

When God Overruled Sin

Good Friday Communion Service

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Bible Text: Colossians 1:21-23
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It was at the cross of Calvary that Christ overruled our sin, you could say. Rather than leaving us to the punishment that we deserved, he interceded for us and for all those who would believe in him for salvation. It's a great manifestation of the sovereignty of God that Christ has delivered us from sin and I want to just kind of focus on that as our communion meditation here this evening. We all were born into sin. By nature and by choice we are sinners, fallen, condemned, worthy of judgment, and utterly unable to save ourselves, is the scriptural picture of all men everywhere at all time since the fall of Adam, and here at the table, here at the communion table, we remember that God has in mercy overruled sin in our lives and given us eternal life for all of us that believe in Christ and have received him by faith for our salvation.

You know, there are couple of things I would say by way of preliminary comment. To be saved from sin by the Lord Jesus Christ is a truly wonderful thing, the wonderful blessings of that will echo throughout all of eternity, and for some reason this afternoon as I was thinking about being here in front of you this evening, I realized that there are some who come and you were saved by Christ at an early age and sometimes when that happens, people say, "I really don't have a very good testimony. It's not that exciting. It's not that dramatic. You know, I received Christ as a young person and there wasn't a whole lot of outward sin for me to be forgiven because I received Christ at an early age." Well, friend, if that's you, let me encourage you to set that thought aside. First of all, your salvation is no less a miracle of God and no less an act of grace of God than the vilest sinner who truly believes. Every salvation is is a miracle because it is God taking a dead soul and breathing life into it and they come to Christ for their salvation. So every one of us that is truly redeemed, truly belongs to Christ, is a miracle of God, is a miracle of new birth that man cannot produce on his own. So you should never apologize for whatever your testimony should be or whatever it may be, I should say, rather just recognizing that it is a wonderful thing to belong to the family of God. And along with that, brothers and sisters, I would just encourage you with the thought that there are great advantages and it is a thing to greatly thank God that not only that he saved you from the judgment of sin but that he also saved you from the experience of sin, if that is your life testimony and that is your testimony to Christ. It was a special act of mercy of God upon you to spare you the scars of sin, the guilt of sin, all of the consequences of a life filled with sin before you were redeemed. So if that's you, young people growing up in a Christian family and

now you belong to Christ, give all the more thanks to God that he not only spared you from the eternal consequences of sin, he even spared you from the earthly consequences of sin, and that is a wonderful thing to give him thanks for. So along with that as we all gather together, it's just with humble and grateful hearts to realize that God has sovereignly worked in our lives.

You know, there is another aspect of it, I'm going to preach on this in a couple of weeks, but when you really understand the nature of biblical salvation and when you know that you belong to Christ, there is something that should be apparent and obvious to you that radically changes your whole perspective on who God is and what it means to live as a Christian, what it means to live in response to him. You know, we're all infected with a bit of the satanic residue of the way that he tempted Eve back in the garden, and insinuated to Eve's mind that God was narrow and restrictive and unkind because he had given a command to not eat of the fruit of one particular tree and that's all that Eve could see and she rebelled against that thought and humanity is infected with this idea, if they believe in God at all, that he's some kind of petty tyrant looking to smack whoever he can smack and to someone who is not easily pleased, and so on. For us as Christians, for those of us that have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ, we should understand and develop an ever greater sense, a growing sense, and that's why I want to preach on it before too very long, of what our salvation says and what it manifests about the attributes of God and what Scripture says that motivated God to save us. Scripture speaks that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son. Our salvation is an expression of the unprompted love of God toward us. Scripture says in Romans 2 that it's the kindness of God that leads you to repentance. God has done a good and gracious thing to you, to save you, something that is very useful, that is eternally useful, and God did that prompted by nothing in you because you were a rebel, you were an enemy, you were dead. There was nothing in you that prompted God to show you such kindness, this is an expression of his great kindness to you if you're in Christ. God has been kind to you. God has expressed his love to you. God has shown mercy to you which is a way of saying that God saw you in your desperate spiritual state, saw you condemned and in danger of eternal judgment, and in great mercy and in great kindness, interceded on your behalf and lead you to Christ; alleviated your need and gave you blessing in its place. Scripture speaks of God being merciful, being kind, being loving to us in our salvation. In 2 Peter 3 it talks about the patience of God, the patience of God that he overlooked your prior life of sin and patiently waited for the outworking of his plan so that you could be safely gathered into his family through faith in Christ. And those of you that have had longer periods of time of sin, you're on the other end of what I said, you were saved later in life, you were saved out of a life of gross outward wickedness, you look back on that and you say, "God was so patient with me. God was so patient to bear with my blasphemies and my indifference and my hostility and my sin in my utter display of depravity. He was so patient to me. Patient and kind and loving and merciful"; all gathered up under the umbrella of how good our God has been to us in our salvation. So when we come to the table, we come not to remember a God who has been stingy with us, a God that has been harsh with us, we come to a God who has bountifully poured out grace upon grace and mercy upon mercy upon us.

