

The Story – The Cross and Redemption

We have spent the year talking about the unfolding story of God's redemption. Everything we have talked about in some sense culminates here in the next couple of Sunday sermons. We are talking about Jesus' death upon the cross, his resurrection and ascension into heaven. This is the means by which redemption is provided for us. This is redemption's plan carried out. Everything in the Old Testament is looking forward to and pointing to the cross.

Go all the way back to the beginning, back to the Garden of Eden. That's where everything fell apart. God's original design and plan for humanity went off the track as Adam and Eve rebelled against God's design and order. They disobeyed God's instructions. They would choose for themselves what was good and what was evil. They sinned and as a result sin marred and stained all of their descendants, including us. Of course it wasn't just their sin. We ignore God's order as well. We think we know best and it leads to sin and death.

Because of their original sin, sin entered into the world and into every human heart and mind. Rather than living in the spiritual and moral freedom and innocence and joy in which we were created to live, we fell under the control of sin and of the devil, the enemy of God and of our soul. Our lives, our choices, our so called free will has all been tainted and damaged by sin and its dominion in our lives. Something has gone horribly wrong for all of us and apart from God's intervention and salvation, we will remain controlled by sin and destined for hell. We need a Redeemer! We need someone to save us and rescue us from the dominion of sin.

Here is a theological definition of the mess we are in. **“Whenever men by their own fault or through some superior power have come under the control of someone else, and have lost their freedom to implement their will and decision, and when their own resources are inadequate to deal with that other power, they can regain their freedom only by the intervention of a third party.”** ...*The Dictionary of New Testament Theology*

That's what happened in the garden. Adam and Eve, by their own fault and through their surrender to temptation came under the control of the devil. They and their sons lost their freedom to make righteous choices. They gave into sin and became greedy, jealous, disobedient. They gave into murder and all manner of wickedness. Their own power to resist, their own power to overcome their sinful nature wasn't enough. They needed the intervention of a third party. They needed a Savior to redeem them from their slavery to sin.

From the beginning, from the garden of Eden to now, through all the Old Testament stories and heroes, we saw their sin, their weakness, their need of redemption. We saw them living in hope of a Messiah that would redeem and ransom them from their bondage to sin because they couldn't do it on their own. They couldn't save themselves and guess what? Neither can we! We too are sinners needing a Savior, needing to be redeemed.

The words associated with the concept of redemption, words like ransom, rescue, release, save, deliver, liberate, all point to what we need and to what God alone can do for us. The bible says all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. By our own effort and merit we all remain slaves to sin. We are all morally and spiritually bankrupt. Our only hope is that someone with the adequate power and resources would pay our debt and redeem us from our bankrupt condition. That's what Jesus came to do. How? By giving his life on the cross as a ransom for us. **“For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” Mark 10:45** Let's look a little deeper at this.

In the Old Testament people were redeemed from a variety of social situations like debt, slavery, captivity, exile. **“Property, animals, persons and the nation were all ‘redeemed’ by the payment of a price.”** (Stott, pg.176). You could become what we would call an indentured servant if you fell into debt, but a family member could pay the debt and redeem you out of slavery. A kinsman redeemer could pay the price owed to keep land in the family. A kinsman redeemer could even pay the price to redeem someone from death. The price had to be paid.

The Old Testament talks about the nation of Israel being enslaved and God redeemed them out of Egypt and from exile in Babylon. God in a sense paid the price of their redemption, delivering his people the bible says, “with an outstretched arm and a mighty hand.”

In the New Testament when we talk about redemption, the focus is on the moral and spiritual condition of the individual. It's not a nation that needs redemption, it's you and me. We need redemption! We do? We aren't indentured servants, we aren't enslaved in a debtor's prison. **What is it we need to be redeemed from?** Here is the truth for all of us: **We are enslaved to sin and by sin. We need to be redeemed from our sin.** “Well, I may have made a few mistakes, sure I've sinned but I wouldn't say I'm a slave to sin or that I need redemption.” Here is what Jesus said, **“I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.” John 8:34** “Okay so maybe by God's standard I am a slave to sin.” Face it. We need to be redeemed from sin that continues to destroy us, to defeat us, to make us less than God intended us to be. We

need to be redeemed from sin that separates us from God and will finally doom us to hell. Something must be done about our sin problem and whatever it is that needs to be done, we can't do it. We need a Redeemer and Jesus alone is the one that can redeem us and set us free.

The passage we quoted from Mark 10, that Jesus came to give his life as a ransom, implies we are held in captivity and only a ransom payment can set us free. Here is the chilling reality: the ransom payment is the very life of Jesus the Son of God. His life sacrificed for ours!

Think of that. We have to be ransomed but **What is the price of our redemption? The life and blood of Jesus Christ.** There is never any doubt about the price involved in our redemption. **“For you know it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed...but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.”**

1 Peter 1:18-19

This was the price paid for us and the cross was the place where that price was paid. The bible doesn't say to whom the ransom was paid. The point is simply about the price itself. We can't begin to imagine the price Jesus paid to redeem us from our sin.

Think about him becoming incarnate in flesh, leaving all the glory and splendor of heaven to be born a helpless baby, subject to all the pain and struggle of life here on earth. Think about Jesus, the man of sorrows, acquainted with grief the prophet said of him. He became a slave to redeem us from slavery. He became the living sacrifice to die for us and for our sins. Think about him enduring the mockery of a trial, lied about by false witnesses, betrayed with a kiss by one he trusted, abandoned by those he loved, rejected by those he came to save, beaten and humiliated by those whom he lovingly and willingly forgave. Think about him beaten and whipped, his back torn open for our salvation, our healing. Think about the crown of thorns upon his brow, his eyes swollen nearly shut as he stumbles on his way to Calvary, bearing the cross. Think of him, nailed to the cross, bleeding, suffering, struggling to breath. This is the price for our redemption. This is the ransom Jesus paid so we could be set free from sin! **“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.” 2 Corinthians 5:21.** The cross, the place of redemption. Jesus himself, his life, his blood, our ransom. His death, the price of our redemption! What extraordinary love he showed to us on that cross. This is the place of redemption.

