

CONVENTION SERMON: STEPHEN RUMMAGE

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2019 Southern Baptist Convention, Birmingham, Alabama, June 12, 2019

BECAUSE OF THE CROSS

Colossians 2:13-15

*And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh,
God made alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our trespasses,
by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands.
This He set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities
and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in Him.*

In 1959, Oklahoma Baptist pastor and Southern Baptist leader, Dr. Herschel Hobbs and his wife took a trip to Hiroshima, Japan, just fourteen years after that city was bombed and experienced the first nuclear explosion over a human population. They toured that city and they saw all kinds of things. One of the places they visited was a museum and on display was a large stone that had once formed part of the entrance-way to a building. The stone told the story of what happened the day of the nuclear attack in Hiroshima. It was charred. It was blackened. It had obviously experienced that explosion. But in the middle of that stone there was one spot that had not been affected by the attack. You could see in that one spot the outline of a man. You could see his head. You could see his hands. You could see his torso. You could see his feet. You could see his body silhouetted there on that stone. Later on, Dr. Hobbs said this, "When I saw that silhouette, it reminded me that our only security in the wrath of God and the punishment of God is to be found in the cross of Christ." That man endured the nuclear attack and left that one spot untouched.

Today, the cross of Jesus Christ stands at the center of time and eternity. It stands at the center of all humanity. Every person on earth is either on one side of the cross or the other. You're either on the lost side of the cross or you are on the saved side of the cross. If you're on the lost side of the cross, may I tell you today, God loves you! He sent His Son to save you. Even today, in this place, you can come to Jesus and He will save You because of what His Son did for you on that cross with His hands, His feet, His wounded head, and His body that bore all of your sins. If you are on the lost side of the cross, God loves you and He longs to save you.

If you're on the saved side of the cross today, God has given you a message. He's given you a privilege. He's given you an opportunity. He's given you a responsibility. He's given you a sacred trust of reaching this generation of lost people with the saving message of the cross. Dr. W. A. Criswell said, "When we preach the cross, when we preach the blood, when we preach the sacrificial death of Christ, we are preaching the meaning of His coming into the world." Dr. Vance Havner said, "We need men of the cross with the message of the cross, bearing the marks of the cross." Today we need men and women of the cross taking that message to our world.

The Apostle Paul was a man of the cross. The cross had captured his heart. He preached the gospel above all. He preached Christ and Him crucified. In this passage of Scripture that we're going to look at today, I want to talk to you about three accomplishments of God on the cross of Jesus Christ – three things that God accomplished on the cross as we walk through these verses of the text.

First of all, the Bible shows us ... **Because of the cross, God has forgiven our trespasses.**

The Bible says, "*And you who were dead ...*" Why were we dead? Because of "*our trespasses and the uncircumcision of our flesh.*" The Bible says that you and I were dead in trespasses. We were dead in the uncircumcision of our flesh. That word "trespasses" means "a false step." It means stepping over a line. It's a false step that leads to a sure death. It's your sin and my sin. The best person you know, the worst person you know, you, me, and anybody you can name – we all have this in common: we have all trespassed against holy God. We have all "*sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.*" The Bible says that because of that, we are dead. Not only because of our trespasses, though. The Bible says we were dead in the "*trespasses and the uncircumcision of our flesh.*" That's a picture of total alienation from God. It's a picture of spiritual bankruptcy. It's a picture of absolute, innate, and inborn godlessness.

Paul is writing to these believers in Colossae, and he tells them, "You, in your trespasses, and you, in the uncircumcision of your flesh – you were dead." On the lost side of the cross I was dead and so were you. Lost people are dead in their sins. Yes, they have biological life. Yes, they have emotional life. Yes, they have human life. Yes, their lives are precious to the God who made them in His image. But there is no spiritual life. There is no resurrection life. There's no eternal life apart from the cross. The Word of God says that when we were dead in our trespasses, and dead in the uncircumcision of our flesh, God made us alive together with Him. Here's how He did it: He forgave us, "*having forgiven us all our trespasses.*" That word "forgiven" there is a beautiful word in the original language. It's built on the Greek word for "grace." It means that God has graciously given us something we could never deserve. In Jesus, He's forgiven us, not just of our trespasses.

