

The Cross as Our Victory

DAVE BAST

Sometimes as Christians, it seems as though we are on the losing side. Sin and evil seem to be on the rise; faith is dwindling in the world; the Church is shrinking in many places. Christians, especially in Western society, are increasingly marginalized. It looks like we are losing the battle; but actually, the battle is already over and our side has won. Stay tuned.

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast. Joining me again today is Kevin DeYoung, pastor of the University Reformed Church in East Lansing, Michigan, a Christian author and blogger, and a great friend of Words of Hope. Kevin, welcome.

KEVIN DEYOUNG

Thanks, Dave. It is great to be here; and we have been talking about the cross in its many different facets, and we are only touching on a few of them in these programs. We talked about Christ as our example, and later we will talk about Christ as the substitute for us – the one who turns away the wrath of God; what Stott would say is the best news of the Good News – what holds it all together.

DAVE BAST

Right; the heart of the Gospel.

KEVIN DEYOUNG

That is the climax, and that is what undergirds it all; that is what brings it all together; but this is also a really important topic, and very biblical. We want to talk today about the cross as Christ's victory over powers, over sin and death and the devil; what is sometimes called: *Christus victor*; and it is not at all to say that Christ does not pay for our sins – we are going to talk about that – but this way of understanding the atonement is also biblical, and Christians need to really appropriate it.

DAVE BAST

And here is a classic passage, where this understanding of the cross is expressed. It is from Paul's letter to the Colossians, Chapter 2, verses 13 to 15, and Paul says:

¹³And you who were dead in your trespasses, God made alive together withh, having forgiven us all our trespasses ¹⁴by canceling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands; but then he goes on to say: This he set aside – meaning that sort of debt of sin that was hanging over us; almost like the sign on the cross; you know, literally it said: Jesus of Nazareth, king of the Jews – Pilate's sign – but figuratively speaking, it was my sin. This is what I owe you, God, for my sin.

KEVIN DEYOUNG

That is right.

DAVE BAST

And then Paul says this: He nailed that to the cross. ¹⁵He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in him. There is an interesting thing about the translation there, as you probably know, Kevin, that it could be “in *it*” meaning the cross, or it could be “in *him*,” meaning Christ; but the point is, that is where the victory was won.

KEVIN DEYOUNG

Yes; and what do you think, Dave? This line, it just jumps out at me again, “put them to open shame,” I mean, that is a really dramatic word. What do you think Paul’s getting at, especially in light of all the shame that Christ endured, and now the cross here puts the powers and the principalities to shame. How would you paint a picture of that?

DAVE BAST

Yes, that is great, that is great. Well, I think, to me, one of the clues maybe to what was in Paul’s mind here is the metaphor of a triumph. You know, he uses the word – the verb that he uses is translated: Triumphant – Christ *triumphed* over; he *disarmed* these powers and put them to shame and *triumphed* over them; and actually, if you read a little bit of ancient history, and I know you know this, too, Kevin, but the practice of a Roman triumph – they actually called it a triumph – which was sort of a victory parade when a Roman general had conquered... it could not be just any battle, he had to have won a big victory – he had to conquer a whole new province for the empire, but then they would have this huge shindig in Rome.

KEVIN DEYOUNG

A general would come through and would have the victorious army, but would also have, in the triumph... sort of in the back are some of the conquered villains and the enemies of the State, and they would be maybe in chains or following behind, and really, in the retinue, that these are the people that he has triumphed over. You can picture in our day when a sports team wins a championship and they have a big tickertape parade down Main Street in Chicago or New York – but picture if the losing team...

DAVE BAST

Yes, had to walk behind, handcuffed.

KEVIN DEYOUNG

Yes, handcuffed and sort of on a dog leash...

DAVE BAST

Yes, and then instead of the tickertape, all the crowd would throw rotten tomatoes at them.

KEVIN DEYOUNG

Yes, that is it exactly...

DAVE BAST

So, that is the shame.

KEVIN DEYOUNG

That is the open shame – that you are despised; and it is such a turn of events because at the cross it looked like at that moment... I mean, Jesus was the one who was facing mockery, spit on, even those passing by reviled him. He took on all of the sin and the shame – all of the mockery and the degradation. He looked like the one who was completely conquered, and it turns out that he was the conqueror.

DAVE BAST

It is a great judo move, you know... I mean, I am not a black belt, or anything...

KEVIN DEYOUNG

Well, I did...

DAVE BAST

Actually, I have never done judo, but...

KEVIN DEYOUNG

But you wear a belt sometimes.

