

From Captive to Free: Christ's Redemption Story
Ephesians 1:7-10

“Knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways....with the precious blood of Christ.”

Introduction: This last week in meeting with a dear friend and wise leader, he gave a startling observation of the state of some of the churches, even those we resonate with, in Southern California (and in a general way, the rest of North America). He said the plight we are facing is a *creeping theological indifference*. Not necessarily false teaching or a ridding of Jesus or the Bible, but a lack of passion or emphasis on the importance of doctrine and clarity of the truth. Yes, there is a lively focus on Jesus, but without doctrinal clarity, we can easily worship a Jesus in our own making, one who primarily serves us, and that is One that we ultimately DO NOT KNOW.

A few years back Michael Horton wrote a book called *“Christless Christianity”*¹ in which he looked at and diagnosed the same thing in the American church. His concern was not so much that the church was becoming theologically liberal (though that’s an issue too), but that it was becoming *theologically vacuous*, characterized by “growth without depth” (p. 23-24). “It is not heresy as much as silliness that is killing us softly. **God is not denied but trivialized — used for our life programs rather than received, worshipped and enjoyed.**” He goes on to diagnose how Christ is viewed, which is key to our study this morning, with a series of questions:

“Christ is a source of empowerment, but is He widely regarded among us today as the source of redemption for the powerless? He helps the morally sensitive to become better, but does He save the ungodly — including Christians? He heals broken lives, but does He raise those who are dead in trespasses and sins? Does Christ come merely to improve our existence in Adam or to end it, sweepings us into his new creation? Is Christianity all about spiritual and moral makeovers or about death and resurrection — radical judgment and radical grace? Is the Word of God a resource for what we have already decided we want and need, or is it God’s living and active criticism of our religion, morality, and pious experience? In other words, is the Bible God’s story, centering on Christ’s redeeming work, that rewrites our stories, or is it some this we use to make our stories a little more exciting and interesting?”

Here is why these questions and answers are important. We believe that the gospel of Jesus Christ is the hope for all mankind, that God is using us, His church, to make disciples of all nations, and to bring people into a right, worshipful, and joyful relationship with Him. In this, doctrine and theology, or to say another way, a true, full, and clear Biblical view of God and Christ is the necessary fuel and ultimate goal in that venture. We often want to separate what God brings together, separating a heart for the lost with an appetite for Biblical doctrine/teaching, when God says they are inseparable. Coming to Jesus in a salvation changes our direction, appetite, master, and expectations.

As we come back to the book of Ephesians, Paul continues to remind the church of **who we are**, the depth of our salvation, the breadth of God’s work in displaying His glory, the height of His love for us, the quantity of grace poured out for us, and the scope of that reach (Eph. 6:18-20). In this, God takes care of both the depth and breadth of our life and ministry, since it is all done by Him and to Him and for Him. Salvation is ultimately a story of God’s glory

¹ Michael Horton, “Christless Christianity: The Alternative Gospel of the American Church” Baker Books, 2008.

displayed IN CHRIST as He redeems those who were captive, making blind to see, lost found, and dead come to life.

Redemption: God's grace for the enslaved IN CHRIST (v. 7)
*In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses,
 according to the riches of His grace*

The word and idea of redemption is either not often used in our explanation of the gospel, or not understood well, but is a central and foundational reality of our salvation. Israel waited for the redemption of Jerusalem when Jesus entered the scene (Luke 2:30). To all those who are IN CHRIST, HE has become our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption (1 Cor. 1:30). We are justified by His gracious gift THROUGH the redemption that is in Jesus Christ (Rom. 3:24). We have been delivered from the domain of darkness to the kingdom of God's beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins (Col. 1:13-14). And the blood of Jesus secured **our eternal redemption** (Heb. 9:14). But what does this mean?

