

Out of the Ashes

Twelve Stories of Redemption

A Bible Study Workbook by Matthew Allen

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Why This Study?

Lesson 1

What It Means to Be Redeemed

Introduction

In the New Testament there are five legal words used from Greco-Roman vocabulary to describe God's work in saving us.¹ *Justification* is used to describe a guilty sinner standing accused before God, but he or she is declared "not guilty," or righteous before God.² *Forgiveness* is used to describe us as we stand before God as a debtor and receive a cancellation of that debt.³ *Adoption* is where we come before God as a stranger but are made a son or daughter.⁴ *Reconciliation* is where a person stands before God as an enemy but is made a friend.⁵ And finally, *redemption* is where a person stands before God as a slave of sin and receives freedom.⁶

Redemption.

We're familiar with it in our time, but maybe not as much as other cultures and ages.

During ancient times the idea of redemption found its origin in warfare. The victor would take prisoners and let it be known that they could be released for a price. The process of recovering those who had been lost was called *redemption* and the price paid to set them free was known as the *ransom*.⁷ Typically, there would be an intermediary⁸ who moved to secure the redemption.

However, redemption is much more than paying a price to secure the release of another person. Inherent in it is the understanding of the total misery and hopelessness of the captives. There is a scene of *desperation*, where if redemption doesn't come ... they will continue to suffer and eventually die in that condition. The intermediary *must* act, and he must act with *urgency*. Once the ransom has been paid and freedom gained, those who have been *delivered* know very well that their liberation did not come by their own means or power ... but by someone else.

¹ See MacArthur, John F., Jr. "Redemption Through His Blood: Richer Than You Think." *John MacArthur Sermon Archive*. Panorama City, CA: Grace to You, 2014.

² See Romans 4.2-4; 5.1, 9; Galatians 2.16-27; 3.11.

³ See Ephesians 1.7; Colossians 2.13-14.

⁴ See John 1.12-13; Romans 8.14-17, 23; Ephesians 1.5.

⁵ See Romans 5.8-11; 2 Corinthians 5.18-21; Colossians 1.20-22.

⁶ See Galatians 3.13-14.

⁷ Hawthorne, Gerald F., Ralph P. Martin, and Daniel G. Reid, eds. *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993, p. 784.

⁸ The Hebrews had a word for the intermediary: *gō'ēl*. It is often used to speak of God, who is our deliverer. "Therefore tell the Israelites: I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from the forced labor of the Egyptians and rescue you from slavery to them. I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and great acts of judgment," Exodus 6.6.

Redemption, Restoration, and Rest in the Gospels

As we read the gospels, we find many different people interacting with Jesus. The writers share stories of individuals from all walks of life, ranging from the top to the bottom of the scale in socio-economic and educational status. They all had a story. Many who came to Him were in desperate need requiring immediate action to be delivered from their terrible circumstances. How did Jesus respond? Repeatedly, the gospel writers shine the light on the way He opened His heart to personally interact with them. In those very touching moments these individuals were one-on-one with the Son of God. Can you imagine what that must have been like? Think of the gravity of the moment. The total focus of the Creator is on you and your need. *You have His undivided attention.* And even more amazing, is how Jesus did this under the constant pressure of being in demand. Passages like Matthew 9.35 are common where we are told *Jesus continued going around to all the towns and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and every sickness.* All of this, while, as each day passed, the cross looms more in sight.

Every story in the gospels has been recorded for a purpose. First, they were written down and preserved *so that you may believe*, John 20.30-31. But they have also been given to us for the purpose of reminder. We were desperate in our need for redemption and salvation. We had an overwhelming need for *deliverance.*

This is an important matter we must keep in mind as we interact with the lost and work to fill our congregations with an atmosphere of healing. God has called on us to share the good news about the spiritual healing we have received with others. In addition to that, we share the message of hope of deliverance from mental and emotional wounds that life inflicts. In short, we share the best news ever! God says, "I'll buy you back," "I'll remake you so that you can be used for the glory for which you were created." The God who created us sees us in our brokenness, stepped down from glory humbling Himself by becoming a servant, and reaches into our lives for good.

Our Purpose with These Lessons

What did it mean to be a leper during the time of Jesus? What would life be like for a paralytic in Palestine? Did you know there were many in the Jewish community who believed these conditions were a punishment from God for some type of wrong committed? This would mean that besides the physical difficulties you had, and the perceptions associated with it, that you would be at an even greater disadvantage when interacting with people in the community. *You must be a sinner. You have failed. We haven't fallen to your level.*

What would it have been like to be perpetually unclean in the eyes of Jewish religious law as you battled the infirmities associated with having an issue of blood? Blindness and being mute are debilitating. Can you imagine being caught in the act of an embarrassing sin and then brought out in the open to be confronted about with your accusers having no regard for your personal dignity? What would it have been like to be known as the village *sinner*? And finally, can you imagine being the thief on the cross? There is no more desperate situation. You're staring death in the face, all the while enduring

unimaginable pain. You're guilty and deserve the sentence you're undergoing. Next to you is the Son of God. How much courage must it have taken for this man to have a dialogue with Jesus?

Every one of the persons we observe in these stories inside the gospels is connected to each other ... and ultimately to us.

- They were taken captive by circumstances that overpowered them. Some of them wound up where they did because of matters outside their control. No one asks to be paralyzed. Others entered their newfound situations after poor decision making and sin. *How they got there doesn't matter.* Now that they were there, they were powerless to remove themselves. They had been captured and were being held against their will. *Sin held us against our will.*
- They were all in misery. Circumstances were dire. There is no joy to be found when a demon possesses you. Living in a graveyard is never pleasant. The pain, stigma, discomfort, and worsening conditions were all signs of the inevitable end looming on the horizon Death. The situation could only be described as *desperate*. Can you remember? *We found ourselves in a desperate situation too.*
- They were all in need of a deliverer. Someone outside of the situation who had both the desire and the means to remove them from danger. Someone who was divine and possessed power outside of our natural world. Someone moved with righteous anger who would punish the one responsible for holding them captive. Someone who wanted to lift them up out of the pit. Someone whose motives were driven by pity, compassion, and love. Someone who saw who they *could be* rather than what they *were*. They found deliverance in Jesus. *So did we.*

How Will We Respond?

Jesus is the great physician and *by His stripes we are healed*, Isaiah 53.5. Every day, as we grow together as disciples, we share in His healing. When people meet with our local congregation, they should see Jesus again and again, in newer and deeper ways, as they spend time with us. In so doing, we invite them to experience the same redemption we have, being delivered from Satan's domain, transferred into God's glorious kingdom, Colossians 1.13. We show them how, in the kingdom, God remakes us and turns us into glorious images that reflect His love and character. We offer the best news anyone could receive: the life-changing, world transforming power of the gospel!

Are you excited? Let's embark on this intriguing and challenging study on twelve stories of redemption.

For Thought and Reflection

1. What are the five words from Greco-Roman times that describe God's work in saving us? What is associated with *redemption*?
2. For what was redemption known in ancient times?

3. What is inherent in the concept of redemption?

4. In what way did Jesus interact with those who came to Him for healing? What is so special about that?

5. What should be the message we share with the lost?

6. What are some of the things every human has in common when it comes to the need for redemption?

7. Place yourself in the shoes of the thief on the cross. What would it have been like to have a dialogue with Jesus? What are some things we can admire about his faith?

8. How apt are you to speak of your deliverance by Jesus?

9. How can you talk about it more?

10. What do you want to learn the most out of this series of lessons?