

On the Cross: Cancelled Debt

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Preacher: Ben Traynor

[0 : 00] Pray and ask for God's help as we come to his word. Heavenly Father, may the words of my mouth and the meditation of my mouth and the meditation of my mouth.

And the meditation of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight. Oh Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen. What do you see when you look at the cross?

What do you see in our opening hymn this morning? We sung these words. And when I think that God, his son not sparing, sent him to die, I scarce can take it in.

When you think of the Son of God coming to die on the cross, what is happening that we can scarcely take it in? We're spending four weeks over the summer to look at the cross.

To ask, what do we see? Or perhaps this way, a little more specifically, what does the Bible show us? What does God's word tell us is happening when the Lord Jesus goes to the cross?

[1 : 18] Last week, we saw from Galatians chapter 3 that on the cross, Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law. That on the cross, there is redemption.

Well, today from Colossians, we're going to see that Christ on the cross cancelled our debt. Cancelled our debt.

I said last week that every week we're going to have a word or a short phrase to capture the aspect of Christ's work that we're looking at. Well, this morning, I couldn't quite get it into one word, but two, cancelled debt.

And so this morning, we're going to look at three things. To understand what it means that we have a debt, firstly. To see that on the cross, it was nailed to the cross as Christ died, secondly.

And thirdly, then, to see what it means for us to live now in light of that, or if I can put it this way, to live a kind of debt-free life. What does that look like? But firstly, then, our first point, our debt.

[2 : 26] Colossians chapter 2, verse 13. Let's read in. We're going to come to the cancelling bit just in a minute, but I want us to start here.

What is this record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands? Well, the Bible's clear that each and every person outside of Christ has this record of debt.

It stands against us. In other words, we start by recognizing that each and every person, male and female, boy and girl, has a debt problem.

Has a debt problem. Now, perhaps today, when we think of a debt problem, we think of personal finances, or we think of national finances. And sure, in the West today, there probably is something of a debt problem.

Credit card borrowing at its highest levels. National debt and borrowing at extremely high levels as well. Not even Elon Musk seems to be able to fix the national debt levels in the U.S.

[3 : 44] It is life lived on borrowed financial capital. But Paul is telling the Colossians, he's telling us that we have a debt problem before God that's nothing to do with money or finance.

And so, what is this record of debt with its legal demands? Well, it's God's law. It's God's law. We saw last week, God has given a good, perfect, holy law, which legally demands that we keep it perfectly, keep all of it, which we cannot do.

And as we sin, our record of debt grows and grows and grows. Look at the last word there of verse 13. It speaks about trespasses. We trespasses. We've trespassed.

We've broken. We've crossed a line of somewhere we shouldn't have gone. Think about it. A trespass. You're a trespasser on someone's land. You've crossed a line, a boundary, somewhere you should not go.

And that is what we've done with God's law. This word here, record of debt in verse 14, it means something like an IOU.

[4 : 56] IOU. I'm not really sure the last time you wrote someone an IOU, but you know what it is, isn't it? You owe someone something. You've accrued a debt, and you owe someone something.

And the Bible is saying here, actually, we're not just to think about our credit card bills or not just our mortgage bills or whatever it is. We are a debtor for the price that we owe God for our sin.

The law is a record of debt against us. And so perhaps one way of thinking about this this morning is seeing it as kind of courtroom language, legal language.

This record of debt stands against us as a witness in court. We are legally obliged to pay for our record of debt and sin. It cannot just be buried under the carpet or stuffed away down the back of the sofa, hoping the one to whom the debt is owed will forget about it.

No, it needs to be paid. So can we ourselves pay this record of debt? Well, no, we cannot. Why not?

[6 : 04] Well, in the words that we just sung there, to put it that way, we stood in need of debt we could never afford. Why? Well, because the consequences of our sin, of this debt of sin, have made us dead.

Dead. The price, the consequence for our sin and debt has been set, and the price is death. Verse 13, what does Paul say? You were dead in your trespasses.

Paul writes to the Romans that the wages of sin is death. Or to think about it another way, as Joe read earlier from Colossians 1, we are in a kingdom of darkness.