Brennan Manning in his book *The Signature of Jesus* writes, “In the winter of 1968 to 1969, I lived in a cave in the mountains of the Zaragosa Desert in Spain. For seven months I saw

no one, never heard the sound of a human voice. Hewn out of the face of the mountain, the cave towered 6,000 feet above sea level. Each Sunday morning a brother from the village of Farlete below dropped off food, drinking water, and kerosene at a designated spot. Within the cave a stone partition divided the chapel on the right from the living quarters on the left. A stone slab covered with potato sacks served as a bed. The other furniture was a rugged granite desk, a wooden chair, a Sterno stove, and a kerosene lamp. On the wall of the chapel hung a three-foot crucifix. I awoke each morning at 2:00 a.m. and went into the chapel for an hour of nocturnal adoration. On the night of December 13, during what began as a long and lonely hour of prayer, I heard in faith Jesus Christ say, 'For love of you I left my Father's side. I came to you who ran from me, fled me, who did not want to hear my name. For love of you I was covered with spit, punched, beaten and affixed to the wood of the cross.' These words are burned on my life. Whether I am in a state of grace or disgrace, elation or depression, that night of fire quietly burns on. I looked at the crucifix for a long time, figuratively saw the blood streaming from every pore of his body and heard the cry of his wounds: 'This isn't a joke. It is not a laughing matter to me that I have loved you.' The longer I looked the more I realized that no man has ever loved me and no one ever could love me as he did. I went out of the cave, stood on the precipice and shouted into the darkness, 'Jesus, are you crazy? Are you out of your mind to have loved me so much?' I learned that night what a wise old man had told me years earlier: 'Only the one who has experienced it can know what the love of Jesus Christ is. Once you have experienced it, nothing else in the world will seem more beautiful or desirable.'" Redemption's price was paid on a cross. Look at the testimony of Scripture.

"For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God." 1 Peter 3:18

"This is love; not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins." 1 John 4:10

"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Romans 5:8

"Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders...And they sang a new song: 'You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and

nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth.” Revelation 5:6-10

The ransom has been paid! He purchased us with his own blood. We don't have to live in bondage and slavery to sin any longer. You don't have to live like you've been living any longer. The price for your redemption has been paid in full. Now here is the last thing I want us to notice. **He purchased us. He paid the ransom. We are not our own!**

The apostle Paul declared, **“We wait for the...glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good.” Titus 2:14** We belong to him. He redeemed us from sin and wickedness so we could be his very own, his people. Such love shown for us should motivate us to live a life of obedience, “eager to do what is good.” We want to please him because we understand the price he paid for us and for our salvation.

In another passage Paul tells us to refrain from sin, to flee sexual immorality. Why? **“You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.” 1 Corinthians 6: 19-20** We are to honor God with our physical body by obedience to his word and by self-control and discipline. John Stott wrote, **“Bought by Christ, we have no business to become the slaves of anybody or anything else. Once we were the slaves of sin; now we are the slaves of Christ and his service is the true freedom.” ... John Stott**

He came to redeem us from our sins, to make us his very own, a blood bought people made new creations in Christ, now indwelt by his Holy Spirit. He redeemed us and made us his own so we can walk in faith as the people of God, so we can walk in obedience to his word, so we can take up our cross and follow him, sharing his life with others.

He has redeemed us, purchased us at such an incredibly high price, the price of his own life and blood. How shall we now live as people purchased by God? Let me quote once more from Brennan Manning as we bring this to a close. In his book *The Furious Longing of God* he writes, “Is the kingdom that He proclaimed to be nothing more than a community of men and women who go to church on Sunday, take an annual spiritual retreat, read their Bibles every now and then, vigorously oppose abortion, don't watch x-rated movies, never use vulgar language, smile a lot, hold doors open for people, root for the favorite team, and get along with everybody? Is that why Jesus went through the bleak and bloody horror of Calvary? Is that why He emerged

in shattering glory from the tomb? Is that why He poured out His Holy Spirit on the church? To make nicer men and women with better morals? The gospel is absurd and the life of Jesus is meaningless unless we believe that He lived, died and rose again with but one purpose in mind: to make brand-new creations. Not to make people with better morals, but to create a community of prophets and professional lovers, men and women who would surrender to the mystery of the fire of the Spirit that burns within, who would live in ever greater fidelity to the omnipresent Word of God, who would enter into the center of it all, the very heart and mystery of Christ, into the center of the flame that consumes, purifies and sets everything aglow with peace, joy, boldness, and extravagant, furious love. This my friends, is what it really means to be a Christian. Our religion never begins with what we do for God. It always starts with what God has done for us, the great and wondrous things that God dreamed of and achieved for us in Christ Jesus.”

What God has done for us. He ransomed us and redeemed us and understand Jesus is the ransom paid for us and for our salvation at the cross. Your redemption and mine had a price and Jesus was that price. This is what he has done for us in Christ Jesus. We are not our own but we were bought with a price Paul said, therefore glorify God with your body. Let's live to give glory to God with every breath we breathe.

The price has been paid for your redemption, now the choice is up to you. Turn to him in faith and ask him to save you and forgive you for your sins. He gave himself for you, stop running from him, stop rejecting his offer of forgiveness. You don't have to live in the slavery of sin any longer. Open your heart to him, receive his redemption, and then live the life of the redeemed!