So our hearts as we approach the table this evening, should be filled with wonder, with worship, with a great sense of love and thanksgiving and gratitude that God has had such mercy on us as we hold these tangible symbols in our hand of the shed blood and the broken body of our Lord Jesus Christ. So this is a wonderful time of reverence and yet a time of joy. So at this table, we remember that God has in mercy overruled our sin. He has intervened and saved us from judgment and given us eternal life, and so it's with joyful hearts that we come to the table here this evening and we're going to kind of expand on this theme from the book of Colossians. If you have your Bible with you, I invite you to turn to Colossians 1 just to kind of see a before, during and after perspective on the way that God overruled sin in our lives.

Colossians 1:21 says,

21 And although you were formerly alienated and hostile in mind, engaged in evil deeds, 22 yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach-- 23 if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister.

Whether you lived a long life of sin or a relatively brief life of sin before the Lord saved you, let's consider our lives in light of these verses. You see a little bit of a spiritual biography for each one of us that are in Christ in these verses. Paul says that you were formerly alienated. You were hostile in mind and engaged in evil deeds. I should ask as a preliminary matter: have you made that kind of self-assessment? Have you judged yourself in light of Scripture and said, "Yes, that's true of me"? That's part of being a Christian is that we disclaim, we reject any kind of claim to self-righteousness.

We are born into sin. We cannot, could not, would not have saved ourselves, and as we grow in our physical lives, as we mature in age, we develop a bent toward sin that expresses itself in different ways in different lives. There is a spectrum that would be represented even in this room. Some show that they are alienated from God by their outwardly wicked and sinful and defiant lives, and you can see it and it's there for everyone to see. Some show their alienation from God in a spirit of self-righteousness that says, "I don't need a Savior. I don't need the Gospel. That's good for you but I don't need a crutch. I'm fit for heaven just as I am and I don't want to hear about your God." So their self-righteousness is a display of their alienation. Some show they are alienated from God by their passive lack of interest in Christ or in his word. They have no real affection for Christ. They have no desire, no understanding for the word of God. They are not interested in spiritual things. Their life is built around this life. They may be outwardly moral but their indifference and their cold and hard and stony heart toward the Christ who gave his life for sinners is a sure sign that they are dead in sin and alienated from God because no one who belongs to this Christ truly could ever have an attitude of indifference toward him. Those illustrations simply remind us wherever we might fall on that continuum, Scripture reminds us and these illustrations remind us that there was a

time, my Christian brother, my Christian sister, there was a time before Christ saved you where you were hostile toward God. You were alienated from him. Your life showed it. Your heart showed it. Your cold and dead eyes were a display of the fact that you were alienated from God and the life of his Spirit was not within you. Your life was not marked by love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control, all of those fruit of the Spirit that Scripture speaks of. And what I want you to see as we reflect on that, as we look back on our lives together, that that was no small thing. That was not inconsequential. The outcome of those things is death and eternal judgment. Prior to your salvation, you were helplessly and hopelessly lost and unable to save yourself and unwilling to save yourself even if you could. As I've said in the past, you were in a black room with no windows and no lights and blindfolded and dead and totally unable to see.