Darkness, death, alienation. That is the picture of our life outside of Christ. To want to represent ourselves in court before God would be as ridiculous as a dead person representing themselves in court down there at the sheriff's court here in Aberdeen.

No, that would be a ridiculous thing. And we who are spiritually dead, we therefore cannot work our way out of this. We cannot represent ourselves. If anyone here today is trusting themselves to plead their own case before God after you die, you cannot.

[7 : 25] For you are spiritually dead. So that is our situation before God. We have a legal price that needs to be paid. We cannot get out of it ourselves.

We are dead. We have crossed the line. We have accrued a debt. And so what hope is there? Is there any hope? You know that feeling? I don't know if you have ever had that feeling.

The letter comes through the post. Payment due. Payment overdue. Payment on the credit card, on the mortgage. Whatever it is, we have some kind of debt. We know it is owed. We are not even sure how we are going to pay it.

It is kind of, your stomach just feels in butterflies, doesn't it? Your heart hits the floor. How am I going to pay this? That is our situation here. We are dead.

So what is our hope? Is there hope? Yes, there is hope. There is good news. Our only hope is Christ cancelling our record of debt.

[8 : 20] And that is our second point then. Christ cancels our record of debt. Verse 13. God cancelled the record of debt. That is, He nailed it. He set it aside by nailing it to the cross.

In other words, our record of debt is gone. It's gone. And actually, what we're about to see is, in some ways, we can see it's kind of doubly gone. I want us to see these two words here.

See the totality of what Christ did on the cross. Firstly there, we see in verse 14 that on the cross, it was set aside. God set it aside.

That is, it's taken away language. I wonder if at home you have, or maybe you had growing up, I think you would call it an etch-a-sketch. You draw a kind of picture, and you push a button, or you shake it, and it completely disappears.

You cannot get it back. We've got something like that. You draw a little, you draw something on it, and the kids will leave a picture, and they want it to be left on the side, and someone else will come along and push the little green button, and it's gone.

[9 : 24] It's gone forever. They've written down their picture, their hopes, their dreams, whatever. You push the button, and it's gone. You cannot retrieve it. That is the picture of what Christ did on the cross with our sin, with our record of debt.

Push the button. It's gone, except it wasn't a button. It was the Lord Jesus nailed to the cross with his body and blood shed. That is, the slate is totally wiped clean.

I wonder if you can picture again that IOU or a really long receipt of something, a bill that you're not sure how I'm going to pay it. Well, imagine picking up that IOU that says you have this huge debt that you can't afford.

You pick up the piece of paper. It says paid. It says paid. It's gone. The list of things that was there is just completely erased. It is not there anymore.

But actually, what we see here is even better. It's even more than that. What's the other part of it? It's actually really that the document hasn't just been wiped clean. It's been taken away altogether.

[10:28] It was nailed to the cross. That is language of saying it's gone. It's gone. Our record of debt is not there anymore.

It was nailed to the cross. Again, think of a courtroom, and the prosecutor wants to get out the papers of charges against the person in the stand.

And the language here of Paul isn't just that he gets out now a kind of blank piece of paper. It's that there is no paper at all. He's opening his briefcase. He's looking around. I thought there was something here to bring charges against this person for their record of debt.

But it's gone. I haven't just lost it. It doesn't exist anymore. It's gone. What did we just sing?

His blood was the payment. His life was the cost. We stood need a debt we could never afford. Our sins, they are many. But his mercy is more.

[11:28] His blood, his life paid for, erased, cancelled. The debt of our sin. So what do you see? What do you see when you look at the cross?

Debt cancelled. Sin wiped clean. Dear friends, this morning, I hope that makes you want to sing. To worship at the grace and mercy of God.

For think of it, who it was that came to the cross to do that. To pay the price. What did we hear earlier from Colossians 1? Of the Lord Jesus.

He's the image of the invisible God. The firstborn over all creation. For by him all things were created in heaven and earth. Visible and invisible. Thrones, dominions, rulers, authority. All things created by him and through him.

And he is before all things. And in him all things hold together. He's the head of the body. The church. He's the beginning. The firstborn from the dead. That in everything he might be preeminent.

[12:30] For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell. And through him to reconcile all things. Whether on earth or in heaven. Making peace by the blood of the cross.

