

Get the Recap! Ephesians 1: 7-10

First Presbyterian Church
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

September 10, AD 2023
Gerrit Scott Dawson



I love my CBS Sports App. To me, it's a lot more straightforward than other sports apps. After I check the score of a game, if I want to read more about it, I can simply press *Recap*. There I get a summary of what happened. I read the story of the game. That's what a recap is, right? A retelling of something. We put the story under headings of different parts of the game that make up the whole. The recap includes the highlights of the event. As we get into our text, I just want you to hold that word "recap" in your mind. It's a word we all understand. And it happens to be the word that describes the key to the whole cosmos. More on that later.

We're jumping back into this long, breathless opening sentence of Paul's letter to the Ephesians. He wants to remind this young church of all they have in Christ. Though they're a tiny minority in their city, Paul assures them they have a huge hope. Starting in vs. 7, we read.

In [Christ] we have redemption through his blood,
The forgiveness of our trespasses,
According to the riches of his grace.

If you are in Christ, what do you get? You get *redemption*. That's a word we use in athletics. The kicker who missed a crucial extra point in one game gets a chance to kick the game winning field goal in the next game. In the recap of the game we read that the kicker said, "After last week, I just wanted a shot at redemption. I wanted to show that I can come through in the clutch." Fans and players lost faith in him last week. This week, he *redeemed* himself. He got back their trust.

In Paul's day, people who were in debt might be sold into service as slaves. For a price, they could be bought out of slavery. If you bought the freedom of a slave, you redeemed him. His debts are cleared. He gets back his life.

That's what Paul is talking about with us. In Christ, we got bought back from our slavery to self-centered, damaging, idolatrous actions. To put it starkly, we got bought back from our slavery to sin. We got freed by Jesus to re-enter a

harmonious relationship with God. We got freed to move towards reconciled relationships with one another. Redemption means freedom. A fresh start. Restoration. Getting back to what we are meant to be.

So how? How does this work? Paul says we were redeemed by the *blood* of Christ. Blood represents life. One translation says, “the life of every creature is in its blood” (Lev.17:14, NLT). Christ gives his life in exchange for our life. Now it’s very easy to miss the depth of this. If we’ve been around the church a long time, we may well view redemption as a transaction. Jesus pays my tab. He takes care of the bill. He trades his blood for my life so I can be forgiven. Yes, that’s true. But there is also more going on. It’s a lot deeper than having a ticket paid for me.

Let’s think closely about four ways Christ redeems us by his blood.

1) He takes up our flesh and blood. God is spirit. He’s not made of skin and bone, blood and sweat. But in coming to us as Jesus, the eternal Son of God took blood to himself. He lived as a human. In order to give his blood for our redemption, he had to have real blood. He had to be one of us. So,

2) Christ Jesus shed his blood for us on the cross. He gave his life for our life. He ransomed us. But that is not the whole story. Think of this.

3) Jesus renews our blood in his rising. After he died, he rose. His heart started beating again. His blood circulated. He was still a man. But something else. The resurrected Jesus would never die again. Unlike all of us, Jesus lives forever in his resurrected body. He took our blood as his own. He shed that blood on the cross. Then he renewed our blood in his rising. But there’s still more.

4) He shares his blood with us now in communion. It’s no accident that Jesus gave us this sign of our continuing union with him. “This is my blood, shed for you.” Paul writes, “The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a *participation*, a communion, in the blood of Christ?” (I Cor.10:16). We share spiritually in the blood of Christ as we partake of him by faith. The given sign of that sharing of blood is the Lord’s Supper. And the Lord’s Supper points us to the reality that we are now one blood with Jesus, and each other.

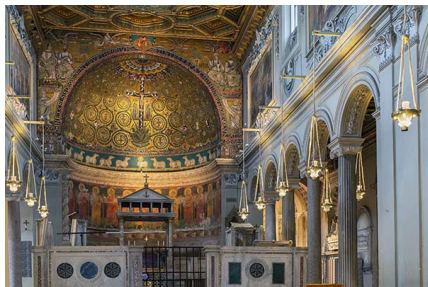
Paul is saying so much when he says “In Christ, we have redemption through his blood.” All of this flows from the riches of Christ’s grace. Paul says that Christ has lavished this grace on us. It’s like those movies where people bathe in money because they’re suddenly so rich. Except that it truly satisfies. We get lathered with the grace of God in Jesus Christ. We get in on his plan. And his plan is huge.

Paul writes that God has a plan “for the fullness of time, to unite all things in [Christ], things in heaven and things on earth.” He wants to bring everything together under the joyful, grace-filled, life-giving reign of Jesus Christ. The whole cosmos. Everything.

