

Sermon – 20/01/2008 pm

Redemption through His Blood

Study Text: Ephesians 1:7–8

‘Let me explain what this word *redemption* means’ said the Bible college lecturer. ‘It is a word many of you will not have heard before’ he said. One student stood up to say that they commonly used the words ‘redeem’ and ‘redemption’. Many had coupons they would ‘redeem’ at the store. Some had items like a precious watch or ring at the pawnbroker which they hoped to ‘redeem’ when they had the money.

‘Ransom’ is another word we will be using today, and it comes from the same root as the words ‘redeem’ and ‘redemption’. All come from a simple Greek verb ‘to loose’. We hear the word ransom when someone is kidnapped. Criminals will abduct someone and threaten to kill them unless a ransom is paid. They may demand a million dollars in cash. The person is held captive and faces death unless the ransom is paid.

In the context of slavery we also read about the ransom price. Slaves were, and still are, bought and sold. For them to be set free someone has to pay the price on their head – the ransom price. I heard of a mission organisation that paid the debts of poor people who were bonded labourers. This was the best way to help such poor people, to set them free of such bondage. Such people would probably understand the great doctrine of redemption that we find in the Bible.

Redemption

One of the most beautiful verses in the Bible is Mark 10:45. Do you know it? Jesus said *the Son of Man did not come to be served but to serve and give his life a ransom for many* – or literally ‘instead’ of many. Jesus gave his life ‘in the place of’, or ‘instead of’ your life. This is what redemption means. It means the ransom price is paid, and you who were held hostage are free. It means that for you who were a slave someone has paid the price on your head and you are free.

In every translation of this text that I have seen the words are ‘ransom for many’. But there are those who think this is unclear; they think it is confusing. They seek to help Jesus and say he means ‘the elect’. But Jesus knew the word ‘elect’, as did Paul. We find the word ‘elect’ or ‘chosen’ in this very chapter of Ephesians. Paul echoes the word of Jesus in I Timothy 2:6. There he writes *who gave himself a ransom for all*.

We know and proclaim the great doctrine of sovereign election even as we find it in these verses. But let us not try to improve on what the great apostle has written. Let us humbly exegese or bring out the truth we find in Scripture and not start imposing doctrine on passages of the Bible. We are ready to condemn others for doing this and rightly so, but what about ourselves. Trying to improve on what is written in Scripture, or to impose even right doctrine upon the text is fraught with danger.

Redemption means to be redeemed or ransomed from some captivity or bondage as we have seen. Few of us, if any, have ever been held hostage and been under the threat of death. It

would be a harrowing experience, to be told every day you will die unless a ransom is paid. You would think a lot about being free. You would think a lot about life and death.

Does a slave ever forget he is a slave? Does a hostage ever say he is free? When the ransom is paid does he say 'I am free anyway, and then stay in the dark room where he was held'? When Jesus said to some Jews who were following him *the truth will make you free* they got upset (John 8:32). They followed Jesus all over the place, watching him perform miracles and listening to his high teaching. But they did not like him suggesting that they were not free. 'We have never been in bondage to anyone' they said to Jesus – what do you mean saying the truth will make us free.

Jesus offended these people by telling them they were in bondage. Many are offended by what Jesus says about them. Jesus did not 'soften' his offending words. He went on to tell them most solemnly that *whoever commits sin is a slave to sin* (John 8:34). Did that make them stop and think? No – they kept saying 'we have Abraham as our father'. We are not such bad people that you should call us sinners, much less slaves to sin! Their self righteous and proud hearts became hardened against Jesus.

Jesus went on to tell them that their very attitude towards him showed they were not children of Abraham, and much less children of God. They were in fact children of the devil. Their father the devil was blinding them to the truth that Jesus was revealing to them.

Do you think Jesus was being a bit harsh? Was it true that these people who were zealous for the law were actually children of the devil? Jesus never told a lie. Jesus was telling them the truth, the truth about themselves and their sinful hearts. They were slaves to sin; they were being hoodwinked by the devil if they thought they were free. Jesus was offering them the truth – he is the truth, the way, the truth and the life.

Here in Ephesians, writing to *the saints* or believers, Paul calls God our Father. He says we are adopted sons of God. In the next chapter he says *you once walked according to the prince of the power of the air* (2:2) – in other words the devil. You walked as a child of the devil. You were in bondage to the devil. You were far from free, whether you came from a good church family or from a life of drinking and drugs.

In him we have redemption (1:7). We have come to the second person in the Godhead and to his role in our salvation. We were adopted as sons through Jesus Christ. We were accepted, or better 'highly favoured' in the beloved or the One he loves (1:6). God the Father chose us, he predestined us to be his children, but God the Son had a vital role to play in executing this plan. It is in Christ that we have redemption. Christ paid the ransom price to secure our freedom. We were slaves to sin, we were in bondage to sin, we were children of the devil, and we were under the wrath of God before this great exchange.

Through His Blood

What does it cost to redeem a person from sin? A lot of good works? Did you need the good works of a few other people transferred to your account? Did you give a lot of money to the poor? *You were not redeemed with corruptible things like silver or gold. but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish or spot* (I Peter 1:18-19).

We were born with a high price on our heads. *The day that you eat of it (the fruit) you shall surely die* (Genesis 2:17). We were in deep trouble. The gun was at our heads as it were, unless, unless someone paid the price. The price was high. It was life for life, blood for blood. The blood of bulls and goats was not effective. The blood of another sinful human being, blood tainted by sin, was not effective either (Psalm 49:7). The only blood acceptable as a ransom price is that of Jesus Christ, the lamb without blemish, the only sinless man to live in this world.

Not with the blood of bulls and goats but with his own blood he entered the Most Holy Place, once for all, having obtained eternal redemption (Hebrews 9:12). This refers to the sacrifice Jesus made when he died on the Cross. This was the price, a very high price which Jesus paid for your redemption (I Corinthians 6:20). This is why Paul is praising God the Father and God the Son in this doxology.

Some might ask to whom this ransom was paid. Scripture does not explicitly answer the question but nowhere indicates it was paid to the devil, even though we belonged to him. Rather, God set forth Jesus as *a propitiation by his blood* (Romans 3:25). Propitiation means to remove the wrath of God. It was God himself who in his justice demanded blood. It was also God who in his wonderful grace set forth his only begotten Son to pay the ransom price that he set on our heads because of our sin.

Forgiveness of Sins

Redemption involves the forgiveness of sin. We were not hostages to sin by accident. Was David Hicks in Afghanistan by accident or because he was aiding terrorists? That was the big question that surrounded his trial. Whatever doubts there were about Hicks let there be no doubt as to the reason we were held hostage to sin. Let no one ever say God is to blame for his/her bondage (James 1:13).

Our sinful hearts lead us to desire many things, some good and a lot bad. These desires lead to sin – when desire has conceived it gives birth to sin (James 1:15). Every human being is sinful from birth – *for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God* (Romans 3:23). Some, however, know the forgiveness of sin. We know that true forgiveness comes only through the blood of Jesus Christ. His precious blood washes our sinful hearts clear (Revelation 1:5).

Together with the apostle Paul we bless God every day for his grace that abounds towards us in Jesus Christ. We praise God for forgiving our sin *according to the riches of his grace which he made to abound toward us in all wisdom and understanding* (1:7-8). We are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.

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