Most of us experience redemption quite often. Every time we purchase bottles or cans, we make a deposit, that can be redeemed by bringing them back at designated locations. Every month or so, one of my daughters will assist me loading up our cans and water bottles and dropping them off at a redemption site. I used to give them the change (if it was \$15.55, they'd get \$0.55 - not bad!) but their rates have gone up and I'm pretty sure I keep none of the haul now.

But the word and concept of Biblical redemption is much deeper than getting back what you've already paid into. The word "Redemption" (apolutrosis) means *to one set free on the basis of a ransom paid to God by Christ's death*. It has to do with buying back those who were in bondage, to paying the ransom price for someone in slavery, setting them free. If we are redeemed in Christ, it's good to look closely at this definition and meaning, which will invigorate our worship of God through Christ.

The REDEEMER - Notice that the whole of verses 7-12 focus around the work of Christ and all that happens IN HIM. There is no salvation outside of Jesus Christ. He is the point. He is the purpose. He is the goal. If we are living a good and moral life that exists without Christ, we are merely more sanitized people who are still under God's wrath. Look back at the end of verse 6 and you'll see Jesus referred to as **the Beloved**. The Father loves the Son (John 3:35), made that known publicly at His baptism ("this is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased." - Matt. 3:17), and to whom God gave a kingdom (Col. 1:13 - "transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son"). Jesus is the Messiah and Redeemer Israel longed for (Is. 44:29, 54:5; Job 19:25). Jesus was not forced into this role, but willingly went to the cross to glorify the Father (John 17:1) and to give eternal life to all whom God gave to Him (John 17:2). Jesus is the uniquely qualified Redeemer, the one whom every sinner and creation itself groans and waits eagerly for (Rom. 8:22-23)

The REDEEMED - Who are the objects of redemption? Notice all the personal pronouns: "we", "our", and "us". Mankind is the object, specifically those God chose and predestined as adopted sons and daughters. We were DEAD in our sin (2:1), living for our own passions and following the course of this world was laid out by Satan himself. We were kids deserving of punishment. We were separated, alienated, strangers without hope (2:12). We were far off (2:13), darkened, ignorant, hard hearted, callous, and given up to every kind of impurity (4:18-19). We walked in impurity and immorality (5:3), or whatever form of that we deemed acceptable. We were under bondage and we did not care. We were sinners and we loved it. We were miserable and did not realize it. We shook our fist at God as we were drowning, choosing to rebel against the hand of God even as our lungs filled with water. We were not a group of people that God would have benefitted from, but we are a group that

God placed His love on. Redemption in Jesus Christ comes to those who did not deserve it, did not want it, and could not find it, but on whom love and grace was lavished.

The RANSOM - What was the cost to free sinners from bondage? Nothing less than the blood of Jesus Christ. What kind of bondage were we under? We were under a curse, specifically the curse of the law (Gal. 3:13) violating God's perfect law and being placed under judgment. Romans 6:23 tells us that the *wages*, or what we earned, *of sin is death*. We were guilty of violating God's law, worthy of and deserving death, and we were enslaved to that sin (Rom. 6:17, 20), meaning even if we wanted to get out, which we didn't, we actually COULD not.

Some have thought that Jesus had to pay the ransom to Satan, since he is the prince of the power of the air and the enemy of God Himself. But the ransom payment actually had to be paid to God, where His wrath would be satisfied, His requirement of fulfilling the Law would be met. It is clear that death had to be paid for by death. *"Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins"* (Heb. 9:22). This is why God provided the whole sacrificial system in the OT, where an animal was sacrificed to take the place of a human. A goat would be chosen on the Day of Atonement, and the priest would lay his hands on it and confess over it all the iniquities of the people of Israel, and all their sins, and send it away into the wilderness (Lev. 16:21) and then sacrifice another goat and make atonement for the people through its blood, *"for it is the blood that makes atonement by the life."* (Lev. 17:11).

This meant that the ransom price was not just a few drops of blood, but the violent death of a substitute. Listen to what **1 Peter 1:18-19** says about this blood offering:

"Knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot."

