

Prayer of the Day:

Lord Jesus Christ, by your victory you have broken the power of the evil one. Fill our hearts with joy and peace as we look with hope to that day when every creature in heaven and earth will acclaim you King of kings and Lord of lords to your unending praise and glory; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Verse of the Day:

Alleluia. Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom. Jesus answered him, "Today you will be with Me in paradise." Alleluia. (Luke 23:42-43)

Sermon Text:

"What's going on anyway?" He thundered across the desk at the pastor. He wasn't mad at the pastor. He was seriously concerned about the world he was living in. Homosexuality wasn't just being embraced by the unbelieving world, churches were performing weddings and ordaining ministers and ministerettes who openly supported it and practiced it in their lives. If John felt more like a Jane, well he could use the women's bathroom at will to the shock of Suzy and Sandy. Crime seemed to be on the rise, the dollar didn't go nearly as far as it used to, and the kids, well they were walking around with earbuds glued in and who knows what blaring at them from who knows where seemingly oblivious to the world around them. The family as God defined it was disintegrating before his eyes. He worried about his kids. He was worried about his world.

Of for sure the list could go on and on. But in the end, he felt like Christian meant target and he was tired of being hit. "What's going on anyway?" was the exasperated cry of this cross-carrying Christian. The pastor opened to *Colossians 1:13-20*. Yeah, our lesson for today, and they began to talk.

He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son, he loves. He paused and tapped his Bible. "I think that sums it up", he said, "'the dominion of darkness' that's what is troubling you so much these days right?" I don't think it's just troubling him, now is it? Every one of us has probably shaken our heads at something we heard in the news, discussed over coffee with a friend, or in the break room at work. We've probably even asked his question.

So what is the "*dominion of darkness*" anyway? Throughout Scripture, darkness is used as the opposite of faith, the opposite of hope, the opposite of heaven. Consider the words of Isaiah quoted by Jesus in Matthew, *the people living in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of the shadow of death a light has dawned* (Matthew 4:16 & Isaiah 9:2). The light is Jesus, the darkness well it's the opposite. Contemplate the words of Paul in Ephesians 5, *For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light* ⁹ *(for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth)* ¹⁰ *and find out what pleases the Lord.* ¹¹ *Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them.* Sin, unbelief, and yes, the punishment that goes with it all, these are part and parcel of this power of darkness and it's roaming around.

Darkness is out there, but it's in here (point to heart) too. The devil and the world after all are only two of the three cruel masters of this realm. Our own sinful flesh is third and truth be told most active in the hearts and minds of men.

Ah, but there is another kingdom, another authority and an even greater power. There is the kingdom of the Son, the one whom God the Father so dearly loves. You can just sense that Paul struggles to find words for the supreme power this one holds. ¹⁵ *He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation.* ¹⁶ *For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him.* ¹⁷ *He is before all things, and in him all things hold*

Text: Colossians 1:13–20

¹³ For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, ¹⁴ in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. ¹⁵ He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. ¹⁹ For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross. – NIV84

together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. ¹⁹ For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him. Such a title bursts forth brightly in this realm of darkness, mentioned before. For me you can almost hear the beginning words of John in these words of Paul, *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. In him was life, and that life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, but the darkness has not understood it* (John 1:1-5).

This One, this Word, this Jesus Christ is everything. How do we even speak of these truths expressed here? Jesus is the author, the architect, the inventor, the life of all things. No greater power, no higher authority, no surpassing supremacy exists. No His throne is above all, over all and there is a purpose for it. He is the head of the body, the church. He rules over, watches over, guides this Church, His body. So Paul will tell the Ephesians, *And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way* (Ephesians 1:22-23).

“But pastor, why?” He interrupted. “I get it Jesus is Lord. I’ve seen the bumper stickers. So why let the darkness rage? Why let it keep on going? Why not wipe it all out?” It’s another question that often plagues us all. The pastor smiled, “it’s because He loves you too.”

That answer seems strange does it not? But then we start to understand the truths of these two kingdoms. David rudely rips the drapes open on our understanding. “*Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me* (psalm 51:5).” You see you were once part of the kingdom of darkness, so was I. That’s the legacy left to us by our very first forefathers, Adam and Eve. It’s a legacy left to all mankind. So again, David announces, *I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge* (Psalm 51:3-4).

But then come the words of our lesson, breaking the darkness of sin and despair. *For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.* This King, this power, this Christ is not only loved by God, but is the ultimate display of God’s love for us. In Christ, we are purchased, redeemed, bought back, and forgiven. Through the work of Jesus Christ, the shades are pulled back on the darkness of our sinful condition, and the light of life is revealed. Jesus brings us into His kingdom.

How? Paul’s answer pierces the darkness. *For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.* Once again, it’s the cross. There on a simple frame of wood, at the height of suffering and on the symbol of defeat, His righteous, powerful, divine blood, paid for us all, washed away every sin. The cross and the message of our forgiveness purchased there pierces the darkness and gives us the kingdom.

Had Christ wiped out sinful man way back in the garden, had He wiped out hardship and trouble, He would have wiped out us. His plan is greater. His plan involves us and the church. His plan saves the sinner and shines the bright beams of the Gospel in a sinful world. His plan can even twist the twisted intentions of the world around us into something good for His kingdom. He does it that He might have the supremacy, that Satan might be vanquished, that sin, death, hell might be defeated for all eternity. That’s the cross isn’t it? From out of the murderous intents of the leaders of Israel, from the out of the shameful justice of Roman occupation, from what looked to be Satan’s ultimate victory, burst forth your Savior triumphant, victorious *the firstborn from among the dead.*

“The questions are hard to answer,” said the pastor. “We don’t always know ‘why’. What we do know is that this King, our Christ is in control. You have the promises of the Holy Scripture as proof. No, that doesn’t mean it will always look like the Christian is victorious. In fact, Jesus tells us we will suffer in this world, precisely because this world doesn’t understand the Light. But, you have God’s promise that in every struggle, Christ sharpens the Christian, hones the faith already given as we flee for refuge in Word and Sacraments, God’s means of grace. He promises something else too. None of His own, none of His elect will ever be lost. Be confident that the most powerful Being who has ever existed, who will ever exist and who exists right now rules all things for the benefit of the church and nothing will ever move Him from His throne. Find comfort in the truth that He has made peace through His blood, shed on the cross. You are His own.” Brothers and sisters, Christ is King! You are **TRIUMPHANT THROUGH THE CROSS!** Amen!