That is who went to pay. That is who went to the cross. What riches of kindness he lavished on us. It was a debt we could never afford. Only God could pay it in and through the Lord Jesus.

And he did it. And I just want to press that home a little bit longer. Before thinking what it means for us now as we live. I just want to press it home. I want us to really have deep down in our hearts.

That this work of Christ on the cross then. Is not some kind of legal fiction. Not some kind of legal fiction. Sometimes people write or say things. That kind of bring charges against Christ on the cross.

And say no, no. It's a legal fiction. It's a legal sleight of hand. It's like a plea bargain. Where someone really gets off scot-free for our sin. But no, that is not what's happening here.

[13:30] The debt is nailed to the cross. It's not waving a kind of magic wand to rid us of our sin. Justice is done. Here's one commentator.

We are not justified because God's mercy triumphed over God's justice. We are justified because in divine mercy God sent his son to the cross to satisfy justice.

Mercy triumphs over judgment. But it does not remove the need for justice. We are not saved by the removal of justice. But by the satisfaction of it.

We are not saved by the removal of justice. But by the satisfaction of it. On the cross the justice of God is satisfied for all who are in Christ Jesus.

The law is not set aside. It's fulfilled. It's fulfilled. The law, justice that demanded death, has it in Christ. Now why is that so important?

[14:33] Sometimes we speak about the work of Christ on the cross. Right at the heart of it is penal, substitutionary atonement. Atonement. Next week as Joe comes we'll maybe hone in a little on that atonement on the sacrifice language.

But here we have the penal substitution. Penal meaning law, substitution, Christ in our place. Why is that so important? It means if justice was not done.

If it was swept under the carpet. If divine justice hadn't been satisfied. Then yes our sins could come back to haunt us. Someone could come into some corner somewhere and say. Aha you did this.

Justice wasn't satisfied. But no. Christ has done it all. His blood has washed away all the record of our sin. Justice has been done.

We need not fear. It is reason for us to praise and worship God. Justice is met. There is no charge. [15:30] There is no charge that can be brought against God's elect. There is no condemnation. For there is nothing to condemn us with. Justice has been done.

We're going to think about that a little bit more now as we come to our final point. Brings us to our final point. We had a debt that we could not pay. We were dead in our sin. Christ cancelled our debt.

God cancelled our debt in Christ on the cross. It is erased. It is gone. It is done with. So what does life look like now? Thirdly. Because of that.

In him we are forgiven and made alive. In him we are forgiven and made alive. 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. Now Paul's argument if you like all the way through verses 6 to 15.

[16:28] He kind of starts if you like on the outside and works in. We started on the inside and worked out. Paul says we've been made alive by being forgiven because Christ cancelled our debt.

We kind of started by saying Christ cancelled our debt. So we've been forgiven and we can now be made alive. Because our debt is gone we are forgiven and we are made alive.

Death and alive are stark pictures aren't they? But it's what the Bible tells us. Outside of Jesus we are spiritual corpses. Anyone who does not know Jesus is a spiritual corpse.

It's quite a striking image. The only way to life is in Jesus. United to him by faith. Union with Christ. You'll have seen that language.

In him. In him. In him. Again through all of this. Verse 6. Just scan your eyes down. Walk in him. Verse 10. Filled in him. Verse 12.

[17:30] Buried with him. Raised with him. Verse 13. Made alive with him. It is only in Christ we are forgiven and made alive.

He alone is supreme in creation and in redemption. Only in him. So I just want to look at two implications of that.

Two implications. The first one though is this morning. If you're here and you do not know the Lord Jesus. Then you are dead still in your trespasses and sins. And the only way to life is in Jesus.

So come to him today. Trust him today. You have a record of debt. But he will pay it. So come to him. All right. Two implications for us. We are forgiven.

We are made alive now. We are no longer dead. We are alive. And so two implications for this life that we have. Verse 6. For this walking in him that we are to be doing.

[18:27] Two implications. Number one. Do not be taken captive. Now that we are alive in Christ and our dead is gone. We are not to be taken captive. Do you see it there in verse 8? Paul writes.

See it that no one takes you captive by philosophy or empty deceit. According to human tradition. According to the elemental spirits of the world. And not according to Christ.

