 14] To come back. We are more likely to fear that when we see them around, what Paul describes here is not just a victory. It's a massacre. It's the language of a military victory that shows no restraint.

He disarmed them. This is a violent way to describe getting their weapons. He didn't ask them to hand their weapons over politely, like the famous picture of General Cornwallis of Great Britain, handing his sword over to General Washington at the Battle of Yorktown.

or the Japanese signing a declaration of surrender aboard the USS Missouri, ending World War II. There is no chivalry, no gentleman's agreement here. He stripped all the spiritual tyrants in the universe of their sham authority at the cross and marched them naked through the streets.

It's a violent word that means to snatch or rip them off. Every power they had over us, he snatched it from them. They don't have any ability to harm us anymore.

This understanding is why Paul mocks them, mocks death in 1 Corinthians 15. It says, where is your sting? Do you know who you're talking to? That's death.

[26 : 25] Yeah, but his fangs are gone. He's not in control anymore. The power that he held over us is gone. Romans 8, 31 says, What then shall we say to these things?

If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is too condemned? Christ Jesus is the one who died. More than that, who was raised? Who is at the right hand of God?

Who indeed is interceding for us? Amen. They can shout guilty all they want. Who cares? He's forgiven us. They can approach the bench with accusation after accusation, but the judge is the justifier, and his son is the one who paid it all.

But he didn't just snatch their power away from them. He put them to open shame by triumphing over them. This word means to disgrace publicly, to parade them around publicly, and to make them a laughingstock.

[27 : 35] This is not a politically correct way to handle your enemies, but it used to be what the Roman army would do. There was no Facebook. There was no Internet. There was none of that. There was no telephone. So when the emperor came back, he would march to the defeated king, and any surviving warriors totally humiliated and naked through the streets for people to laugh at and belittle as they rejoiced in the spoils of war.

Not only did he snatch away their powers, he humiliates them. They had not just hurled accusations. They had hurled shame. So our victorious king didn't just conquer them.

He shamed them. He didn't hold back in his defeat. He was ruthless. So, is it appropriate for us to think about something like that?

I'd argue we aren't just to think about it. We're to meditate on it. We're to constantly remind ourselves of the gospel and how powerful Jesus Christ is and how he totally obliterated the enemy.

We don't just hear the gospel and believe it. We stand in it. 1 Corinthians 15 says, You're going to need this understanding of triumph over and over.

[28 : 50] When the accusations come at you, and they're going to come at you, you stand in the gospel. So when the devil throws your sins in your face and declares that you deserve death and hell, tell him this.

I admit that I deserve death and hell. What of it? For I know one who suffered and made satisfaction on my behalf. His name is Jesus Christ, Son of God.

And where he is there, I shall be also. What a fantastic proclamation. Remember what Jesus has done for you. He died for you.

He's been raised for you. And he totally disarmed and humiliated your enemies. If you're here and not yet a Christian, these are the facts.

You're dead. And you're guilty. But the fact is, some of you don't even know it. Some of you do.

[29 : 48] And you feel your darkness is too dark for him. You know, I've heard it, I don't know how many times. You don't know what I've done. You don't know what I've done.

I can't be forgiven. I'm going to argue that that's not humility. So think about this. You believe the creator of the universe, the one who by his spoken word holds all of it together, all of creation right now, he holds it together by his spoken word, is not capable of forgiving your sins.

I would ask you to reconsider your true thoughts on this matter. And let's have a conversation after the service. You have no darkness he can't conquer. You can't add one.

If you're here, you're already a Christian. Maturity in Christ is growing in your dependence on his salvation. It's growing, not more self-assured, but dependent on him.

Pharisees, Pharisees grew in knowledge, but that produced self-righteousness. The guy who wrote Amazing Grace knew he needed grace. He said, I am a great sinner and Christ is a great savior.

[31 : 07] 1 Timothy 1.15 says, The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost.

I charge you to live free of guilt and shame for past sins. I charge you to forgive radically. The best way that we can do this on a weekly basis is to take communion.

It's just a reminder to all who call Christ Jesus Lord and Savior that he paid it all, that his body was broken and his blood was shed to completely obliterate all of our sins, to remove the fangs from death.

I ask you to consider before you come up and take communion, asking for forgiveness. We all do it. I do it. I forget the power of Jesus Christ and the authority that he has over all powers and authorities and I lose my faith.

I feel like I have to do it. I have to pull myself up by my bootstraps and keep on going instead of depending on him. consider these things before you come up. God, thank you, thank you, thank you so much for nailing my sin to the cross.

[32 : 30] That I can live in that true acceptance that you forgive not only what I have done, what I will do and what I will do forevermore. You forgave me of all those things.

God, I pray that that truth was set and find good soil in the heart of your people today in this room. Man, that we will remember that you rule and reign. That yes, you died but yes, you are alive.

You completely obliterated our enemies and we no longer have to live in that life of shame. That lifestyle that is not pleasing to you.

God, I pray that we would be a people who live a lifestyle who are pleasing to you. Lord, for those in this room that may not know you as Lord and Savior, God, I pray that you would call them, that you would reveal yourself to them.

It says in the Bible that you remove the scales from their eyes and they can see you for who you truly are. May that be the case. So thankful for all these things, God.

[33 : 29] Have your will in our lives in the name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen.