

**Liberating the Captives**  
The Cross: Week 2: Colossians 2  
3/15/20

Welcome/intro/vision—Been a crazy week! Haven't seen anything like this in most of our lifetimes

thanks for being flexible, joining us online, many of our small groups are getting together today—don't know how long this might go, likely several weeks, could even be a couple of months

if you want to stay up to date on all that's going on and the meeting or not-meeting decisions we're having to make, like us on Facebook or sign up for our Connect Devotional

In the midst of everything, this is week 2 of a series we're doing called the Cross, if you're new today we're just four weeks out from Easter so we're gearing up for the most important celebration on the calendar

But really this series came about a couple years ago when a person who was here exploring faith just said to me "I don't get the cross. Don't know why it had to happen, why it's so important"

And it struck me as I thought about her great question that the first disciples didn't get the cross either—it was a total shock to them

But after the cross happened, total shock, and THEN even more shocking, the resurrection happened—God was doing something utterly unique, one and only time in all of history, to solve some problem but they didn't know what that problem was

So those first disciples start to work backward from the solution to the problem. What problems had God solved through the death of his Son?

And if you go through the New Testament you can see several different ways that the disciples answer that question because there wasn't just one problem that the cross was solving

We're going to put them into 4 different buckets or categories

And our hope is that over these next few weeks, the cross of Christ will capture our imaginations and that we'll grow in our understanding

When Christians have lived with the cross front and center in their lives throughout the centuries, it has propelled us to our best, most courageous, most impactful moments in history

When Christians have grasped the cross, it has given them strength to live totally different lives in the face of all kinds of threats and challenges—famines, wars, persecution, even plagues and sickness, just like what we're facing today and now with the coronavirus!

Because the cross of Christ is the single greatest spiritual power event in history, and as it's been unleashed it has changed more lives than anything else in history

and so it has a way of empowering us to no longer be afraid but to live bold lives for the sake of God and for the sake of loving our neighbors in just the way that Jesus called us to.

And last week we looked at how the New Testament describes the cross as the solution to the problem of sin and estrangement from God

The disciples saw Jesus as the once and for all sacrifice, taking away all our sin for all time and thereby reconciling us to God, restoring us into a relationship with God

If you missed last week, after you get done hanging out with us here today, go back over to our website and look under messages, you can get all caught up there.

This week we're going to tag back to the series we just completed called Eyes Wide Open and talk about how the cross of Christ was the surprise solution to the problem of spiritual powers and authorities that are at work against us

In my small group this past week I asked the question "what are the things that seem to have power and authority over our lives in some way?"

Coronavirus came up pretty quickly, we'd already been talking about that for a good while, and fear quickly followed as another thing that seems to have power and authority over our lives

We talked about being captive to crazy busy—lots of things on the calendar, especially kids sports! Maybe you feel captive to your schedule.

Of course there are bosses or the organizations that we work for that have power and authority over our lives

And then there are medical issues and financial pressures

And of course there's an election gearing up! And part of the reason why the volume gets so shrill on and there's so much anxiety about the election is this one person has so much power and authority in our country

There are all these various powers and authorities that shape and impact our lives—and at various points those powers and authorities seem very clearly aligned against us

A couple of weeks ago we looked at a passage of Scripture where the apostle Paul declared that our battle is not against flesh and blood but against spiritual powers and authorities and principalities that are set against us

There's the surface expression of those powers and authorities—like your boss, like the Coronavirus, like your medical issues

But underneath those things that are genuinely set against us are the spiritual forces of darkness that drive and are the root source of all of them.

The Scriptures say that all of us were captive to those spiritual forces set against us

And what we're going to see today is the good news that part of the reason why God put on flesh in Jesus

Was so that finally one human being might go toe to toe with these spiritual forces of darkness and conquer them, that we might have someone represent us in the conflict against the spiritual authorities and win

Jesus has come to liberate captives. In Jesus Christ, the great liberator is here to set you and me free from our greatest threat.

And when we get our hearts and minds around this great liberation and the price that God paid to set us free and the work that God has done to set us free

The only sane thing is to follow the liberator out of prison and into the life that he promises us

My friends, some bad news to start with: today there are powers at work that are set against you and that you and I both blindly and foolishly participate with and cooperate with to our great detriment

But the good news is that the great liberator has come to set us free from our captivity, and the invitation today is to follow that liberator out of the prison camp and into the life everlasting—what the apostle Paul is going to call today “fullness”

That's what we're going to see as we turn to Colossians 2: Bible/no Bible

***<sup>9</sup> For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, <sup>10</sup> and in Christ you have been brought to fullness. He is the head over every power and authority.***

Well I don't know how to break it to you but there's no toilet paper left at Wal-Mart.