DAVE BAST

I do wear a belt... sometimes it is black... with the right suit; but in judo, you know, you use your opponent's momentum to flip him. It is like a total reversal, and that is exactly what the cross is. In fact, you know, the ancient Greek fathers loved this aspect of the cross of Christ. They emphasized especially the victory of Christ; and some of them even used the analogy that the cross was like a fishhook. You know, Satan thought he was going to devour Christ there, and it stuck in his craw – it stuck in his craw.

KEVIN DEYOUNG

Or what about an example that many of the listeners probably can picture because they have seen the movie, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, you know, with *The Chronicles of Narnia*, the C. S. Lewis classic there. You know, his view of the atonement is interesting, but one of the things that he gets right is this conquest over evil – and of course, the White Witch is sort of the Satan figure, so you have Aslan, the lion... spoiler alert, here; but you can guess... is on the stone table and it looks for all the world that he is dead, and yet...

DAVE BAST

And she is gleeful in her triumph, yes. She slays him with the magic knife.

KEVIN DEYOUNG

And there is darkness over the whole land; but then, lo and behold, the table cracks, and as Lewis says: There is a deeper magic; by which he does not mean hocus-pocus, but he means there is a principle at work in the universe that even can triumph over this evil.

DAVE BAST

Because the cross was not the end...

KEVIN DEYOUNG

Absolutely.

DAVE BAST

And the cross made possible the resurrection; and that multiple event... It is like a solar system with two suns – it is the death and the resurrection; we can never separate them; that is the total event that led to Christ utterly overthrowing every evil power. Wow, I could talk about that... and let's talk about it some more after we take a break, okay?

Segment 2

DAVE BAST

Welcome back to *Groundwork*, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast, and with me today is Kevin DeYoung; and we are talking, Kevin, about the victory that Jesus won over the principalities and powers at the cross.

KEVIN DEYOUNG

Thanks, Dave. You just set it up there: Principalities and powers; what are these things, these elements? Are we talking about government or Dracula and Frankenstein and the werewolf or a Harry Potter type? What do you think? How would you explain to just somebody – a regular person listening; what does Paul have in mind here?

DAVE BAST

Well, you know, he names them. The translation that we read, the ESV, calls them “rulers and authorities.” You could think about that on several levels. Certainly, I suppose, the ordinary reader would read that and

say: Hmm, rulers and authorities – must be the Romans and the Jews – the religious leaders and the political leaders – who actually put Jesus to death; but there is always another level, I think, in the New Testament that takes that back and is talking about spiritual powers or spiritual rulers; and there are other passages in the New Testament that make that explicit.

KEVIN DEYOUNG

Because there are principles at work behind the scenes in all of these things; and sometimes in the West we can be forgetful of that. You know, it is just politics, or it is just media, and we forget that behind these things... and it is not always the way we think: It is not Dungeons and Dragons kind of slayer or there is a little bush that is haunted or something; at least, that is not what we see. What we see is, well, behind the lies that our world gives us, behind the corruption, behind the injustice, and whenever that comes together with the authority or the power of, be it the State or false religion or media or just all of the things that seem so normal to us in this life, that is the devil at work.

DAVE BAST

I heard a great line, I thought, in a sermon a few months ago, and it was a preacher I had never listened to before, but it was pretty good. He was preaching from 1 Peter on “Satan goes about like a roaring lion seeking those whom he may devour,” and he said: The fact that we believe in a real devil means that we believe that evil is orchestrated. And I thought: Yes, that is exactly right because there is way too much of it and it is way too insidious to be merely the result of chance, or even human engineering. You think about evil, and just how evil evil is, and how prevalent it is, and how sneaky and how it gets us, and you think: There has got to be a mastermind behind this.

KEVIN DEYOUNG

And what makes it even more sinister in our day is how absent he seems to us, although he really isn't. There was a book I read a number of years ago, *The Death of Satan*, and it was about in our culture we have lost the ability to speak in moral language. You know, just think about whenever one of these tragedies happens at a school, or some kind of shooting...

DAVE BAST

A senseless tragedy, we call it... senseless?

KEVIN DEYOUNG

Yes; and people just grope for the right language, and it is always a mental illness or it is driven by politics; all of that may have something to do with it, but people just shudder from saying: This was evil. We just do not even have that vocabulary.

DAVE BAST

It is evil that is spawned from hell.

KEVIN DEYOUNG

Yes!

DAVE BAST

There is no question about it. We trivialize the idea that there is a real host of spiritual evil powers; we trivialize that when we think of it in cartoon terms or caricature or think that he is going to come at us and appear in the night in our bedroom or something, or come out from under the bed...

