

The year was 1864. The US was in the fourth year of the Civil War, what would become the bloodiest conflict in its history. People all across the nation were weary of the steady stream of losses being suffered on both sides. Abraham Lincoln was up for re-election, and the odds weren't in his favor. His opponent, George McClellan, ran on the democratic platform of "Compromise with the South." Negotiate terms with the South, sue for peace – an appealing option for a nation tired of war.

It was then that a political artist named Thomas Nast drew up a poster that helped rally the north behind Lincoln's cause. In big, bold letters the poster proclaimed, "Peace through Victory." In other words: A compromise wouldn't bring real rest to a war-weary country. Slaves would remain in their chains. Soldiers would have died in vain. North and South would remain at odds. The only way to bring real peace was with a decisive victory.

Paul tells the Colossians that the same is true in our relationship with God. Peace – or, as Paul describes it, Sabbath-rest – only comes through Christ's decisive victory on our behalf. But there's a reason why he needed to say it: False teachers had made their way to Colosse with a different message. That Jesus' victory wasn't all-sufficient. That salvation involved a sort of compromise – between what Jesus did and they had to do.

The lie is still around, even lurking in these hearts, and it robs us of real rest as we go looking for it where it can't be found. So listen as Paul reminds you this morning: Real Rest is Found in Christ. 1) in his one-time victory, 2) it's his ongoing invitation.

¹³ When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, ¹⁴ having canceled 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. ¹⁵ And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.

¹⁶ Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. ¹⁷ These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.

I. In his one-time victory

In order to win us peace, Jesus was going to have to beat the enemies that plagued us. And the first enemy Paul mentions here might surprise you: The law of God. That's what Paul is getting after when he says that **the written code, with its regulations...was against us and...stood opposed to us**. That might seem strange – especially when today's worship theme is that God's commands are good, for our benefit! And it's true – they are. There's nothing wrong with the law. It *is* good. It's your best friend, as long as you're keeping it. You're at peace with God, if you keep it perfectly. It promises you eternal life, if you perfectly keep its every command every moment of your entire life.

And that's an impossible "if," isn't it? Not because the law's bad – because *we're* bad. We haven't kept the law. By nature, we aren't able to and don't even want to – born **dead in sins**, like Paul says. Even in our best efforts to do so as Christians, we're not attaining the perfection the law demands. And since that's the case, the law is no longer our friend. The law stands **against us, opposed to us** – condemns us as guilty. Our sins turn the list of God's commandments into our criminal record, so to speak, a list of all our failures to keep them that declares us guilty and sentences us to hell.

Ah! But...did you notice what Paul says God did with that list? **He took it away** from you and **nail(ed) it to the cross** of Christ. In Paul's day, when someone was crucified, a sign was usually nailed above their head, listing the charges against them. That's why Pilate nailed that sign above Jesus' head: "King of the Jews." Even though it was true, that was the "crime" that got Jesus the death penalty, claiming to be a king. Paul says God the Father nailed another sign to the cross. This one was the long, long list of your sins and my sins and this world's sins. God took your criminal record away from you and charged Jesus for your crimes. Condemned him as guilty, gave him the sentence of hell you deserved in your place. In doing so, **he cancelled** the charges against you, expunged your record, wiped your sins away.

And, in doing so, he disarmed another enemy of yours. **And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.** Do you know whom Paul is referring to with "powers" and "authorities?" The devil and his fellow-demons. The bible calls the devil our accuser. One of the things he loves to do is to use our sins against us as a weapon – bringing sins past and present to mind, accusing us of them, so we live in guilt and fear of God's punishment. Ultimately, our sins are the one weapon he's hoping to use against us before God the Judge – if he can accuse us of even one, he has an airtight case for us landing in hell with him forever.

But Jesus, Paul says, triumphed over him on the cross! He completely disarmed him. In taking away our sins, he took away once and for all the one weapon the devil can use against us. Jesus even **made a public spectacle of him** – that's what his descent into hell after coming alive on day three was all about. It was a victory parade down hell's main street that proved the devil disarmed and utterly defeated.

It's a one-time victory that brings you rest. Rest from your futile attempts to get right with God by your works, because Jesus' work has made us right with God. Rest from the guilt the law's unmet demands leave us carrying, because Jesus fully met those demands when he carried our guilt to the cross and took it away. Rest from the devil's endless accusations, because Jesus has silenced them. Rest from fear of punishment, because Jesus has removed it and won us perfect peace and rest for all eternity.

II. It's his ongoing invitation

So don't let anyone rob you of this rest, Paul says. **Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day.**

You might notice – that list contains some of the ceremonial laws God gave Israel. He told them what they could and couldn't eat; commanded them to celebrate festivals like Passover; commanded them to not work on Saturday, the seventh day. It appears that some false teachers were trying to convince the Colossians to follow these rules – and judging them as “inferior” or “incomplete” Christians if they didn't. As if resting in Christ's victory was just too simple. As if Christ's work wasn't sufficient, and something needed to be added, and following these rules would give them something Christ couldn't. They were robbing them of rest in Christ by pointing them to more work that needed to be done!

We still need the warning. Because there are plenty of rest-robbers still around today. Christians who would point you to some work of yours that needs to be added to Christ's for you to be saved. In some churches it's accepting him as your personal Lord and Savior or praying a sinner's prayer. In others it's speaking in tongues or committing your life to him. In still others, they'll add own rules of dress and conduct and tell you you're a “carnal Christian,” second-class, unless you keep them.

But the truth is the closest rest-robber we know is the one staring back at us in the mirror. There is a part of each of us who wants to add to Christ's work - tries to find rest by working. So we sin, and feel guilty for it...and we try to salve our guilty conscience by making up for it with something good, by trying harder to be better. Or maybe we call ourselves stupid, and beat ourselves up in an attempt to atone for our sins. Maybe the work we look to for rest is trying to excuse or justify our action in our own minds. But none of that gives real rest – at best, just a shadow of it.

Paul says, “Why turn to the shadows, when you have the reality?” **These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.** Those ceremonial laws, Paul tells them, they were a shadow. They drew a rough outline for people of what Jesus would do for them. Observing Passover never saved anyone...but it pointed ahead to the reality of Jesus – the Passover Lamb who truly saves us from death. Animal sacrifices couldn't pay for sin...but they pointed ahead to Jesus' one-time sacrifice that paid for all sin. Observing physical rest on the seventh day never lifted a burden of guilt or brought peace to a troubled soul. But it pointed ahead to the One who does. The One who refused to rest until he had done all the work – all the work necessary – to save us. The One who calls to us, “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”

With an offer like that, why would we look anywhere else? Instead, take him up on it, every opportunity you get. Because until you get to heaven, you'll struggle with guilt. Your conscience will condemn. And the devil's beaten, but he won't stop tempting and then accusing. So until you get to heaven, remain regularly in God's word. Feed as often as you can

on our Lord's supper. Until you get to heaven's rest, that's how God will keep giving you real rest in Christ. Amen.