

Colossians 2:13-17

Eighteen years ago, the hymn which we just sang was **new** to most of us. Since then, it has become one of the **favorites** of many WELS Lutherans. The **cross** was originally designed to be a cruel instrument of **torture** - bringing about one of the most **agonizing** forms of death ever devised by human beings. But this **hymn** speaks about the **cross** of Christ as a **banner** - a banner which we are to **lift high** before all the people of our world - telling them about the great **saving deeds** of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our **text** for today **also** reminds us of what God really **did** for sinners by means of the **cross**. May a study of these words lift high the cross in our **lives**, and in our **world**, as we are reminded that **Jesus' Cross Is My Triumph Over Sin**.

In the Garden of Eden, Satan succeeded in deceiving our first parents, overcoming them, and leading them into sin by means of a **tree**. Ever since that time, sin has existed as an insurmountable **barrier** between sinful human beings and our holy **God**. For that reason, if we are going to be spiritually **alive**, have **peace** with God, and possess eternal **salvation** - then the barrier must be broken **down**. Sin must be **paid for**, and guilt must be **removed**. Yet, you and I know that **we don't** have what it takes. Because we have been conceived and born into this world in a **sinful** condition, we are spiritually **dead**, and incapable of doing **anything** about paying for **sin**, or removing **guilt** from our lives. Only **God** can do that. And He **did**.

Somewhat ironically, God **removed** sin by making use of the same circumstances and surroundings which existed when sin **entered** the world. He used a **tree** - not the tree of the knowledge of good and evil - but the tree of the **cross**. Our text says, "*God forgave us all our sins, having **cancel**ed the **written code** with its regulations, that was **against** us, and that stood **opposed** to us. He took it away, nailing it to the **cross**."* Because of the **cross**, the **Law** can no longer condemn us. On that first Good Friday, God forgave us all our sins at the **cross**.

The Law of God is good and wise. But the Law of God is also **stern** and **uncompromising**. It simply states, "*You **shall** ... or you shall **not**."* It reinforces God's demand for **absolute purity** - that we are to walk in His **perfect** footsteps. "*Be **holy**, as I the Lord your God am holy.*" The Law demands perfection which we can **never** achieve, and at the same time, it pronounces the curse of **death** on all who **fail** to meet its demands. The Law is the **accuser** of mankind. And as such, the Law points its finger at **everyone**, and boldly declares, "You are **guilty**. And

because you are **guilty**, you are also **cursed** and **condemned!**” For the Bible says, “*Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law.*” However, at the **cross**, God **canceled** the Law - that written code with all its regulations which was **against** us and **opposed** us. In fact, He not only **canceled** it, but He utterly **destroyed** it - nailing it to the **cross** together with Christ!

Consequently, when **Christ** died, so did the **Law** - at least it died as mankind’s **accuser**. The **historic** purpose of the Law, which God had given to **prepare** and **preserve** the people to whom the Savior would come, was now **complete**. Jesus **had** come, and Jesus had **fulfilled** the task which He had come to do. By shedding His innocent blood on the **cross**, and giving His life as the substitutionary **sacrifice** for sinners, Jesus **suffered the punishment** and **paid the price** which God demanded, as payment for the sin and guilt of the entire world. Because of what Jesus accomplished on the **cross**, the damning and curse-pronouncing character of the Law has been **taken away**. It can no longer **accuse** or **condemn** us.

Nevertheless, the Law still continues to **have** a function for all believers of all time, including us. It’s just a **different** function. Oh, the commandments still provide a perfect summary of God’s will for our lives and actions. They continue to remind us that we are sinners, and therefore, that we cannot save ourselves. That remains the **same**. But because of the cross of Christ, we now have a **new** relationship to God’s Law as well. Since Jesus has **paid** the penalty which God’s justice demanded, the Law can no longer **condemn** us. Jesus has paid the debt for our sins. Therefore, we no longer need to **fear** or **hate** the Law. We know that the Law’s **accusing** power is **gone**, and now it serves as a **guide** for us, as we strive to live ever better Christian lives.

