

# OUR SINS: FORGIVEN AT THE CROSS (COMMUNITY OF THE CROSS CONT.)

COLOSSIANS 2:13-15

BY PASTOR JIM LINCOLN ON JUNE 22, 2008

Jesus said to His disciples,

*"If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his **cross** and follow Me." Mtt.10:38*

*"And he who does not take his **cross** and follow after Me is not worthy of Me." Matt. 16:24*

We've been thinking together about what it means to be a people of the cross and what it means to take up the cross and follow Jesus. After Jesus fed the five thousand (Jn.6:24), the multitudes crossed over the Sea of Galilee, searching for Jesus to make him the new king of Israel. They were so determined they planned to take him by force if necessary. What a moment and opportunity for Jesus and his disciples. For the first time in his ministry they stood on the threshold of success, respect, power and popularity. Like we might, some began to think about how much easier things would be with thousands of people knocking on their door ready to follow Jesus. Certainly, the financial burden would be eased. Also, the division of labor would be lighter with so many volunteers. We can almost hear them thinking...

*"Finally, we've made it over the hump. Several thousand excited, professing Christians can't wait to join us. They've come over land and sea to acknowledge Jesus as the king of Israel. This is the day we've been waiting for. Finally, maybe God will actually doing something significant."*

But instead of seeing the possibilities, Jesus blows it. He offends them all. He tells those who had followed him, "You don't believe in me" (36) He said, "The reason you're here is because you ate the loaves and had your fill." (2). He said, "If you don't eat my flesh and drink my blood, you have no life in yourselves. He said, "You are simply dead men walking." Then he capped it off with a point about election (cf. 44 & 65). I can hear the disciples,

*"Jesus, these people have made significant sacrifices of their time and energy to be here. They've traveled great distances and took time off work to acknowledge*

*you as their king. Couldn't you be a little more complimentary or perhaps a bit more positive and less demanding? Why don't you talk about how special they are? Why in the world did you go and blow it like that? They've come here seeking you. Why erect all these barriers? Why be so inaccessible to the world of their aspirations? We work hard to follow you and you just killed our chance to make a little progress."*

Jn. 6:66 says, "As a result of this (a long, accusing and obscure sermon about eating his flesh and drinking his blood plus two points about election) many of His disciples withdrew and were not walking with Him anymore." As long as it was a good deal for them they followed him. He said, "You seek me not because you saw signs, but because you ate the loaves and were made full." When he stopped treating them like consumers,...game over. As Paul suggested in 1Cor. 15, they had believed in "vain." Not that they didn't have enough faith. Their faith was in Jesus. It just wasn't in Jesus *AS HE IS* or in the Lord Jesus. Such is the faith of many today. Just like these, they call themselves disciples. But when Jesus challenges their own appetites, they stop following him and default to making their own agenda primary.

The crowds stopped following Jesus until he made his triumphal entry into Jerusalem. But within days they would ask for Barabbas to be freed...not Jesus. His usefulness had ended. He wouldn't give them the bread or the circus they wanted. And He was crucified.

## COLOSSIANS 2:13-15

Here Paul describes what happened at the cross. I want to focus on two blessings of the cross Paul addresses that tell us why Jesus wouldn't let the crowds make him king of Israel. I hope to address the first this morning and the second next Sunday.

The two reasons given here are: 1. Before he would rule as king, he would cancel the debt of our sin. 2. Before he would reign as king, he would defeat the devil: the enemy of our souls. Both of these, Jesus did at the cross. Let's linger on the first of the two reasons.