It would be wonderful enough if the only thing the Bible said was, "God has forgiven you of your trespasses." But the Bible makes sure to put this one little word in there. He's forgiven you of *all* your trespasses. That word "all" is a tiny word that encompasses the whole universe. *All* of my sins. I'm so thankful that God took care to say *all* of your trespasses, because otherwise, I might say, "Lord, I know that Jesus died for my trespasses. I know He died for my sins, but You don't know about this sin in my past. You don't know about this thing that I have done of which I am so ashamed. I don't even like to think about it; I try to ignore it and pretend like it's not there. Surely Jesus didn't die for this sin." God's Word testifies to me and says He's forgiven us of *all* our trespasses! I'm glad it says *all* there, because I might be tempted to point to somebody else and say, "Now Lord, I know that You died for sins, but did You know about this person's sin? Did You know what she did? Did You know what he did? That sin seems unpardonable. It seems unforgivable." Yet, I know that Christ died for all our trespasses. God has forgiven us of *all* our trespasses because of the cross.

Dr. E. V. Hill was preaching at a meeting of Baptist churches in Philadelphia. On the platform with him was the president of this Baptist federation. Dr. Hill began to preach his message and he was preaching about Adam and Eve and their sin in the Garden of Eden. He came to the place in the message where Adam and Eve were expelled from the garden because of their sin. As he talked about that, he took off his long preaching robe that he had on, and he called his friend, the president of the federation, to come and stand beside him. He put that robe on his friend and said, "This robe represents sin." Then he said to his friend, "You can't stay here in the presence of God with your sin. Get out!" His friend looked at him, and, you know, stood there, and E. V. Hill said, "No, I mean it. Get out!" So, he made him walk down off the platform, up the aisle of the church, and then out the back doors of the church. Then he had two men – he called them angels, they were really deacons – guard the door. He said, "Don't let him back in. He can't come back in here. He's got all that sin on him."

Dr. Hill then began to preach about the cross. He began to preach about God's grace. He began to preach about God's forgiveness and how when Jesus died on the cross, He bore in His own body all of our sin so that He can take our sin away. He said, "Open up the doors of the church, and bring him back in." Then he told the two angel-deacons, "Take the robe of sin off of him. Come on closer, up the aisle, back up the steps, back up on the platform, and stand here beside me!" His message was clear: Before the cross, God's message to sinful humanity was, "Stay away!" But because of the cross, God's message is, "Come close. Come near!" Our sins and our trespasses, have been forgiven because of the cross.

Secondly, I want you to see this in the text: the Bible shows us ... **Because of the cross, God has cancelled our sin-debt.**

In verse 14 of the text, the Bible talks about how God has forgiven us of all our trespasses. The Bible says, "... *by cancelling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands. This He set aside, nailing it to the cross.*" The Bible says that because of the cross, God has cancelled the record of debt that stood against us. That phrase, "record of debt" is one word in the Greek language. It only appears here in all of the New Testament. It's a word that literally means "written with the hand." In fact, the King James Version translates it "handwriting" or "written with the hand." So what is written with the hand? A record of my own sins. It's a spiritual IOU of everything I've said, everything I've done, everything I've thought, and everything about me that is sinful in the sight of a holy God. The Bible says that it is "handwritten." This means I can't deny it. I can't say, "No, this doesn't have anything to do with me." No, it's written by my own hand and signed by my own life. The record of my life testifies to the reality of my sin.

That's true for you, as well. There's a record. But the Bible says that through the cross, God has *cancelled* the record of debt that stood against us. That word "cancelled" in verse 14 means "to wash away or to wipe out." It was used in the ancient world to talk about taking a page of papyrus that had been written on. The scribes would wash out the words that were there and the ink was taken away. They could wash it so that the ink wasn't there at all. Every trace was gone. The record was cancelled. They used the word figuratively to talk about wiping out, taking away, or erasing a memory. The experience wasn't there anymore. The past and its guilt were cancelled. The Bible says God has cancelled "*the record of debt that stood against us with all its legal demands. This He set aside.*" The phrase "set aside" means to pick up something, to carry it away, and it's a perfect tense in the original language. This means it was taken away fully, finally, and forever – never to return. Our sin has been *cancelled* because of the blood of Jesus Christ. We can praise God for that today.