Even though now if we belong to Jesus we are alive. And we are alive in Christ. Paul says there is a danger. And he gives a warning that we can be taken captive by philosophy.

By empty deceit. According to human tradition. Or elemental spirits of the world. Now we don't have time to unpack all the kind of false teaching. The Colossian heresy.

All that is going on. But essentially among the false teachers. There is a teaching of human tradition. Which attacks the sufficiency of Christ. Paul goes on to talk about circumcision.

[19:28] And the law here in these verses. And in verse 16. He speaks about food and drink and festivals. And these kind of things. And in short. There is a teaching that says. Jesus isn't quite enough.

And in whatever way that plays out. Traditions or laws. You need just a little bit more than what Jesus has done. To make you right with God. There is a little bit of law keeping on top of that.

That you need to do. In order to be made right with God. And Paul is saying. We must never be taken captive by that teaching. What does being made captive lead you to think of?

Bound by a rope. Put in jail. Held hostage. He is saying. We must never be bound. Imprisoned.

Handcuffed. Whatever image you like there for captive. We must never be held captive by that kind of teaching. Because what does it offer? Verse 8. Emptiness.

[20 : 27] Do you see that? Empty deceit. But what does Jesus have? Verse 9. The fullness of deity. And verse 10. We are filled with him. With this human tradition.

There is emptiness and deceit. But with Jesus. There is fullness of life. And forgiveness. We saw some of that language in Ephesians. In our series earlier in the spring.

Didn't we? The fullness of him who fills all. We have everything in Christ Jesus. That is what Paul shows us here. We have everything in him.

He has made us alive. So what do you see when you look at the cross? Debt paid. All of it brothers and sisters. Christ utterly sufficient to pay it all.

So what does it look like to be taken captive? How can that happen today? Well it still could be through the keeping of Jewish ceremonial laws.

[21 : 25] It could happen that way. But there are other examples too. One example is in the Roman Catholic Church. The Roman Catholic Church still teaches in its catechism. That indulgences are to be sought to reduce temporal punishments.

And purgatory before someone reaches heaven. Indulgences cannot be bought and sold. As they were in the time of the Reformation. But they are still to be sought.

And in doing that. They are taking away the sufficiency of Christ. It says his nailing of Christ to the cross for our debt isn't enough punishment. No there has to just be a little bit more in purgatory before I get to heaven.

It is empty to seed according to human tradition. But we must not think that we ourselves cannot be prone to it. There's any number of religious or non-religious things we can do or say that Jesus just isn't quite enough for my salvation.

That empty out the gospel. There are idols of the heart that we can sit alongside Christ. Things done by human hands. So how is your heart today brothers and sisters?

[22 : 36] Trusting and resting upon Christ alone? Or is it Jesus plus? Jesus plus my religious affiliation. Jesus plus my grandparents faith.

Jesus plus my children's faith. Jesus plus my good law keeping. Do not be taken captive by anything that does not place Christ front and center.

Upon which you rest all of your hope of salvation. No one else can hold the weight of your sin. No one else can fully cancel your debt. Do not be taken captive.

Christ alone. The fullness of him who fills all. But our second implication as we live and not wanting to be taken captive then. Is that we now do not live in fear.

We do not live in fear. Verse 15. On the cross. What did Jesus do? He disarmed the rulers and authorities. And put them to open shame. By triumphing.

[23 : 34] Triumphing over them. In him. Christ's work on the cross. This penal substitution. Also wins for us a victory.

That's verse 15. He disarmed the rulers and authorities. And put them to open shame. He triumphed over them. And so now we need not fear.

Put simply. Verse 15 says. At the cross. Jesus wins. Jesus wins over our sin. And over spiritual rulers and authorities. Over Satan.

And all those who oppose Jesus. I wonder if you've ever seen a TV show or a film. Where a Roman emperor arrives home to Rome.

After winning a great battle. The streets are packed. People are cheering and shouting. Here comes our triumphant emperor. Arriving home with the spoils of victory.

[24 : 30] As he comes back into Rome. He's won. Verse 15 says. That is what Christ did on the cross. On the cross.

Sometimes we think the cross is defeat. And that the resurrection is victory. But no. The cross of Christ is victory. And the resurrection is the declaration of that victory.