### FIRST, ON THE CROSS, JESUS CANCELLED OUT THE DEBT OF OUR SINS.

First, why was this necessary? Why couldn't God just say, "You're forgiven and that's that"? The answer is that sin left us all dead before God and dead to his

blessing. In the sermon I mentioned earlier in Jn.6, Jesus said to the crowds, *“I’m the living bread that comes down from heaven and if you eat of it you will live forever (but) ...unless you eat my flesh and drink my blood **you have no life in yourselves.**”* Jesus was simply reviewing the covenant God made with Adam and Eve. He said, *“Adam, you can eat of any tree in the garden, but the day you eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in that day you will surely die.”* But Satan persuaded our first parents that God was holding out on them. He persuaded them to doubt the goodness of God. Have you ever doubted the goodness of God? They ate of the tree, spiritually died, and were banished from the blessing of God’s presence. Although they didn’t immediately die physically, they died to fellowship and communion with God. Since, all are dead in trespasses and sins.

Sin causes this death. So above anything else we need God to make us alive by His mercy. If Jesus accepted their offer to be king and hadn’t gone to the cross we would all remain dead or separated from the saving blessings of God. So, Paul says in v. 13, *“And when you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, he made you alive together with him (Christ) through the cross...”* The cross is the means by which God makes us alive to him. Oh beloved, can you hear these words? Through faith in Christ we are alive to God together with Christ. Did you see that phrase, “together with Christ”? As Jesus is now alive to the Father’s will, blessings, love, hope, joy, purpose and power...with Jesus we too have been made alive to God because of the cross. That’s Amazing!

## THE PRODIGAL

When the prodigal came home, his father said to the older brother. *“Your brother was dead and is now he’s alive and so we must celebrate.”* He wasn’t physically dead yet. But, his rebellion and sin cut him off from the blessings, love and fellowship of his father. He was dead to all his father was.

And when he came to his senses he ran to his father and confessed his sins. He asked if he could simply be a slave in his father’s household. He knew his sin had justly severed his relationship to this man as his son. He violated every responsibility of son-ship and he knew that his net worth was not enough to pay it back. But, beloved, his father was merciful and he forgave the debt. And he was made alive again to his father’s wisdom, mercy, love, grace, and authority.

As we have been saying for some weeks now, sins don’t evaporate into thin air. They must be dealt with because they lead to death. How are believers made alive to God with Christ? Verse 13 says, *“And when you were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh he made you alive together with Him (Christ) having forgiven us all our transgressions.”*

## THE WRITTEN CERTIFICATE OF OUR DEBT

There were two obstacles to our peace with God. The first in v. 14 is what Paul calls the *written code* (NIV) or the certificate of debt (NASB) or the *handwriting of requirements* (NKJV). He says, “*having cancelled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us and which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross.*”

The Greek phrase means an official handwritten decree. Now, there is some debate about what this decree actually is. Some say it’s the law and its covenant stipulations and requirements. Others say it’s the written bond of debt we owe to God for not keeping his commandments. But these two don’t have to be at odds. Both can be intended.

When Jesus taught us how to pray he said to pray that God would forgive us our *debts*. Our sins include our violations of the covenant... and because God has authority over us all as the One who authored us all, that list amounts to a bond or certificate of debt that we owe God. In the Lord’s Prayer, some say, “trespasses” and others say, “debts.” Although “debts” is the precise word, both are true. The Law is a moral covenant. To break it is to trespass it. And it’s also a bond of debt describing the regulations that we indeed owe God. At the cross, that debt was forgiven (13). **Paul uses three verbs to tell us what happened to it. 1. He cancelled it. 2. He took it away and he nailed it to the cross.**”

### FIRST, HE CANCELLED OUR DEBT.

Like the prodigal son, our debt that exceeds our net worth. He owed his father respect and obedience. How was he going to pay the father back for that disrespect and rebellion? He couldn’t. And neither can we before God.

There’s a TV program called “My Name is Earl.” The point of the story is that after a car accident he realizes that he’s been a jerk. So he makes a list of on a small piece of paper of everyone he has wronged in his life and then he tries to make restitution to everyone on his list. Here’s my problem with this story line. If I made a list like that it would fill up several books. How many times in my life have I spoken ill of someone else? Cleverly, of course, and with a spiritual spin on it. But, how could I ever make that up to them? What about those of whom I was unaware that I had offended? But even if you could know everyone you had done something wrong to and, somehow, could go to each one and make it right, what about God? We owe it

to God to love, him with all our hearts, souls and minds and strength and our neighbor as ourselves. Who can say they have done that? Who could count or list every time they had failed at this? This is Paul's point, "All have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." Our record before the law will leave us in debt and with insufficient funds to pay that debt back.