That was you spiritually and yet here we are on March 30, 2018, and you find yourself in Christ and we've gathered around the table to remember him. Do you realize what that says about you? Do you realize what Scripture is pointing us to as we remember and prepare for the Lord's table? The fact that you are here today in Christ when your life was like that in the past, is an indication that God graciously overruled sin in your life. Somewhere at some time, you were brought under the sound of the Gospel. Somewhere, someone spoke the word to you either in a sermon or a private conversation, on the printed page, perhaps over the radio, television, whatever the case may be. The outward circumstances are inconsequential compared to the greater principle that we are recognizing that Scripture speaks to here this evening, that in the Gospel, in that act of someone somehow bringing you the good news that Jesus Christ is a Savior of sinners, that he died and rose again for sinners just like you, and that he gladly receives all sinners who come to him and graciously, gladly grants them forgiveness with no prior conditions, you can just come to Christ and be saved today, this moment, words to that effect were shared with you. What I want you to see, brothers and sisters, is the personal and the particular providence of God that he used to bring you under the sound of the Gospel. Born into a Christian family, introduced you to Christian friends, you wandered into a church off the street for reasons that were unknown to you at the time, somehow, you get the point, somehow God brought you under the Gospel and under the sound of the Gospel you heard that the Lord Jesus Christ saves sinners. You heard that he shed his blood as a ransom for sinners just like you and there was a stirring in your heart that says, "I need that. I want that. I'm drawn to this. I must have Christ." And you asked him to save you and what did he do? He did. The Holy Spirit convicted you of sin. The Father drew you to Christ. Beloved, understand that if you are here in Christ tonight, you were saved not by an act of your human insight, not by an act of something that you did unprompted because remember, look back at verse 21 with me, let's not forget where we came from: you were alienated; you were hostile in mind.

So if you were convicted of sin and you came to faith in Christ, what has happened to you is nothing less than the God of the universe, the Creator of heaven and earth, the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, intervened personally in your life and overruled sin so that you might come to Christ, be saved and be welcomed into the family of God. That's great. That's wonderful. That is amazing grace. And if those things are true of you

and you do belong to Christ tonight, look at yourself now as we look at the present aspect of your biography in this wonderful passage from Colossians in verse 22. Notice the past and present dimension. Past tense verse 21, "you were formally alienated." Verse 22, "yet He has now reconciled you in His fleshly body through death, in order to present you before Him holy and blameless and beyond reproach."

Fellow member of the family of God, as we gather together, we look at that and we remember, Scripture teaches us that as Christians Christ has reconciled you to God with his own life blood. And in a church of our size, we can say things like this and know that the circumstances of which we speak is different painful things in life affect our body, the church over time, what I would remind you of and what I would have you take comfort in tonight as we come to the table, is to remember this: that the sorrows of life, the disappointments of life, the griefs of life, are all by their very nature temporary. They don't last forever. The gift that has been given to you in your salvation is an eternal gift, the outworking of which, the fullness of the blessing of, we haven't even begun to see yet. And what you have in Christ, what you have in the lovely Lord Jesus Christ, is a pearl of great price that is worth far more than anything that happens in this life be it good or ill. We have in Christ the greatest treasure in the universe and God has graciously, gladly, willingly given his Son to you that you might be brought into his family, and that means that there is hope in the midst of our sorrows; that means that there is something of a transcendent glorious wonder that has a value that earth cannot take away, and sometimes it's when life takes away that which is dear and precious to us that we are better able to see more clearly the wonder and the value of Christ and his inestimable worth and his great complete sufficiency for us to satisfy every longing of our broken hearts. In Christ we have the greatest of the great. In Christ we have the blessed Rose of Sharon, the Lily of the Valley. In Christ we have the one dearest to our soul. In Christ, beloved, you have a Savior, you have a friend, you have a brother in heaven who will never be taken away from you. That's sweet and precious in this life in this broken world in which we live.