It's God's amen. That what Christ did on the cross. Has been fully done. Done. At the cross. Jesus is victorious. Over spiritual rulers and powers.

They have no hold over us now. And so what does that mean? What does that mean? It means that Satan can never bring any charge against us.

We need not fear ever of being accused of our sin. He cannot accuse us. He cannot bring any accusation against us. For there is none to bring. Imagine with me.

[25 : 28] Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden. With Satan there. If Adam and Eve had said. Well we didn't do anything. Satan need only have held out an apple. But when he accuses us.

Now in Christ. What need we do? We just point to the cross. And say it is paid. It is dealt with. There is nothing. When Satan tempts me to despair. And tells me of the guilt within. Upward I look and see him there. Who made an end of all my sin. Because my sinless savior died. My sinful soul is counted free. For God the just is satisfied. To look on him and pardon me. There is no condemnation for all who are in Christ. Satan was stripped of his power. Defeated. Disarmed on the cross. Jesus wins. Jesus wins. So when you hear the accusations. Of the evil one coming against you. Point him to the cross. Say it is done. There is a story of Martin Luther. The reformer. Being tormented and accused in his conscience. [26 : 25] By the devil. And the devil kept pointing to his sin. Saying aha you did it. Aha you did it. And Luther said I wanted to hide. But then in typical Luther fashion.

He says actually to the evil one. Bring out the whole list. Because Christ has erased it. And he's dealt with each one. By nailing it to the cross. We're going to sing. My sin. Oh the bliss of this glorious thought. My sin. Not in part. But the whole. Is nailed to the cross. I bear it no more. Praise the Lord. Oh my soul. We need not fear. There is no condemnation. It's gone. Our sin. Second and final implication of this little bit. Though we need not fear. As Satan and the powers and rulers and authorities are disarmed. It meant they're robbed from their power to hold us in fear of death. They have no power now to hold over us the fear of death. Hebrews chapter 2 verse 14. [27 : 23] Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood. That is we're human. Jesus partook of the same things. He became human. That through death he might destroy the one who has the power of death.

That is the devil. Death now has no power. Because its wages have been spent on the cross. Here's American pastor John Piper. When Christ died in our place. He took the sting out of death. Because he took the sin out of death. When Christ died in our place. He took the sting out of death. Because he took the sin out of death. He took condemnation out of death. And so he took fear out of death. Which means that second great weapon of the devil was stripped from him. And that is the power to hold us in bondage. He has that power no longer. He cannot do it. He has been disarmed of the weapon of the fear of dying. [28 : 21] Because the sting of death is sin. And the power of sin is the law. And all of that has been satisfied. And punished on the cross. In other words brothers and sisters.

We need have no fear. When Christ died in our place. He took the sting out of death. Because he took the sin out of death. We have total victory in Christ. He's overcome the world. And so sin and hell and death have been defeated. Death for some of us perhaps feel closer than for others. But I guess it's true for all of us. None of us know when we're going to die. But for all of us today. No matter how old. No matter how young. We must bathe ourselves in the glory of this truth. That just like death worked backwards for Jesus on the day of his resurrection. So it will work backwards for all who belong to him. [29 : 22] Because the sting has been taken out of it. Because sin has been taken out of it. Because he's paid our debt. And he has triumphed over all our enemies. And so what do you see when you look to the cross?

See your debt paid in full. See justice satisfied in full. See Christ's victory. His triumph. And our saviour dying. That we might live with him forever. Let's pray. Oh Lord Jesus how we praise you. For your triumph and victory on the cross. That you fully paid for our sins. That they are all gone. That they are all erased. That no more can we be condemned or accused. We pray that the glorious truth. That we are now alive. Through all that you've done for us. [30 : 31] Would be worked deep into our souls. That we would live then for your glory. And live then as those who have been made alive. By the power of the spirit. Rejoicing that we are new. That we indeed then would walk in your ways. Established. Rooted in truth. That we are truly forgiven. We are no longer of Adam. But we are in Christ. Because of your mercy and grace. You've paid all our debt. So help us then to live. Knowing that for your glory. Fearing not even death. That it is through death. That we will come one day.

To see you face to face. And live with you. In glory forever. And we ask this in Jesus name. Amen.