Jesus’ Cross Is Our Triumph Over Sin, because Jesus has restored our sin-broken relationship with God, and has removed the sting of death and the Law. That means that all our sins have been forgiven, and that we have peace with God. Only the sacrificial death of **Jesus**, God’s **perfect** Son, could bring that about. And that is the **real** significance of Jesus’ death. That’s why we **thank God** for the death of Jesus, and for the **triumph** over sin which He **won** on our behalf. Knowing we are safe from sin, we can return to our homes with **peace** in our hearts - the **spiritual** peace which comes from knowing that our debt has been **paid**, and our sins have been **forgiven**. In that peace and security, we will resolve to **continue** to lift high the cross of Christ - to share with sinners everywhere

whose hearts and consciences are still being terrorized by the threats and curses of the Law - to share with them the Good News that **Jesus' Cross Is Our Triumph Over Sin.**

But so far, we have only dealt with the accusations of the **Law**. Yet, when Jesus destroyed the power of the Law, He **also** disarmed **Satan** himself, so that the **devil** has no power over us either! That's extremely important, because it was Satan and his evil hordes, who **first** presented the temptation, of the knowledge of sin. These beings are constantly at **war** with God and His followers, and they try their best to **copy** the powers which belong to God alone. And even though their copies are not always that **accurate**, you and I know very well that these demons continue to be **powerful**. They **still** tempt human beings to sin - and they mercilessly attack our **consciences**, and **accuse** us when we fall. But as devious and powerful as these evil spirits are, Jesus has **disarmed** them by His cross.

That's really nothing new. As the sinner's substitute, Jesus met and defeated the devil **throughout** His public ministry. Jesus overcame Satan in the **wilderness**. He cast out **demons**, and repeatedly demonstrated His **power** over them. But most important of all, by His perfect submission to the heavenly Father, Jesus carried out God's plan for the world's salvation. He **crushed** the serpent's head, stripping Satan and his hosts of their power to **control** sinners' lives, and to accuse us **before God**.

Following His great victory, Jesus even made a public spectacle of the devil and his hosts. Our text tells us, "*Having disarmed the powers and authorities, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the **cross**.*" Like the victorious Roman generals, who held great parades in which their chained captives were made to march behind them, Jesus demonstrated His victory over Satan and his armies. Paul is speaking here about Jesus' descent into **hell** - an event about which the Bible really doesn't give us much information. Martin Luther pictured Jesus as a victorious champion, kicking down the doors of hell, and sending the demons flying in all directions! Maybe - maybe not. Yet, even though we don't know exactly **how** it took place, we do know that Jesus' descent into hell **did** take place; and it provides us with all the **assurance** we need, as we daily face the temptations and assaults of the devil. By His cross, Jesus **conquered** hell, and **shattered** the devil's kingdom and power. As we lift high the cross in all the world, by our support of the Wisconsin Synod's home and world missions, more and more of Satan's captives will be **set free** from his power and dominion. And by God's grace, they too will find **hope, deliverance, freedom, and life** in the

Savior.

The event which took place on the **cross** was **more** than **significant**. While **outwardly** the crucifixion of Jesus appears to be rather **morbid**, if we really understand what Jesus **did** on that cross, then we will **realize** that the cross is **not** just a cruel instrument of torture and **death**. Rather, it is also a wonderful symbol of **triumph** - triumph over sin, death, Satan, and hell - triumph not only for Jesus, but for a whole **world** of sinners. May that fact inspire and motivate us to lift **high** the cross - to display the banner of **victory** in every possible way, as we live to serve the Savior who **won** eternal life for us. Lift high the cross in all the world, so sinners everywhere can say with each of us, "**Jesus' Cross Is Our Triumph Over Sin.**" Amen.