In the Old Testament, one day a year, the high priest of Israel would go into the Holy of Holies in the temple and he would always come with blood. He would come first with the blood of a bull to atone for his sins and the sin of his family. As he came into the most holy place, he would sprinkle that blood on the mercy seat that sat atop of the Ark of the Covenant. Inside the Ark of the Covenant was the Law of God that the priest and his family had broken, and with the blood of that bull, the broken law was literally covered by blood. He would then come with the blood of a goat and sprinkle that on the mercy seat to atone for the sins of all of the nation of Israel. When he did that, sin was atoned for on that day – the Day of Atonement. Every year, however, that process had to be repeated. Another high priest would come in with blood – first the blood of a bull, then the blood of a goat – sprinkling that blood on the mercy seat year, after year, after year, for over a thousand years. More than a million gallons of blood were shed during the time of the Old Covenant. The question is, why? Why so much blood? The answer is, "*Because apart from the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sin*" (Hebrews 9:22).

But why year, after year, after year, after year? And here's the answer: the blood of bulls and goats could cover sin temporarily, but it could not cancel sin permanently. It pointed forward –

not to a bull, not to a goat – but to the Lamb of God, slain from the foundations of the earth. It pointed forward to *“the Lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world.”* (John 1:27) The Bible says in Hebrews 10:3-4, *“But in these sacrifices there is a reminder of sins every year. For it is impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.”* *“But as it is, (Jesus) has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself”* (Hebrews 9:26). He has cancelled our sin-debt.

When Michele and I got married, we made a determination early on in our marriage that we didn’t want to go into debt. It was good we didn’t want to go into debt because we had very little income. We were seminary students living in a one-bedroom duplex near the campus of Southeastern Seminary and just trying to learn what it meant to serve the Lord and be in ministry. We knew we didn’t want to have debt, but we also wanted to get a credit card just for the convenience of it. We got a credit card, and for all these years in our marriage, each month we get a credit card statement – that record of debt. We have three options when we get that record of debt. One option is just to ignore the bill altogether and not pay it. That’s one option. That will get us in big trouble with the credit card company and so we never take that option. There’s another option – to make the minimum payment. But may I ask you this question? You tell me: If I make the minimum payment, does my debt go away? No. In fact, my debt will increase, and increase, and increase if all I do is make the minimum payment. So we have always taken the third option, which is every month to pay the bill in full, and then, the debt and the obligation go away.

The sacrifices of the Old Covenant are sort of like a minimum payment. They provided a temporary covering for sin. But Jesus Christ, when He came and died on the cross, made final payment – full payment – for our sin. The Bible says, *“This He set aside”* – this record of debt, this sin that stood against us – *“this He set aside, nailing it to the cross.”* God has cancelled our sin-debt through the cross.

Dr. Adrian Rogers explained it so clearly. (By the way, I hesitate to read aloud the words of Dr. Rogers from this pulpit because every time I read it to myself I can hear him saying it, and it sounds great. Then when I read it out, it doesn’t sound anything like him. That’s alright. It doesn’t sound anything like him when you read it out loud, either. But I’m going to let you hear what he said.) Dr. Adrian Rogers said it this way, *“Your sins were nailed to the cross and He has given you a certificate of debt; and on that certificate of debt is written in the crimson blood of the Lord Jesus Christ, ‘PAID IN FULL.’”* My sin-debt has been cancelled.

Brothers and sisters, why would we continue on – as saved people on the saved side of the cross – in that sin from which Jesus died to save us? When we talk about the toxic culture of the Southern Baptist Convention, you know what we’re talking about? Sin. Sinful things we say, sinful words we use, and sinful attitudes we have. God help us, as saved people, if we would continue on in that sin that put Jesus on the cross.