This certificate or bond of debt stood against us and was hostile to us, and rightly so. It was filled up with accurate accusations. It made a good case.

However, at the cross, God cancelled our debt. Literally, the word means ***to wash in every part, to besmear: to cover with lime...to wipe off or wipe away...to erase, blot out...or delete.*** This is Paul's point. Because Jesus paid the debt of our sin we're set free from this heavy burden. It has been deleted.

## CHRISTY'S BIRTH DEBT

When Christy was born, we didn't have medical insurance. So we had to pay for her on the payment plan. We were poor students and it took several years to get her paid for. I think we paid ten or twenty dollars each month. About three years later, when Debby went in to deliver Rebekah, I came prepared to make my last payment. However, when I spoke to the accounts receivable they said they had closed out my account and I didn't have to pay that last payment. But I wanted to pay my bill. She said, "I'm sorry you can't pay it. It costs us more money each month to keep your file open than what you owed. Your file has been deleted. There is no bill. There is no debt to pay. It was closed as paid in full." "Can I give you the money?" "No. Mr. Lincoln. Go home. The debt was canceled. The file was deleted." Our sins, and the debt we owe God for them, have been cancelled.

## CHRISTIAN IN PILGRIM'S PROGRESS

You know how much I love that place in Pilgrim's Progress when Christian came to the cross. When he saw the cross, he stood up and the heavy burden of his debt (a backpack full of heavy rocks) fell off as the straps that held it on his back snapped. It fell off his back and rolled down to a grave at the bottom of the hill. Here's how it reads:

"I saw in my dream that just as Christian came up with the cross, his burden loosed from off his shoulders, and fell from off his back, and began to tumble, and so continued to do till it came to the mouth of the sepulture (grave) where it fell in and I saw it no more. Then Christian was glad and lightsome, and said,

with a merry heart, He hath given me rest by His sorrow and life by his death...He looked therefore, and he looked again, even till the springs that were in his head sent the waters down his cheeks...*'What a place is this! Must here be the beginning of my bliss. Must here the burden fall from off my back. Must be here the strings that bound it to me crack! Oh blessed cross! Blest grave! Blest rather be the man that there was put to shame for me!*

Jesus paid the debt for us in our place and God wiped the bond of that debt out...he deleted it, so that we can be free of its burden. At the cross it has been canceled for those who believe. To be a people of the cross is to believe this, rejoice in this and rest in this, and cling to it when the enemy of your soul makes you suspicious about the goodness of God.

## SECOND, PAUL SAYS THAT GOD TOOK OUR DEBT AWAY.

In the Old Testament on annual Day of Atonement, we often think about the goat that was sacrificed. But there were actually two goats in the ceremony. One was sacrificed and its blood was sprinkled on the mercy seat to cover sins. But there was another goat. Let me read this piece of the service for you.

"When he finishes atoning for the holy place and the tent of meeting and the altar, he shall offer the live goat...Then Aaron shall lay both of his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the sons of Israel and all their transgressions in regard to all their sins; and he shall lay them on the head of the goat and send it away into the wilderness...The goat shall bear on itself all their iniquities to a solitary land; and he shall release the goat in the wilderness." Lev.16:20-22

That ceremonial act was a vivid picture of what God was doing with their sins. He was taking them out of the way and driving them into the wilderness. That ceremony symbolized that God placed their sins on this goat and drove them both away. However, notice that the sins were taken away by substitution. The scapegoat had to bear those sins. Hebrews says, *"Therefore Jesus also, that He might sanctify the people through His own blood, suffered outside the camp."* He not only cancelled our debt, blotting it out...Jesus also *took it way* from us. Beloved our bond of debt or the certificate that stood against us has been cast as far as the east is from the west to be remembered no more and cast into the deepest sea.