He has reconciled you to God with his own life blood. The guilt that you have felt in the past over your sin has been settled. The accounts have been settled with God. You don't carry that any longer. "My sin, O, the bliss of this glorious thought, my sin not in part but the whole is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more. Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul." You see, that is a balm for a broken heart, to realize that a gift like that has been given to you. It's humbling, yes, because we didn't earn this, we didn't deserve it, but we realize the grace and the love and the mercy and the kindness and the patience of God because Christ made a full payment for the penalty of your sin for everyone who would ever believe in him. The blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin, 1 John 1:7 says. This passage that we're looking at, he has reconciled you in his fleshly body through death. Though once you were the enemy of God, now you have been reconciled and made his friend. And as I love to say, we have a brother in the throne room of heaven representing us even now before a holy God, carrying out and interceding for us in an unbroken way until we are reunited with him and see him face-to-face; a friend who sticks closer to a brother, a brother who gladly owns us and bears the name Son of God and shares it with us.

In Romans 5:8, we are reminded of this past and present nature of our salvation. You don't need to turn there. Romans 5:8 says that "God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners," past tense, "Christ died for us. Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from the wrath of God through Him. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life." The Gospel never gets old, does it? The wonders of Christ never become a tiresome thing to hear again and again, do they, to the redeemed soul? We never tire of looking at the word which unveils to us this one who is more precious to us than life itself.

Mark it, you're still there in Colossians, mark this: that it's not just that he has forgiven our sins. That would be wonder upon wonder enough. It's not just that, though, he saved you in order to transform you and to present you before the throne of God blameless and beyond reproach. Look at it there in verse 22. His reconciliation had a purpose beyond this life. The day will come when he will present you before the Father holy, blameless and beyond reproach, and just as you have confessed Christ here on this earth, he will gladly confess you before his Father and say, "That child belongs to me. That one belongs here, my Father," so to speak. Blameless, without reproach. There will be no shrinking back for us at the throne of God because we will be clothed in the perfect righteousness of Christ. That is why he saved us is for that ultimate destiny, and all purchased at the price at Calvary 2,000 years ago that we'll remember with these symbols in just a few moments.

So here you are, beloved, you now stand before God justified, declared righteous, declared in God's sight that all of the demands of the law have been satisfied in your life, not on your basis but because the righteousness of Christ has been counted to your benefit. Your guilt, your sin charged to Christ's account and he paid for it on this cross that we remember 2,000 years later. So your guilt placed on Christ where he bore the stroke of God and suffered punishment in your place. Here you are now with his perfect righteousness credited to your account, nothing more to be demanded at the bar of God from you. God has declared you righteous. Beloved, that means that God accepts you in Christ and the reason that you are in that position is because God by nature is a loving God toward his people. You know, God doesn't love you – follow me carefully here, it's easy to trip over this – God sent Christ because he loves us. It's not that he loves us because Christ died for us, as though he needed to be changed by an action by Christ for the Father to love us. His disposition toward us was always loving, that's why we are here, and the love of Christ, the death of Christ, was an outflow of the love of God. He so loved the world that he gave his Son. And one day, beloved, one day soon enough, we'll be done with the evils of this world, we'll be done with its sorrows, we'll be done with our own sin, we'll be done with our own lukewarm inadequate lives, and we will find ourselves in the presence of our Savior, sharing in his glory and looking fully at the face of our Beloved because Scripture says we will see him face-to-face. You will see the face of the one who changed your life and rescued you from eternal damnation. You'll see him in just a little while longer.

Beloved, do you see how God has overruled sin and its consequences in your life? You should have been banished forever from his presence. You should have, by what you deserved, shared a destiny with the devil and his angels, but instead this glory is before you with a foretaste now fully belonging to you. Don't you see that God has overruled sin in your life? Look at this unseen work as it is unveiled and revealed to you in Scripture and give him thanks. Give him your praise. Give him your worship. Take the elements in a moment with a profound sense of gratitude for what he has done.