And this is a national phenomenon that has sparked a bunch of articles about how people respond to crisis and WHY they do what they do

*Scarcity mentality* is one description of it

And in a scarcity mentality, the very real issue of limited resources is always front and center and you're very threat oriented

you're very aware of those limited resources and you make decisions and sometimes make demands on other people in light of a scarcity mentality

Contrasted with that is abundance mentality, where you live with a mindset that there is always more in the universe that is available to you and there is more than enough to go around

And the only way that can be true is if there's more to the universe than what you can see, touch, or handle

Because the truth of this matter if this world and matter is all that there is, then scarcity mentality is the only thing that makes any sense! The pie is only so big and there's only so much money or other resources to go around

And there are silent, deadly viruses that spring up and come after us!

But if there's something larger than matter, larger than just natural resources, larger than just money, larger than just what you can see touch or feel, or HOARD  
then maybe, just maybe, it's possible to have an abundance mindset

Paul here in this section of his letter to a small church in ancient Colossae is inviting these new Christians into a life that is marked by abundance, the word he uses is fullness

It starts with Jesus Christ himself and the rather dramatic assertion that **in Jesus ALL the fullness** of the Deity, that is all the fullness of God, lives in bodily form

***Jesus is the touchpoint and the conduit between all the resources of heaven and all the needs we have here on this earth***

When you're sick and your body needs a regular supply of some external resources to help it to get better, medical professionals install a small port in your body

So that when you need that regular supply of external medicine to help your body to get better, you've got an easy way to plug into those resources

Jesus is the medical port between all the fullness of God and God's resources and our sick and dying humanity

Jesus is the port through whom all the fullness of God gets poured into our bodies and spirits and our souls and our communities and our whole world

He's fully God and through him we receive fullness

For some of you who are spiritual but not especially tied to any religious or faith tradition, some of you will ask me why we make such a big deal about Jesus, why does it always come back to him?

Aren't there many great religious and spiritual teachers throughout history that we can learn from?

And the answer to that is yes, there are many great religious and spiritual teachers throughout history--But the Scriptures tell us that Jesus is much much more.

For one time in all of human history, one person had all the fullness of God poured into a human body

Jesus is the only of all the great religious and spiritual teachers throughout history who God raised again from the dead, the sign by which God validated and vindicated everything he ever said and did

And the sign by which God established Jesus as something more than merely another great religious or spiritual teacher or guide

He is utterly unique among all the religious teachers—in him all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form

Come to do something extraordinary, not just another teacher but a full-out rescue operation

And that rescue operation is described as **the move into fullness: in Christ you have been brought into fullness**

It's the move from a world where scarcity mentality is the only sane way to live to a larger spiritual reality where all the resources of heaven are now available to each one of us

And this abundance mentality can re-shape everything, no matter what our earthly circumstances

Several years ago I was talking with a person here who had gone down to Mexico City to work with a church down there

And their primary ministry was serving people who lived around and scavenged at a giant trash dump in Mexico City

And you know how they described the church services at the trash dump there in Mexico City, among the poorest of the poor?

They said it was the most joyful church services they had ever experienced

How do you have joy while living in a trash dump? When your life gets connected with the one who is all the fullness of God, you get brought into his fullness

And even when scarcity is your earthly lot in life, there is an abundance of joy and love in Christ Jesus and being brought into that fullness is life changing

And how is this joy-filled abundance possible? Paul hints at it here when he says this: **he is the head over every power and authority**

We talked earlier about powers and authorities, the things that have the power to shape our lives

In the biblical world, any time it talks about the powers and authorities it both includes earthly authorities like kings and presidents and prime ministers

AND spiritual powers and authorities, and those are always spiritual entities that are opposed to us and working against us

The powers and authorities in the spiritual realm are always looking to deceive us, to draw us further and further away from God, de-humanizing us one temptation and one lie and one discouragement after another

There is a spiritual power at work in the world that is bent on your destruction and my destruction, that enslaves each one of us in darkness apart from Christ.

Have you ever felt like you were captive to some external situation before?

Captive to a situation at work you couldn't get out of, captive to a medical situation that was extremely difficult for you,

captive to a pile of credit card or other debts, captive to a boss, maybe growing up you had an abusive parent and you felt captive to him or her

maybe you have or had a a child or an in-law who was making your life miserable?

Or maybe you've battled an addiction and you know what it's like to be totally under the spell of a substance or behavior that you just cannot overcome, no matter how hard you try— alcohol, eating disorder, pornography, gambling, video games

Or maybe you've been captive to mental health issues—depression, anxiety, or something else that just feels like you have no ability to beat it

Or maybe you've got a sin pattern that nobody knows about yet, and you kind of like it, you kind of think it's giving you something that want or need, but in reality, it's killing you spiritually, emotionally, psychologically, and it's just a matter of time before it all goes off the rails

Captivity is a miserable experience.

