

The Crucifixion: Ransom and Redemption

Jeremiah 31:7-14

Preached by Rev. Craig T. Smith on April 9, 2023

Truly no man can ransom himself, or give to God the price of his life, for the ransom of his life is costly, and can never suffice, that he should continue to live on forever, and never see the pit. – Psalm 49:7-8

A Good Comeback Story

Redemption is not necessarily an unfamiliar topic or concept. Books and movies and series are often described as having a “redemptive” theme. Secular writers use the word “redemption” as well as “deliverance,” or even “liberation.” Redemption is one of the most popular topics in our western culture because of how often it is connected to sentimental story resolutions.

We love comeback stories about how someone was able to experience redemption. However, as often as you read about it and watch it and are entertained by redemption stories, you might come to think that it seems to be readily available and not particularly costly or expensive. We hear arguments made all the time that someone deserves a shot at redemption, even before they have shown any sense of remorse over whatever it was that now has led them to seek out redemption.

When the theme of redemption is applied to Christ’s work, all of that sentimentality falls away as we consider the cost as well as what God has made possible.

The Bible makes many references to redemption, and it also links the idea of redemption to ransom. This link expands the concept of redemption considerably. In fact, several times we see the word redemption connected to the word groups that include what we also call ransom. For example, it appears in Mark’s gospel when Jesus says, “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)

It becomes clear that our redemption is not possible without someone more powerful than us paying a ransom. The weeping prophet, Jeremiah, shared a prophecy about a promise of redemption that is only possible through the Lord paying a ransom. I invite you to turn to Jeremiah 31:7-14. (read text)

Paying the Price

The ideas of ransom and redemption refer to deliverance made possible by a steep price being paid. The early church of the second and third centuries after the resurrection, wrote and thought a lot about the idea of a ransom paid. Several early Church Fathers even suggested that perhaps Jesus himself paid the devil a ransom himself. This was a popular idea even until the Middle Ages when orthodox consensus was that Satan had no claim on or rights to anything, let alone the life of the Son of God. No, Jesus did not pay the devil a ransom for our souls.

But to be clear, Jesus paid a price, a ransom, for our redemption. However, over the years there has been revisions and changes to dump the metaphor of ransom. In fact, the Episcopal hymnal was revised in the 1970's, an attempt was made to remove a verse from a popular Holy Week hymn. The line in question: "There was no other good enough to pay the price for sin/He only could unlock the gate of heaven and let us in."¹

Critics were trying to lesson the emphasis on a "price to be paid." They neglected their Bible readings in 1 Corinthians, apparently, as twice in rapid-fire succession, the Apostle Paul writes, "You were bought with a price." (1 Cor. 6:19-20; 7:23). While the lines were reinstated (under duress), the attempt reveals within the church an ever-growing apathy and even an aversion to the cross as a payment of a price.

However, the resurrection reminds us that redemption must be second nature to us. Redemption is all over the Scripture:

- "Blessed is the Lord, the God of Israel, because He has visited and provided *redemption* for his people." (Luke 1:68)
- "May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to you, Lord, my rock and my Redeemer." (Psalm 19:14)

People are looking for redemption, and rightly so. Those movies and books are proof of that. However, people don't understand the cost of redemption. People either don't know or they have forgotten the price of redemption.

Sin has made our situation dire. Our problem with Sin is so horrible that it cannot be remedied in any normal, typical, ordinary way. Jeremiah mentioned that people were captive to a power that was beyond our ability.

¹ Hymn text from "There is a Green Hill Far Away" written by Cecil Francis Alexander (1818-1895), Episcopal Hymnal #167.

It is a power that is light years stronger than we are. Sin is a great weight and power. And unless we have considered what Sin cost us, we don't understand what Christ did to buy us back, to redeem us. The buying back was not cheap.

Jesus himself, through the crucifixion, paid the price by suffering the consequences of Sin. That is the "price." That is the ransom. A perfect sacrifice had to be paid to buy back those who were captive to Sin. And this purchase price was beyond the capacity and capability of any of us. Only the Lord could ransom us and redeem us from the power of one stronger than us.

Jeremiah has us thinking about the concept of "payment." The Lord will pay a ransom for our redemption. In the Old Testament this would have been understood as a sort of legal exchange. It was paid by the Redeemer. In Old Testament understanding, this Redeemer would have been connected to the concept of a kinsman redeemer, one who had a familial relationship with the person or people being redeemed. The Redeemer would pay a ransom price to buy back (redeem) a life that was forfeited for some reason. The word we translate as ransom is *kopher* in Hebrew. *Kopher* conveys the idea of substitution: one thing offered in exchange for another as a compensation or a cover.

Our Redeemer was our compensation, our ransom, our cover. The Lord ransomed us by trading places with us. The Old Testament is clear. God himself was involved as our kinsman Redeemer who paid a ransom by taking the place of anyone – male and female, Jew and Gentile, slave and free (Gal. 3:28).

Not A Lever Puller

God himself is involved in our deliverance. He did not Venmo us deliverance. He didn't push a button and send money into our PayPal account. God himself, in the form of the God the Son, stepped into our situation. Personally. The ransom paid was costly to God. Jesus was crucified to pay the ransom that covered us and redeemed us.