When I was on the lost side of the cross, I didn’t even know what my sin was. I didn’t know the full reality of it. I didn’t understand what it meant to sin against holy God. But now I do. Why would I continue on in that sin? When I come to the cross of Christ, it compels me to turn from my sin, repent, and say, *“Jesus, thank You so much for loving me! Thank You for paying that price for me. Lord Jesus, by the power of Your Spirit and Your resurrection life living in me, give me Your grace to turn from that sin in my life. Give me Your grace to stop making excuses for it, to stop explaining it away, to stop pretending like it’s not there, or that it doesn’t matter.”* My sin and your sin put Jesus on that cross, and day, by day, by day, God calls us, as followers of Jesus Christ, simply to say, *“Lord Jesus, today may I live for You in gratitude for what You have done for me.”*

The Bible says that because of the cross, God has forgiven our trespasses. Because of the cross, God has cancelled our sin-debt. Number three, the Bible shows us that ... **Because of the cross, God has conquered our adversary.**

God has conquered our adversary. In verse 15 of the text, the Bible says that, “*God disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in Him.*” Because of the cross, God has conquered your greatest adversary. The Bible says that when Jesus died on the cross, He disarmed the rulers and authorities. Who are those rulers and authorities? In the book of Ephesians, Paul calls them the “*spiritual armies of wickedness in the heavenly places*” (Ephesians 6:12). It’s talking about Satan and all of his demons. It’s talking about the powers and forces of spiritual darkness that fight against God and against you. The Bible says that through the cross, they have been defeated. He *disarmed* them. That word “disarmed” means “to strip.” He has taken away all of their weapons. He’s taken away all of their instruments of warfare. He’s taken away all of their tools of death. He has disarmed the rulers and the authorities and put them to open shame.

In the days of the Roman Empire, when a Roman general would conquer his enemy, first he would defeat the enemy. Next he would strip the enemy and all the enemy soldiers of all their weapons. He would then come to the king and the great generals of the enemy, and would strip them of all of the vestments of their power and authority so that they just stood there as those who had been defeated. But that wasn’t all he did. Next, the general would put in chains the king and those soldiers who had been defeated. He would attach that chain to his chariot and he would pull that chariot all the way into the city of Rome. There, chained behind the chariot of the one who had defeated them, the enemy would stumble, struggle, and fall down in the dust. [The Roman general] not only defeated and disarmed them, he made them a public spectacle, triumphing over them.

Jesus spent six hours on the cross of Calvary. He breathed His last. [His followers] took His body down off that cross. They put His body in the tomb. They sealed the tomb with a stone. They walked away, and it was over. Simon Peter, go on back to your nets. You had three years with Him, but it’s over. Judas, count your money. You betrayed the Son of God, and now it’s over. Satan, dance your dance and sing your song. It looks like you have won. It’s over.

But friend it was not over. Jesus didn’t say, “It’s over.” Jesus said, “It is finished!” On that third day, He came triumphant out of that tomb, and He came with the power of sin, and death, and hell, and Satan – defeating them forever! He has put them to open shame by triumphing over them in Christ and His cross. The cross of Jesus Christ brings us victory, and we have the privilege of declaring His victory.

I almost forgot to tell you something. When the Roman general would drag the enemy back in chains all the way to Rome, He would send out in front of him a runner – a messenger. That runner would run ahead of the chariot, and would announce that the conquering general was coming, and that the enemy had been defeated. The people would pour out of their buildings to see what had happened. They would hear the message of the messenger and would come to see the defeat of the enemy. They called that messenger the *kerux*. They called him “the herald.” They called him “the announcer.” They called him “the proclaimer.” They called him “the preacher.” The preacher had not won the victory, but he bore witness to the victory. He declared the victory and he called other people to experience the victory.

Dear brother preacher, God has put you where you are to proclaim the victory of His Son, Jesus Christ. You have experienced that victory. You proclaim the victory. Wherever you are – whether you’re a preacher standing in a pulpit, or in your workplace, in your school, in your community, in your family – God has put you there to be a messenger/proclaimer, and to tell people that the victory over sin and Satan has been won because of the cross.

Early in his ministry, Billy Graham was preaching in Dallas. It was a large meeting – forty thousand people there each night. One night he got up to preach and everything had been wonderful. Music, wonderful. Testimonies, incredible. Billy Graham got up to preach. He preached a good sermon. At the end of his sermon, he gave the invitation; with tens of thousands of people there, and no doubt thousands of lost people in the place, only just a few – just a handful, and thank God for them – responded to trust Jesus as Savior. Billy Graham walked off of the platform very discouraged. A German, Christian, business man came and put his arm around Billy Graham and said to him, “Billy, do you want to know what you did wrong tonight?” (Let me stop right here. Whether you’re Billy Graham or anybody, no preacher wants somebody to ask them that question after the message.) He said, “Billy, do you know what you did wrong tonight?” He said, “You didn’t preach the cross.” Billy Graham received that. He went home that night and came back the next night. There again, forty thousand people or more. Great music. Incredible testimonies. Billy Graham got up and preached a message on the blood of Jesus Christ and scores and scores and scores of people trusted Jesus as Savior and Lord. Reflecting on that night, Billy Graham said this, “When we preach Christ crucified and risen, there is a built-in power to it.” Brothers and sisters, when we proclaim Christ crucified and risen, there’s a built-in power to it!