Jesus was qualified because He was a blemish free sacrifice, a perfect Passover Lamb (Exodus 12:15; Heb. 9:14; John 1:29). His death was required because His blood was precious. His blood was the ransom price that God required, a life for a life, and death for sin. In this ransom price of blood, Jesus obtained the church (Acts 20:28). He freed us from our sins (Revel. 1:6) and ransomed His people (Rev. 5:9). It was effective so it did not have to be repeated (Heb. 10:12). He bought us with a price (1 Cor. 6:20) and thus owns us, allowing us to enjoy being slaves to righteousness and united to our Master and Lord. Think about this for just a second. Jesus loved us so much in the epitome of selflessness, HE gave His life for ours, shedding His precious blood on the cross, becoming a curse, having all of our sin transferred onto Him, bearing the weight of our guilt and shame, experiencing the pouring out of wrath reserved for sinners, so that He could buy us out of slavery and bondage and make us His children. If you believe in Christ today and He is your Lord and Savior, you know that you are highly valued and loved. Your life is precious because it was redeemed with something more valuable than gold and silver. And what do we get?! We get Christ! It's like we just got an in with the most influential and powerful person in the universe, and He thought us valuable enough to that He invested His own life into ours. If I speed on the 118 in Moorpark and name all the CHP officers I know, I may get out of a ticket (not likely). If I know a player on a sports team, I may get into the sporting event. If you are the son of President, you may get out of litigation. But we are known by the Lord of the universe, who gets us out of sin, judgment, and wrath, and brings us into fellowship, peace, and a restored relationship with the Father, and gives us hope in full redemption in the future. We get Jesus! But that is not all.

The RESULT - If redemption was the cause, forgiveness is the effect or result. The idea of forgiveness in the context is the removal of guilt or remission of sin. In classical literature it referred to the release of captives and the cancellation or release from a legal charge,

financial obligation, or punishment.² Sometimes the other words for forgiveness have to do with a temporary suspension of punishment for sins, but not the word Paul used here. “Afesis” means the **permanent cancellation of or release from the punishment for sin because it has been paid for by Christ’s sacrifice**. This means that the effect of Christ’s death on the cross, He offers us forgiveness of ALL our sin, past present and future. He removes our sin as far as the east is from the west (Psalm 103:12). He casts our sins behind His back (Isa. 38:17) and remembers our sin no more -- noting that He doesn’t not FORGET but proactively remembers no more (Isa. 43:25). When He forgives, He casts our sin into the depths of the sea (Micah 7:19). He removes, remembers no more, and casts off, **but He never looks the other way**. He never **waves a magic wand and says ‘forget about it’**. God demanded and received full payment in our redemption so He no longer sees our sin but Christ’ righteousness. There are several implications for su:

- 1) We no longer have to walk in shame or guilt because of our sin. We rank sin by what is sanitized and acceptable in our culture, even church has culture. Gossip -- ok. Sexual sin -- out. Open slander or bad-mouthing others - ok. Dealing with anxiety or depression -- out. On top of this, we hide our past or lock it away in some lock box because if people knew what happened then, what would they think (or how would I even deal with it myself). Forgiveness is total and complete, and though we still must deal **consequences of choices and sinful realities, we can be clean and pure before God, no matter our past.**
- 2) We have the basis of asking for present forgiveness based on living life in the flesh. God’s demand is that we do no sin, but if we do, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation for our sin, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:1-2). So we confess our sins to the Lord, and even each other, knowing that forgiveness is already secure in Jesus’ work. **The penalty and power of sin has been broken, but the presence of sin remains.** So until the day we get redeemed bodies, we will confess our sins openly to the Lord, who is faithful and just to forgive.
- 3) We have the basis now of forgiveness each other. This is difficult and will require a whole sermon to unpack. But for now, we will simply quote **Ephesians 4:32**, that we “forgive one another as God in Christ forgave you.” Forgiving others means that we understand that forgiveness rests with the work of Christ on our behalf, not on someone earning it back. Trust, respect, and submission are other choices we can make after forgiveness, but the act of forgiving is a faith driven decision to remember sin no more, since it has been paid for fully by Christ.