## THIRD: THEN PAUL SAYS THAT

## OUR DEBT WAS NAILED TO THE CROSS.

Paul is using imagery from the trial of Jesus. Pilate had a sign nailed to the cross, over Jesus' head in three languages. "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews."

The religious leaders brought Jesus to Pilate charging Jesus with sedition and blasphemy. So Pilate asked Jesus, "Are you king of the Jews?" Jesus said that His kingdom was not of this world or my servants would be fighting.

"Therefore Pilate said to Him, 'So You are a king?' Jesus answered, 'You say [correctly] that I am a king. For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, to testify to the truth. Everyone who is of the truth hears My voice.'

Pilate \*said to Him, 'What is truth?' ...

'But you have a custom that I release someone for you at the Passover; do you wish then that I release for you the King of the Jews?' So they cried out again, saying, 'Not this Man, but Barabbas.' Now Barabbas was a robber...

Now it was the day of preparation for the Passover; it was about the sixth hour And he said to the Jews, 'Behold, your King!'

So they cried out, 'Away with Him, away with Him, crucify Him!' Pilate said to them, 'Shall I crucify your King?' The chief priests answered, 'We have no king but Caesar.'

So he then handed Him over to them to be crucified...

Pilate also wrote an inscription and put it on the cross. It was written, 'JESUS THE NAZARENE, THE KING OF THE JEWS.'

Therefore many of the Jews read this inscription, for the place where Jesus was crucified was near the city; and it was written in Hebrew, Latin and in Greek.

So the chief priests of the Jews were saying to Pilate, 'Do not write, "The King of the Jews"; but that He said, "I am King of the Jews."'

Pilate answered, 'What I have written I have written.'"

Now, that sign (*titulus*) Pilate had written and nailed to the cross announced *the charge* the people brought against Jesus. **It meant that this man was a usurper of God's authority and the usurper of the emperor's authority.** That's why they wanted Pilate to change it to say that Jesus *claimed* to be the King of the Jews and not that he should be called the king of the Jews. That sign nailed to the cross was ***the public notice or the written code or charge that stood against Jesus.***

Now, Paul looks at the cross and instead of seeing the *unjust charge* against Jesus that charged Him as a usurper and blasphemer, he sees ***the just charge against all***

**people.** And that is the bond of debt of our sin... that we owe...or the written code that stood against us and that was hostile to us. Let me ask you this? Who was really doing the usurping? And who was guilty of blasphemy? Everyone involved was guilty except Jesus. When Paul looks at the cross he sees Jesus taking that just charge of our sin. The only valid charge that could be nailed to the cross was the charge of our sin not His.

Beloved, Gal. 3:13 says, "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us". And 2Cor. 5:21 "He made Him who knew no sin [to be] sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him." As the representative of His people Jesus dies the death we should have died so that we can live before God in peace, and when you were dead he made you alive together with Jesus having forgiven all our sins.

Hear this piece of the gospel. Through faith in the Lord Jesus, He takes our record of sin and debt and we get His righteous record and are made alive in Him. The first barrier, the written code of our debt has been **cancelled** (blotted out and erased). It was **taken away** (as far as the east is from the west) by being **nailed to the cross** with Jesus (the Just dying for the unjust). And the last words Jesus said before his death were these... "*It is finished*". That phrase is from the world of business transactions and it means "Paid in full." You can't pay the debt of your sins. But Jesus can and did. Beloved, how more blessed could we possibly be? But here's the deal: To be a person of the cross is to receive this gospel. It's to receive this blessing. It's to lay the burden of our sin down at Jesus feet and, like Christian, it is to be lifted up, forgiven, and washed clean by the blood of the Lamb. It is to marvel and be amazed. It is to be loved as we have never been loved. And it is to worship, "Blessed cross...Blessed grave, Blessed better be, the man who, there, died for me." Amen.