Southern Baptists are always in progress. There are always things that we want to do better. Things that we’ve done wrong that we need to make right. Areas where we fail, of which we want to repent, and then move forward and succeed. If we fail in reaching this generation with the message of the cross ... if we fail in reaching this generation with the message of the cross – no matter wherever else we might succeed – *if we fail in reaching this generation with the message of the cross, we fail!* No matter where else we might succeed, if we don’t reach the lost with the saving message of the risen Lord Jesus, we fail.

The good news is, if we will simply preach the cross, we can’t lose. When we take the message of the cross to lost people and tell them about Jesus, bringing them to the saved side of the cross, we cannot fail.

Every now and then believers face an issue and we ask that clarifying question, “Is this a hill worth dying on?” I want to tell you today that for Jesus, Calvary was a hill worth dying on. For us, it’s a hill worth living on. It’s a hill worth standing on. It’s a hill worth preaching on. It’s a hill worth praising God on.

Dr. R. G. Lee described the cross as the place “... where the history of human guilt culminates ... where the purposes of divine love are made intelligible ... where the majesty of the law is vindicated ... where the problem of human redemption is solved ... where the fountain of salvation is unsealed ... where Satan is crushed ... where our sorrows hide in Emmanuel’s wounds ... where our death sentence is revoked.” That’s what one Baptist preacher had to say about the cross.

Listen to what the Word of God says about the cross.

- Because of the cross ... “*Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be white as snow.*”
- Because of the cross ... “*Though they are red as crimson, they shall be like wool*” (Isaiah 1:18).
- Because of the cross ... “*No one will be condemned who takes refuge in Him*” (Psalm 34:22) – and it’s all because of the cross.
- Because of the cross ... “*To all who received Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God*” (John 1:12) – and it’s all because of the cross.
- Because of the cross ... “*I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me*” (Galatians 2:20).

- Because of the cross ... *"The life I live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me"* (Galatians 2:20) – because of the cross! Praise God for the cross today!
- Because of the cross ... *"The world has been crucified to me, and I to the world"* (Galatians 6:14).
- Because of the cross, God declares ... *"I have swept away your offenses like a cloud, your sins like the morning mist ... I have redeemed you, says the Lord"* (Isaiah 44:22) – because of the cross.
- Because of the cross, God proclaims ... *"I, even I, am He who blots out your transgressions, for My own sake, and remembers your sins no more"* (Isaiah 43:25).
- Because of the cross ... *"You know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed ... but with the precious blood of Christ, a Lamb without blemish or defect"* (1 Peter 1:18–19) – because of the cross.
- Because of the cross ... *"In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of His grace"* (Ephesians 1:7) – because of the cross.
- Listen to what Jesus says: Because of the cross ... *"Everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him shall have eternal life"* (John 6:40).
- Because of the cross ... *"He saved us, not because of righteous things we that we have done, but because of His mercy"* (Titus 3:5).
- Because of the cross ... *"He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities"* (Psalm 103:10).
- Instead, because of the cross ... *"As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions for us"* (Psalm 103:12). It is because of the cross.
- Because of the cross ... *"He did not spare His own Son, but freely gave Him up for us all"* (Romans 8:32).
- And with the cross and because of the cross ... *"How will He not also, along with Him – generously, graciously, freely – give us all things"* (Romans 8:32).
- Because of the cross ... *"You who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ"* (Ephesians 2:13).
- And because of the cross ... *"We know that when He appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is"* (1 John 3:2). And it's all because of the cross.

This is eternal life.

This is God's forgiveness.

This is God's healing from sin.

This is the message we are called to preach.

This is our hope.

This is our future.

There is peace with God and it can be yours today. If it is yours today, you can share it with someone today – all because of the cross.