KEVIN DEYOUNG

Heads are going to spin around.

DAVE BAST

Yes; when, in fact, it is usually through us that evil does its work, and sometimes unwittingly and unwillingly. You think of the classic example of Peter in the New Testament. I mean, the one person Jesus rebukes by name and calls Satan is Peter, when he kind of blurts out in his uncomprehending way: No, don't go to the cross. So, even the best human institution... I mean, it strikes me – it has always struck me that it was the highest religion – Judaism – with the revealed word of God – and the greatest form of government, the great Roman Empire with its commitment to law and justice and all the rest – those two forces came together; they were the human powers and authorities who sent Jesus to the cross.

KEVIN DEYOUNG

Let me throw a question at you because you have been to lots of different countries, Dave, and you know that in many other parts of the world demonic possession or oppression shows itself in very vivid colors, and much more like the New Testament in some ways, with shrieking and all those sorts of things that we do not tend to see in the West. Is that because we do not have eyes to see it or is it because Satan knows he is smart; he knows that is not going to work here?

DAVE BAST

Right; I have often puzzled over that because it is much more obvious – it is more palpable. I think the two most evil places I have ever visited – they really stand out; one was a Hindu temple dedicated to the goddess, Kali, the goddess of destruction, where criminals were coming to worship because it was all about power – getting power to do whatever they felt like doing.

KEVIN DEYOUNG

Watch the *Temple of Doom*; that is what it is about.

DAVE BAST

Yes; the other was a Christian church, at least it had once been a Christian church that had been taken over by witch doctors in southern Mexico. So, you know, there is that whole thing again, and sometimes it can be through outwardly even Christian institutions that evil does its work; and I don't know... I mean, I am not an expert. I do not know why it is more close to the surface in more “primitive” cultures; but certainly I think he is very pleased to do his work anonymously, and if he can get people to disbelieve in his very existence, then the devil is very happy to do that, and on it goes.

KEVIN DEYOUNG

Well, don't you think even here in the States or in the West, those sort of just very stark manifestations could even backfire. Then people begin to believe in the spirit world, where here he would rather just have us not even think there is a spiritual world. So, in another country or continent where that it a given, it seems like he is going to play on that; he is going to use it and he is going to put fear... but for us, if he can just give us lies through commercials, through the political process, the lies that we see on half-hour sitcoms or PG-13 movies; you know, whatever he is going to use, the goal is to turn our eyes off of Christ.

DAVE BAST

Yes; you know you mentioned C. S. Lewis and *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, but I do not know if people still read the classic *Screwtape Letters* that Lewis wrote. It is just profound. The tempter there says: Let sleeping dogs lie. Do not alarm him. Do not alarm your subject. Let him go on. Do not awaken him to the fact that you are there; all the time working on him.

KEVIN DEYOUNG

Yes; or you remember the famous illustration... was it Donald Grey Barnhouse who painted this picture: What would it look like if the devil took over a town, and you would go in there and there would be no bars and the families would be happy and everyone would be doing well in school and the streets would be safe; and he paints this idyllic picture of small-town life, and then he says: But there would be no Gospel – there would be no Christ.

DAVE BAST

Well, let's focus a little bit more on the implications of Christ's victory over the powers of evil for us personally; and we will do that after we pause briefly.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

Welcome back to *Groundwork*. I am Dave Bast.

KEVIN DEYOUNG

And I am Kevin DeYoung, and we have been talking about the cross, and in particular today, talking about the cross as the victory of Christ over principalities and powers – this great conquest over the devil. In the last few minutes, we just want to think about, really, a practical pastoral question, and you can maybe lead us off, Dave: What do we say to people who hear this and say: Well, that is great news. I love it. It is a great story, and I don't seem to feel any of this in my life.

DAVE BAST

Yes, where is my victory? I am a believer in Christ. Frankly, that is something I struggle with personally; or even on a bigger level, Christ has defeated evil? Oh, really? It doesn't look like it. Christ is reigning? Christ is ruling? Christ is sovereign on the throne? God is in control; really? Does this look like a world where God is in control? It looks to me like Satan is alive and well.

KEVIN DEYOUNG

And it is a very complex doctrine in scripture because we see this conquest in John 16, that he has triumphed over sin in righteousness and he has triumphed over the devil, and yet, 2 Corinthians 4 says: The god of this age has blinded the minds... So, he still is the god of this age. You know, Revelation 11 talks about the kingdom of this world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ; and that has not happened. Just one other passage from Hebrews 2, which is talking about Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, and it says:

^{8b}Now in putting everything in subjection to him (Christ), he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him, ⁹but we see him who was made a little lower than the angels. So, we see Jesus. He has been given all authority, and we do not see it all that way here on earth yet.