The RICHES - How does this all come to be? How does God apply all of this to such wretched sinners like us? Because He does so **according to, NOT OUT OF, the riches of His grace**. If someone pays you or gives you something OUT OF their wealth, it inherently diminishes their wealth. We give out of a finite amount of resources, but God gives **ACCORDING TO His** riches, where He can lavish, overflow, drench, and shower us with GRACE. Grace given comes from a never-ending supply that is sourced in the goodness and glory of God. How can God forgive us? His grace! How can we forgive others? Grace. How do we continue to walk forward in spite of our sin? Grace. How do we look up after realizing how sinful we really are? Grace. The greater our view of God’s holiness, the deeper our sense and understanding of our sin, the greater understanding of the riches of His grace, which was poured out for our redemption. Which is exactly why we can not receive it, worship, and delight in Christ. This is the basis of worship, obedience, and joy.

The Mystery: God’s grace revealed IN CHRIST (v. 8-10)

² Harold Hoehner, “Ephesians.” P. 207.

Which He lavished upon us, in all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of His will, according to His purpose which He set forth in Christ as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in Him, things in heaven and things on earth

But grace did not stop its lavish nature at the point of salvation. God overflowed in grace to us so that we would have **wisdom and insight** into the mystery of His will. What is this mystery?

When we speak of mystery, we mean to keep things hidden, like the treasure that is sure to be found on Oak Island, a small island off the coast of Nova Scotia that holds the mystery of Templar gold and has been searched by people for centuries, including FDR. (Erin thinks they'll never find it, but I believe it will yield up its secrets soon). When the NT speaks of mystery it means a truth that was previously concealed that is now made known. There are two main things that have been made known to us today that was hidden or concealed in the OT.

- 1) When the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son...(Gal. 4:4) - The first and great mystery is how does a holy God welcome back sinful humanity back to Himself without compromising His glory or holiness? The answer:

"Now to him who is able to strengthen you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery that was kept secret for long ages but has now been disclosed and through the prophetic writings has been made known to all nations, according to the command of the eternal God, to bring about the obedience of faith — to the only wise God be glory forevermore through Jesus Christ! Amen."

Romans 16:25-27

Christ is the revealed mystery, and the gospel is the instrument by which all nations come to obedience through faith. God's grace is what is needed to give wisdom and insight to anyone who could actually see Jesus and comprehend spiritual truth.

- 2) There is a second mystery of the purpose of God's will in Christ, and that has to do with a different fullness of time, when He will unite or **summarize all things under Christ** - This is a point in the future where every knee will bow and tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord (Phil. 2:10-11). This will be a time when Christ will reign Bodley on this earth, and that everything and everyone will be yielded to His headship and lordship. Right now, He is seated at the right hand of God in the heavenly places (Eph. 1:20), far above all rule and authority and power and dominion, and He is head over all thing in the church (Eph. 1:22), which means that no schemes of our enemy will prevail nor the gates of hell itself. However, there will come a time in the future where all authority will bow to Him, and Christ will make all things right and bring justice. Jesus is the preeminent One (Col. 1:18), since all things were created by Him, through Him and for Him. What now Jesus is ruling over from afar He will draw near and gather all things to Himself. In other words, there is coming a day when all things and all people will be about Jesus! That mystery has been made known to us by grace, and it is the hope we hold in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation.

Are you living in a Christless Christian existence? Are you pursuing Christ in a way that acknowledges who He is, that you desire to worship Him, make much of Him, and make Him known? Are you here today because you are redeemed in Christ or for some other reason — even good reasons —but are missing Christ? Today is a day to acknowledge, to repent, and believe. Grace has been given, Christ's blood has been shed, forgiveness is available, and the future is sure. The mystery is revealed to us. Today is a day of salvation for all who hear.