

“He disarmed the rulers and authorities,” Colossians 2:15
Tom Johnson, July 25, 2010

In our reading from the book of Colossians, Paul is talking about a battle. He is giving his play by play analysis—giving us the detailed, inside story of what happened when Jesus died on the cross of Calvary.

Many of the things he mentions are familiar. He reminds us that we have the forgiveness of sins—that the debt of our wrongdoings has been paid in full. He reminds us that when Jesus rose from the dead, we too were made alive. And that the gift of forgiveness, life, and salvation comes to us through the water, word, and Spirit of Baptism.

However, there is one aspect of this analysis that we may overlook—one facet of the cross we may not be familiar with—that is, that it was through the cross that Jesus disarmed evil.

Paul says that Christ “**disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in him.**” Jesus disarmed evil. Jesus put the powers of evil to open shame. Jesus triumphed over the dominion of darkness through the cross.

We believe that the cross is the place where Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate—where Jesus emptied himself of his glory—where Jesus laid his life down and surrendered to the power of evil—where Jesus died at the hands of sinful people.

And that is all true. But Paul is reminding us that when Jesus suffered, emptied himself, surrendered his life, he was not losing—he was winning. Jesus was allowing the world, our sin, and the powers of evil to unleash the whole arsenal of their power—every weapon at their disposal.

And the greatest weapon that sin, hell, and the devil have is death. Death is the most powerful thing that evil could throw at Jesus. And this death was by crucifixion.

Crucifixions were common when Jesus was crucified. Rome used it as a means of intimidation and a display of the power of the emperor—that Caesar had the right to take a person's life and to put them to open shame—to make a public display of a person's weakness and humiliation for the whole world to see. A public declaration that Rome was the most powerful of all.

When Jesus was crucified, it was not just the Roman authority—it was the Jewish authority—it was the whole world—it was the whole human race and all of our brokenness joined with the evil power of hell and the devil himself.

But when Jesus was crucified, he turned the world upside down. It was not Jesus who was put to shame and triumphed over. Our Scripture says that Jesus **“disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them.”**

I was thinking about my favorite fight scenes in movies. And it occurred to me which moment in those fights is the most awesome. When Zorro fights his enemy with sword, it's not the moment when his sword is heavier and faster and kills his enemy—it's when his sword knocks his enemy's sword out of his hands.

It's when the Jedi master puts his hand out and uses the force to pull the laser guns out of the hands of his enemies. It's when Neo in the Matrix is able to lift up his hand when people are shooting guns at him and the bullets stop in mid air and fall to the ground. It is when the enemy is disarmed and can no longer do any harm.

When Jesus died on the cross and then rose again from the dead, he was putting evil to open shame and triumphing over them because the cross and death could not do to Jesus what the cross and death had done to every person before him.

Pontius Pilate, Herod, the Roman authority, could not kill him. The Sanhedrin, the Jewish authority, could not silence him. The world, the devil, and all of our sin could not destroy him.

When Jesus was crucified on the cross, he made a public and profound statement that nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

“Neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, [nor Rome, nor Caesar, nor Herod, nor Pilate, nor the Sandhedrin, nor the Jews, nor the Greeks, nor the sin of all humanity] nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 9:38-39).

All those things are powerless in the face of the powerful love of Jesus. On the cross, Jesus knocked the guns, swords, and bombs out of the hands of the enemy. He did not dodge bullets, arrows, or spears. He has rendered them ineffective and powerless.

He has put them to open shame. We can ridicule death and laugh in the face of it because in Jesus we have the assurance of eternal life. We can cry out with a triumphant smile, **“O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?”** (1 Cor. 15:55). In Christ, death has no victory and no permanent sting.

Jesus has given us the victory over all those things that would drag us down—even to death itself. He did not just have a bigger gun or more power. He has disarmed them—all their power has been taken away. And, in Christ, we have the victory.