The Scriptures tell us that each of those specific captivity experiences are just the surface expression of larger spiritual truth: that there are powers and authorities that want to keep you and me in captivity.

There are powers and forces that want to keep us barely living--in a scarcity, fearful, ambitious, proud, anxious, grasping for whatever we can get mentality

There are powers that want you to live cynical, apathetic or proud, anxious or hiding or fearful, powers that want to either keep you down or puff you up with a false pride

There are powers and authorities that want to keep you hiding in the darkness, hooked into your captivity of whatever sort you might be dealing with

Any of those behaviors cuts you off from God and renders you a smaller, lesser human being, forfeiting portions of your image-bearing and causing you to NOT participate in God's larger work of courageous redemption and right-making in this world

And Paul declares to us that those powers and authorities are now UNDER Jesus

he is the head of every power and authority that wants to oppress you, make you cynical or proud, keep you in captivity or push you away from the fullness of Jesus

These powers and authorities have been at work in human history from just about the dawn of human history

But somehow, Paul says, Jesus is now the head over all these powers and authorities. To overcome and conquer these powers and authorities is no small feat

And it's not until a few verses later that Paul tells us how it happened, let's skip down to v. 13

***<sup>13</sup> When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, <sup>14</sup> having canceled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. <sup>15</sup> And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.***

I've told you before that I love commercials for weight loss or hair replacement or teeth straightening because the before and after pictures are usually pretty ridiculous

**Here's a good** one from Smile Direct—before this poor woman NOT ONLY had crooked teeth but she also lived in a bad lighting and in a grainy picture ALL the TIME!

But now after getting her teeth straightened by Smile Direct, not only are her teeth straighter but also her life is well-lit and her hair is absolutely perfect all the time!

**I like these** because they remind me of the Scripture before and after picture, only there's no doctoring needed to paint the picture of what life was like before

Before Jesus, what were we? Dead. Dead in our sins and the uncircumcision of our flesh, which is another sermon that we don't have time to unpack

BEFORE Jesus, we were dead. And when we were dead, God made us alive with Christ.

How did he do this, two parts: 1. He forgave us all our sins and canceled our debts, we talked about that last week, if you weren't here go online and give it a listen

And 2. He disarmed these powers and authorities that have held human beings captive since the beginning of time

All the spiritual powers and authorities that at work behind all the things that oppress and keep us captive, however that gets expressed, whether that's a medical condition or relational strain or a difficult job situation

OR even if it's less negative and feels more positive--our own pride and ambition, our greed, our lust, our vanity, our people-pleasing

There are many ways to be held captive, some are absolutely miserable, they feel miserable, and everyone knows they're miserable

Other ways of being held captive look golden on the outside, have a certain amount of privilege or pleasure associated with them, but they are rotten on in the inside

There are many ways we can be held captive by spiritual powers and authorities that are bent on the destruction of human beings made in God's image

But the good news of the Scriptures is that Jesus has gone all the way to the source of that spiritually dark power and triumphed over it

And the way that he goes about doing that is completely unexpected. The first century Jewish people wanted a military victory over an oppressive Roman government that would result in them getting their nation back

Instead, God gave them a cross, a crucified messiah, who liberated them from eternal spiritual captivity

And of course, this passage is dripping with irony because the cross was an instrument of public humiliation.

And what it looked like to everyone around Jesus on that great and horrible day of the crucifixion was that HE was the one being humiliated, he was the one being made a public spectacle

Paul who wrote this initially thought the whole Jesus thing was a sham, utterly ridiculous. The cross was foolishness to him, shame, failure, loss

In polite Roman society nobody ever talked about the cross because it was too gruesome, too shameful, too gross and disgusting

But Paul has done a complete 180 on this whole cross thing. NOW Paul says that THIS instrument of failure and shame and execution where it looked like Jesus was being put to public humiliation

THIS is the instrument of God's victory. The most unlikely tool or weapon of victory in all of history.

In this upside down world, the cross was for losers, not winners—the deepest, most uttermost expression of being a loser, being destroyed, being a nobody, being UNDER some OTHER authority, the authority of the Roman government

In the upside down world, the cross was the symbol of nothing but loss and defeat  
But God so loved the world, his redemptive reach goes all the way down to bring everything all the way back up

Jesus goes to the cross, and even though in the moment it looked like he was being made a public spectacle of and even though it looked like he was being utterly humiliated

It was the powers of darkness that were being humiliated, defeated, cast down—they just didn't know it

And so what problem was the cross solving? The cross was solving the spiritual powers and authorities problem

Jesus on the cross was liberating us from captivity to spiritual forces that were set to oppress and imprison us

Jesus on the cross was springing us from jail, releasing us from our concentration camp.