Sin was a power that held us – holds people – in bondage. Sin was a controlling power over every person. People must be delivered from it. Deliverance was achieved with a price. That price was crucifixion. The cross. Jesus paid the price, the ransom, which led to our redemption.

When we read about the crucifixion and the resurrection in the New Testament, it carries forward this idea from Jeremiah in the Old Testament. Redemption means deliverance by purchase at cost.

The crucifixion of Christ was commensurate – in proportion to – to the power of Sin and Death. By submitting to them on the cross, Jesus conquered them. In Jesus, there is a power strong enough to deliver the entire human race. Once for all.

The Risen Lord has become the only hope you have to ever experience freedom from Sin because he paid our ransom by taking our place. Because Jesus did that, we can be redeemed. You and I and everyone has a Redeemer. What does that mean?

A Redeemer is an advocate who pleads a cause and protects His property: “Do not remove an ancient landmark or enter the fields of the fatherless; for their *Redeemer* is strong; He will plead their cause against you.” (Prov. 23:10-11)

A Redeemer will provide justice and right a wrong: “You championed my cause, Lord; you *redeemed* my life. Lord, you saw the wrong done to me; judge my case.” (Lamentations 3:58-59)

A Redeemer paid a precious and costly price, a king’s ransom. Except it is not the King who is being ransomed, rather the King is doing the ransoming: “Instead of your being deserted and hated, with no one passing through, I will make you an object of eternal pride, a joy from age to age...you will know that I, the Lord, am your Savior and *Redeemer*, the Mighty One of Jacob. I will bring gold instead of bronze; I will bring silver instead of iron, bronze instead of wood, and iron instead of stones...violence will never again be heard of in your land; devastation and destruction will be gone from your borders...the sun will no longer be your light by day, and the brightness of the moon will not shine on you. The Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your splendor.” (Isaiah 60:15-19)

The Redeemer has come. He has provided a powerful redemption and deliverance.

Through his crucifixion and resurrection, Jesus not only redeemed us from bondage, but He also provided atonement for sin. He paid the ultimate price, a ransom for many, a once for all time sacrifice. The cost for our redemption was his death. And through His resurrection, we rejoice at the completed transaction.

An Easter Faith

Our great redemption story has been laid out for us. Jesus paid the ransom that will bring anyone over from death into life. The crucifixion can bring anyone over from sin into righteousness.

And the resurrection is the sign of the power and purpose of God. By this resurrection power alone are we able to confess the faith of Christ crucified on our behalf and in our place.

I hear people describe their faith as “a spiritual faith.” They mean some weird, ambivalently vague faith. If you are a Christian, if you believe in the crucifixion as being the ransom paid for your redemption, if you believe in the resurrection power that enables you to live and testify for Christ, than yours – and mine – is an EASTER faith.

While we have spend several weeks focused on the resurrection, let's end these four weeks and the Good Friday sermon with this declaration: If Christ were not raised from the dead, you and I would never have heard of him. Thousands upon thousands of people were crucified by the Romans. Of all of these people, only the name of Jesus of Nazareth is known to us today. Rome's plan was to banish Jesus into oblivion and anonymity. But within weeks, that name was proclaimed as the name above all names (Acts 4:12). “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile, and you are still in your sins.” (1 Cor. 15:17)

The resurrection vindicated the crucifixion and enabled all who believed in Him to understand what that ransom made possible. Redemption.

FURTHER THOUGHTS

What are some comeback or redemption stories that are popular in the news? What issues or problems are people coming back from? From what have these been redeemed?

What songs or hymns deal with the concepts of ransom and redemption? What songs or verses are you familiar with concerning a Redeemer?

What comfort is there in considering the idea that Jesus was our kinsman Redeemer?

Jeremiah 31 promises great rejoicing, joy, and victory to come with the Redeemer. Have you experienced that same feeling in your own life with Christ? If yes, how so? If not, why is that do you think?

ANNOUNCEMENTS:

THERE IS NO WEDNESDAY MORNING BIBLE STUDY THIS WEEK!

Silver Wings Update: Silver Wings Ministry was going to see “Hello Dolly” on Wednesday July 19th but that showing is sold out. However, they were able to secure 20 seats for the performance on Friday July 21st at 2:30PM. The cost is \$38 for seniors. Interested? Contact Cindy Everhart for more information.

Silver Wings Picnic and Egg Hunt: April 19th, 12PM Bring a brown bag lunch!

1st Quarter Reports Due April 10th: The business meeting is scheduled for Monday April 24th at 6PM. Reports for the book of reports are due by April 10th.

The Constitution and Bylaws Committee has proposed a new constitution and bylaws to replace the current edition being utilized by the church. The church family is invited to read, prayerfully reflect on changes recommended, and vote on at the next business meeting. There will be a Church Town Hall style meeting with Pastor Craig and representatives of the Constitution and Bylaws committee on Sunday April 16th at 4PM at the church if you have any questions about changes being proposed. If you have a smartphone, you can find the new constitution on the church’s app.

Pastor Craig, the deacons and finance committee recommend the transitional hiring of Richard Marsh as our Financial Administrator.

Richard has degrees in accounting and has served as both an accountant in the secular marketplace and as an Executive/Administrative Pastor in a sister church in our community. Pay would be a continuation of what is currently budgeted for that position. We are excited to see how God uses Richard to help lead us in the days ahead.