Now here’s where we get to bring back the word we started with. *Recap*. Because this verse is more literally saying that God’s plan is to recap all things in Christ. He wants to sum up everything and re-state it in Jesus. To make it new. To order the world the way it was always meant to be. Because recap means to re-head. To order everything from the top down. The heading of your article recapping the game tells you what everything you read below that headline is going to be about. Christ Jesus is the head. He’s the headline. He’s the title. Now, Jesus still has his resurrection body. But in another sense, Jesus’ body is the church. All the people connected to him by the Spirit. The head supplies direction that keeps everything alive and ordered. And Paul is telling us that Jesus our head is going to bring all things, spiritual and physical, under his rule and ordering.



I want so much to give you a picture of this. And so I keep returning to an ancient church which puts this all together in one stunning image. Not far from the Coliseum, on a relatively quiet street in Rome, the church of San Clemente is easily passed by. It doesn’t look like much. But inside there is treasure.



The front of the sanctuary has a quarter dome, called an apse. Thousands upon thousands of colored stones create the image. I know you can’t see what’s depicted yet. I just wanted to give you a sense of the inside of the church. Now let’s zoom in for an overview, and then some detail.



Look inside the dome. You see a semicircle with bright bands of gold and blue, radiating downward. That’s the heavenly realm. Below that glory is the cross. Jesus is the very center of everything. Beneath the cross is a leafy plant. It’s a vine. As you look, you realize that from that plant under the cross, vines are swirling out in circles to fill the whole

dome. Around this dome, there are some Latin words inscribed. It's a quote from the first Christmas. The words of the angels from Luke 2, with a slight twist. You know how it goes. "Glory to God in the highest. Peace on earth. Good will toward men." So is this a Christmas picture? Here's the twist. "Glory to God in the highest, *to him who sits on the throne*, peace on earth..." To him who sits on the throne? Wait. Where is there a throne in this picture? I see only a cross. What's going on? We look on the left, just outside the dome and see an old bearded man. That's Isaiah the prophet. Let's zoom in on him.



Isaiah has a scroll. What does it say? It's from chapter 6. "I saw the LORD, sitting on a throne, high and lifted up." Again, this idea of the throne. We read around the apse, "Glory to God in the highest, to him who sits on the throne." Now Isaiah looks at Jesus on the cross and says, "I see the LORD sitting on his throne." The throne of God is the cross! Jesus rules from the rough beams of the wood. The glory of God is seen in the shame of the cross! Let's zoom out just a tad on that cross.



Do you see the hand at the top? That's the hand of God letting down the cross into the world. This is God giving his only Son. There is Jesus with arms outstretched, his love wide open to everyone. The base of the cross is planted in the earth, and from it grows the vine. Someone has commented that it looks like the hand of God is thrusting the sword of the cross into the earth. And where the cross plunges into the ground, life grows. The cross becomes the tree of life. And the branches of that tree spread everywhere. So let's go one more place. Let's look at the vine that grows from the cross.



The vine grows all around people. People of all different kinds. Men, women, children. People reading. People tending sheep. People feeding chickens. People working and playing. All of this happening in harmony. The vine is the church, the body of Christ who is our head. He makes all things new. He brings the whole world back into harmony. Ruling from the throne, the

sacrifice of the cross, his glory spreads everywhere. And as an ancient theologian said, “The glory of God is man fully alive” (Irenaeus).



Nine hundred years ago, artists created a beautiful picture of God’s plan. To unite all things in Christ. To *recap* the whole creation. That is, to say it all over again, but now restored. Now re-ordered by the rule of Jesus, Jesus who reigns from the throne of sacrifice. The heart of reality is love that lays down his life for the world.

So what does this have to do with our daily life? Because I know that most times when I present this verse, people can’t take it in. All things united under the headship of Christ? That seems impossible. That seems so far away. What does this do for me now in a world of bullies and swindlers, chaos and crime? Paul wrote these words to a world every bit as much of a mess as ours is now. Sexual chaos. Religious and ethnic and cultural diversity, often in conflict. Exploitation of the poor. Slavery. Rampant abortion. High taxes. Terrible medical care. Short life spans. Violence. And, only a handful of Christians in the whole world. Paul looked out on a heaving sea of sorrow and lostness. And still declared that God’s plan for the fullness of time is the uniting of all things under the headship of Christ. The God who reigns is the God who took up the shame of the cross. That is his throne. The way of life is the way of sacrificial love.

You might look out on the world and wonder, “Where is all this going?” The church looks at the mess straight on and declares with all the defiance of a love that will not die, “Christ Jesus is the head. He makes all things new. And this old world will yield to the new heavens and the new earth. That’s the side of history that I’m on. The history of the crucified God who will set all things right. And the purpose of my faith is to show that truth by the way I love. To share that truth by the stories I tell and the gospel I proclaim.” So let me *recap* this for you. In Christ we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace which he lavished upon us. And in Christ God has made known where all this is going. The cross has become the tree of life which will extend to reorder and remake the whole cosmos. That’s what’s coming. That’s how I want to live my life now.”