And what does that mean? It means that Jesus is Lord, ultimate authority and has the last word over everything and everybody forever and ever amen

And what difference does that make? What does that actually mean? It means that Coronavirus is not Lord

for many people all around us, the result of Coronavirus being Lord is fear which naturally results in looking for salvation in hoarding as much stuff as we possibly can

When you don't know who the Lord is, you're going to live submitted to slavery underneath any number of Lords and all of them are misery-makers

If money is your Lord, it will enslave you. If family is your Lord, what happens when your family tailspins into conflict?

If your reputation or work is your Lord, you will make foolish sacrifices of family and friends and your own soul to try to gain them.

The spiritual powers and authorities use these tools to make a fool out of you. You think you're climbing the corporate ladder, you think you're successful or doing well

But all of this is just being leveraged to distract you from the God who made you and loves you

and these powers and authorities only job is to dehumanize you by calling you to worship some other god, ANY other god, other than the one in whom you find eternal life

Jesus has gone to the cross to conquer and disarm all the powers and authorities that threaten to choke out your joy, to set the captives free

Jesus is Lord, there is no other. And any other Lord that you'd submit to will only do damage to your soul—even and especially the Coronavirus

The question, of course, is how do we do this? How do we live distinctive lives in line with the good news of Jesus's Lordship in the face of this very real threat?

People will get sick. People we love might suffer and die. There are real tears being shed today all over the world. What do we do in light of that?

We worship Jesus Christ, the Lord and King, who disarmed all the powers and authorities on the cross

And then he rose from the dead and His resurrection is promised to all who trust in him.

And so we will worship Jesus as Lord together on Sundays, even if we have to do it livestreaming and online

In order to orient and re-orient our lives around what's true and to free us from the misery that results when we submit ourselves to any other Lord.

Jesus is Lord. The Coronavirus is not. Jesus has set the captives free, the liberator has come, we are no longer slaves to fear, we are the children of God, under the Lordship of Jesus

This is not only good news for us, it is good news for so many around us who do not yet know it.

### Today's **Take-WITH (Wildly Important Take-Home)**

**Jesus is Lord and liberator over all spiritual powers and authorities and all their earthly expressions.**

Jesus is Lord is the good news that all of Christianity rises and falls on. If it's not true, we should never re-open church again, pack this whole thing up and go about our lives eeking out as much pleasure and happiness as you can

If it is true, then the single most important thing any of us can do is to align our lives to this reality

So a couple of questions to help us to get at this a little deeper:

- 1. What are the earthly expressions of those spiritual powers and authorities that seem to be at work against you right now?**

Maybe you're freaking out about the Coronavirus, maybe you're not maybe there are other issues in your life that feel more oppressive, other things that seem to have a bunch of authority over how your life is unfolding, powers that seem to be shaping your destiny, your future, your career, your family

Can you name the obstacles or the barriers or the institutions or situations that seem to be in authority over you and your life in this season?

- 2. How might you align your heart and mind around the good news that Jesus is Lord over the spiritual forces behind those earthly expressions?**

Late in the week I just felt swamped with all that was going on around us and the decisions and moving parts we needed to make as a church to move forward

And Friday morning I got into the office early and I went into the prayer room and I opened up my journal and I just started naming all the things that seemed to be setting the agenda for things this week—the virus, the logistics, the things on my to-do list

And I spent some time putting those on paper and declaring that as real and imposing as those things were and felt to me, Jesus was Lord over all of them

And I did not want to waste any more of my Friday living as if those things were Lord instead of Jesus

And so I stepped back and oriented my heart and mind and spirit around the good news that Jesus has disarmed all the spiritual powers and authorities behind this threat

And I worshiped Jesus. I blessed his name. I praised him. I celebrated that the liberator had come and set the captives free

And I wanted to follow the LIBERATOR who had knocked down the wall of the prison to set me free

Rather than submit to the prison guard of fear and tasks

Jesus is Lord is always good news that sets captives free. I needed to step back from the craziness on Friday to remember that and reset around that

And when I did, the result was a tremendous peace. Hopefully some wisdom and some courage

I EXPERIENCED that victory in my day when I first ordered my heart and mind and spirit around the truth of it

In light of YOUR current challenges, your current sin patterns, your current fears or worries, how might YOU align your heart and mind around the good news that Jesus is Lord over all the spiritual forces behind the challenges you face?

My friends, this week, we're facing something that none of us has ever experienced before. We want to face this as a community with real strength, from a posture of victory

Even as the whole world walks through the valley of the shadow of death, even as nations rage and economies melt down and challenges arise

We have our Good Shepherd who has disarmed all powers and authorities and set us free

My hope and my prayer is that we'd walk in that victory individually and together especially in the midst of this situation

The victory bought for us, at the cross.