What happens between now and that entrance into glory? You walk with Christ and you grow in his grace. Look at verse 23. It says, "if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was proclaimed in all creation under heaven, and of which I, Paul, was made a minister." Paul here is describing the natural consequence of the new birth. Those who are truly born again will continue in the faith and so don't read that verse and think that somehow God now leaves it up to you and between now and glory it all depends on you to make it happen. That's not the case. The grace of God is so encompassing and so certain in his love and his purpose, your blessing is so settled in heaven that God himself guarantees the outcome. He will perfect his purpose of presenting you in heaven holy and blameless and beyond reproach. This is a work of God that he will carry out to the end.

So beloved, think about it this way, think about it this way: the same God, the same Christ who overruled your sin in your unbelieving life, the God who overcame sin in your life as an unbeliever, now will continue to subdue sin in your life and sanctify you until you enter safely into his presence. Philippians 1:6, "I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus." Philippians 2:13, "for it is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure." The Spirit given to you as a down payment of greater glory to come. This is overwhelming. To be on the receiving end of such undeserved love and undeserved kindness, undeserved patience, undeserved mercy, we are greatly blessed. So of course, we pursue righteousness in the years or days that God gives to us, but we do so as a glad response to this gracious work, not as a work that is necessary for us to finish the work of salvation on our own and by ourselves.

God is at work in you, beloved, and take heart, gather in the full picture of all of this glory because we all need it as we stumble our way through our Christian life, don't we? As we get weary of our own sin. As we get weary of the struggle, not just with circumstances but the struggle from within, battling sin from within, feeling like there are more losses than wins in your spiritual life. Beloved, look at all of this and see the great overruling purpose of God in your salvation and realize that he is favorably disposed toward you, that this is a God of love and grace and patience toward his children. He knew your sin before you committed it and he saved you anyway. Christ went to the cross long before you were ever born so he knew fully in advance what you were like and received you anyway and poured all of his grace out on you anyway.

So that's what we remember. God is at work in you to accomplish his purpose and to make sure that the work that he began is finished, will be completed, and you will never

be lost from his fold. "No one," Jesus said, "can pluck them out of my hand." That's the position that you are in if you're in Christ today, purchased with blood at a cross 2,000 years ago. So tonight as we partake of communion together, we remember that in Christ God has overruled sin in our lives, in the past, in the present, and perfectly removed in the future in glory. He has forgiven us. He has forgiven you if your faith is in Christ, and he has set you on a path that leads to eternal life. Our hearts are bursting with hallelujahs, with, "Praise God!" With thanks for such a wonderful gift purchased with the blood of Christ. So that's what we're going to remember now.

Now, just a word about communion. If you're visiting with us today and you're in Christ, you belong to Christ, we invite you to share in the Lord's table with us. It's his table, not the table of Truth Community Church so you are welcome to partake with us. Just a couple of words. If you're not a Christian, what you should see is the great glory of Christ that has been presented to you tonight through his word, and I would invite you tonight, maybe you're watching over the live stream, I would invite you to receive Christ in response to what you've heard tonight. Christ is a willing Savior. You can come to him immediately and he will immediately save you. No conditions. You don't have to do any prior works. You don't have to clean up your life. You can come to him right now and he will receive you. He said, "I am like a physician and a physician receives sick people." Christ is a Savior who receives sinners. That's why he came.

So while we take it with joy, we also take it with reverence. If you're a professing believer and you are consciously holding onto some sin in your life, I would encourage you to let the elements pass. Indeed, I would warn you Scripture says, "Don't take communion in an unworthy way." He has dealt with us graciously but we are not to trifle with his blood. We are not to pretend to share in the benefits of it when we still love sin in an unrepentant way. It's not that struggling people can't take communion, it's those that are defiant and say, "I want my sin and I won't hear of releasing it," that's the person that should let it go.

But for the rest of us which I trust is the vast majority of us tonight, you are walking with Christ in light of his word, your heart has been warmed by the things that you've heard from God's word tonight, this is a time of joy. Our Lord said on the cross, "It is finished." The work of your redemption is done. It is complete in the sight of God. Your sins are forgiven and Christ commands us with the intention to bless us and says, "Come and remember me at my table in this way."

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