DAVE BAST

Well, I think one of the profound messages of the book of Revelation is that God is sovereign, Christ is glorified in heaven; but here on earth, that has not yet been fully realized. You mentioned Revelation 11; I know you know the next chapter, 12, which I love. I think it is the heart of the book in some ways because it is our story. It is a picture of this woman who gives birth to a child. The child is the Messiah – the child is Christ. The woman is the people of God, and it says, quoting Psalm 2: He will rule the nations with an iron scepter, or with a rod of iron; but then it says: but he is caught up to heaven; so before he exercises that rule, he is taken away, and the Church is left wondering: Wait a minute; the Messiah has come – the King has come – the King is reigning – what is going on? What is wrong with this picture? The answer is: In the wonderful plan of God, the reign has not yet fully begun here on earth, in order, we know from the Bible, to give people time for repentance.

KEVIN DEYOUNG

Right.

DAVE BAST

We know that this is the reason he has not returned yet; this is the reason he went away in the first place without fully inaugurating his kingdom; because it is a season for repentance – a season for grace.

KEVIN DEYOUNG

Yes, and it is really key for joy in our Christian life to understand where we are; so when we expect the world to be one election away from transforming the cosmos, or something, or graduate from this school and you are going to change the whole planet over... You know, that is not going to happen; and what you see in Revelation, you know from preaching through the seven churches, all of them end: to him who overcomes. The Greek word is *nike* – it is victory. To the one who overcomes, and it is not slaying the devil because Jesus has done this. What is the spiritual warfare in Ephesians 6? Over and over again it is “stand therefore; stand,” that the picture in Revelation is of the Church under constant attack, and yet surrounded by constant protection from the Lord Jesus.

DAVE BAST

¹⁰Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come; for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down ¹¹and they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they love not their lives even unto death – Revelation 12; and so, our share in the victory comes from our faith and our faithfulness in bearing testimony to the blood of the Lamb. Here and now, he is still the lamb that was slain. He does not openly rule, but yet, we share the victory by being faithful.

KEVIN DEYOUNG

And what you just said there is so important about faith and accusation, because how is the devil described in scripture? He is the accuser; he is the liar; he is the accuser of the brethren. He comes to us with guilt and shame, and, “Here is what you did.” One of the great passages we have not talked about for spiritual warfare is Zechariah Chapter 3, where: Look at this man, he is a brand snatched from the fire that Joshua, the high priest there, and Satan is coming with accusations, and then the angel – what does he do? He puts a new robe – gives him new clothes.

DAVE BAST

So, let’s make this personal again. We wanted to say, let’s get down and be pastoral and practical. What do you say to someone, Kevin, or what do you say to yourself, who is confronted with kind of besetting sin, having trouble overcoming it, still feels guilt, feels weakness, does not feel the power, does not feel the victory?

KEVIN DEYOUNG

There are a lot of things. First, I would say our feelings are not always accurate. We cannot just go by how we feel. I would say, second, you fight with the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; so when you feel that guilt and that shame, you claim the promise of Romans 8:1: There is, therefore, now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. And then, I think, all that you have been talking about, Dave, we need to have a realistic appraisal. We still deal with indwelling sin. There is still an enemy who prowls around. So, Wednesday may not always be better than Tuesday, and this week better than last week, but over years, the trajectory ought to be one of increasing victory and growth and joy in the Lord; and we do not always see that, so sometimes we need to get the whole community of faith to help us with our own evidences of grace.

DAVE BAST

Yes; more I think probably we are too individualistic in general about this; that we need to rely more on the community and ask for the prayers of the community – the communion of the saints – to uphold us. And I always want to say to people, too: What alternative do you have? Where else are you going to go? I love Peter’s line: Lord, to whom else shall we turn? You have the words of eternal life. I don’t know why I am not better. There is a great line from John Newton, you probably have read this, too; when he was 82 years old: My memory is almost gone, he said, but I remember two things: that I am a great sinner and that I have a great savior; and then he went on to say: I am not what I ought to be, but neither am I what I used to be or what I am going to be.

KEVIN DEYOUNG

That is right – that is right; and when we look at Christ, why should we expect the servant to be treated better than the master?

DAVE BAST

Thanks, Kevin; and thank you for joining our *Groundwork* conversation. Don't forget, it is listeners like you asking questions that will keep our topics relevant to your life. So let us know what you think about what you are hearing. Suggest topics or passages that you would like to hear on a future *Groundwork* program. Visit us at groundworkonline.com and join the conversation.

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