

# *Ransomed by Precious Blood*

*I Peter 1: 13-21*

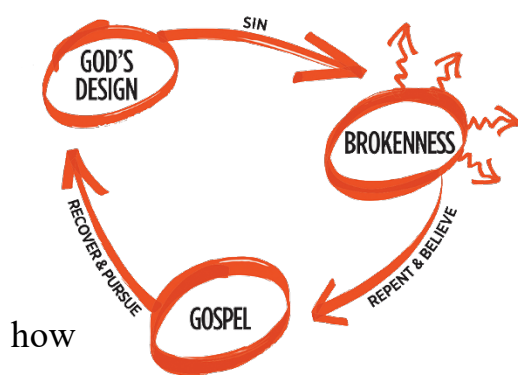
**First Presbyterian Church  
Baton Rouge, Louisiana**

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We have a huge passage this morning which begins with a small word: *therefore*. “Therefore” looks backwards to something already established as true. And “therefore” looks forward to what that true fact beckons us to do in the future. Therefore means, “Here’s a fact, so act!” Peter tells us that based on all Christ Jesus has done in giving us new life and new hope, we can start living out of our new identity. Here’s a *fact*: you’re in Christ now. So *act*: live in this hope according to the house rules of your new family.

There’s so much going on in this passage, that I’ve been looking for a simple key to approach it that will unlock its treasures. This past summer at our denomination’s General Assembly, we talked a lot about putting the “E” back in our name. We’re the Evangelical Presbyterian Church. Evangelical is an ancient word that describes those who build their lives around the evangel: the good news that God has come to us in Jesus Christ. Evangelical is not a political part or a voting block or a demographic. We can’t give away that word. It means people of the Good News intent on sharing that Good News with a lost and hurting world. So they taught us a simple but effective way to show and say the Good News with a graphic and a few words. It’s called the 3 Circles.



You draw 3 circles on a napkin or a tablet or a whiteboard. Each circle represents an arena or stage in the human journey. The circle on the top left represents God’s design. His will for human flourishing. What we were made to be in a life of love, giving, harmony and creativity. That stage is a memory in us of life is supposed to be. The second circle represents the present experience of most We’re not flourishing. We’re burdened and

can’t ever quite make life work. The third circle is the Good News about Jesus. God’s Son came into the world and lived and died filled with love and faithfulness. As you narrate the story, the circles are the nouns, the stages. The arrows are the verbs. They are the action that moves us between circles. We get from God’s

design to brokenness by sin. Sin is our intentional choices to move away from what we know is right to what we decide is preferable for us. Sin is departing from God's design to pursue life as our own gods, as those who choose what we think is best. This inevitably leads to brokenness.

The squiggly arrows coming out from the brokenness arena represent our attempts to get life back on track, albeit still on our own terms. We chase success. Or intimacy. Or ecstasy. Or authority. Or position. Or control. Or even harmony. But we keep messing up. We can't get back to the wholeness and peace we long for.

The great news is that God has done something about our brokenness and the sin problem that underlies it. He has entered the world in Jesus to remake our humanity. To be the man who truly lived by God's design. Jesus remained faithful even as he experienced the most dire and devastating effects of our sin and brokenness. He went to the place where all sin leads, the place of isolation and forsakenness and abandonment, cut off from God and everyone else. But after he had died, his Father raised him from the dead. He broke the power of sin on the cross and the power of death on Easter. Joined to Jesus, we can be forgiven of sin and restored to a right relationship with God.

But the power and blessing of this third circle doesn't just happen to us. Someone has to send an arrow from the Gospel arena to our broken stage of life. Someone has to tell us the Good News in a way backed up by love and care. That becomes an invitation for us to make the journey out of brokenness and self-centeredness and into Jesus. But that's no automatic thing. We repent, we change our minds about all the futile ways we tried to fix brokenness on our own terms. We confess that we have fallen from God's design. And we move toward Jesus in faith. With trusting belief we ask him to take us into his gospel circle. And he does!

Then we discover through the years something wonderful. God's Holy Spirit enters our hearts when we trust in Jesus. The Spirit begins shaping us to be more and more like God's original design for us. He sets us free to be more ourselves than we ever could be on our own. And he lets us have part of his massive project of calling others from the circle of brokenness into the arena of Good News. That's what it means to be evangelical. 3 Circles: God's Design, Human Brokenness, Christ's Redemption. Our journey is about moving through these circles in ever deeper, truer ways. Cool, right? You can get an app on your iPhone to take someone through the circles, and even show a 4 minute video.

Now let's see how the 3 circles become a key to this passage from Peter today. Peter says, "Therefore." Because you moved from the circle of brokenness to the circle of the gospel, keep your life set on the future God has for you: you will be brought fully into the circle of God's design for communion and love. Don't go backwards! You're a child of the heavenly Father now. Christ Jesus is your brother. Live according to your new family rules. Don't go back to the old ways. Be holy, that is, realize that you are no longer at home in the circle of brokenness. You still live in the broken world. But your homeland is God's circle. You're an exile in this world. Don't try to fit in. Don't go back to "the passions of your former ignorance."

What a great descriptive phrase that is! You used to not know any better. You used to keep hoping that destructive ways would lead to fulfillment. You believed that your desires were all good and healthy, but they weren't. They were leading you to ruin. Do you remember the desires of your former ignorance?

- Getting even is necessary for me to save face and keep my place.
- Lying will get me out of this.
- Now is all. You only live once. So do whatever you want to seize the day.
- Cover your tracks and keep the dirt hidden.
- Get high, however you can, it's the only pleasure there is.
- Use people before they use you.
- A little on the side won't hurt. What she doesn't know...
- Distractions are enough: gambling, porn, shots and chasers will fill you.
- You've got to move people out of the way to move yourself up.

Do you remember feeling, thinking, doing these things that always led to destruction? Former ignorance based on desire. It never fixed anything. But the lure to return to old ways is always there.

Peter moves us to another level. "You were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers." This is more than just what our desires conjure up. We get passed certain ways of coping with life. Our families of origin and the cultures we're raised in pass along as if by osmosis the habitual ways we relate to others and the world. These habits may save us in the short term from terrifying pain. But overtime they prove futile. They undo us and our deep quest to love and be loved. Do you recognize any of this poisonous inheritance:

- Anger is not allowed in this house. So I have to stuff it down. It only comes out when I explode and make a real mess of things
- I have to maintain my looks and keep up my charm or I won't be able to get people to do stuff for me
- Money drove my parents apart. I have to make a lot of money so I won't get divorced.
- People always leave me. Whenever I get close to someone, I sabotage the relationship so at least I am in control of the abandonment.
- I only feel significant if I am in the inner ring of whatever I am involved in.
- If people really saw who I am, they'd know I'm a fraud.
- I don't want to try too hard because I am not worthy of doing well. I can't handle success.
- I can't show weakness or I'll be steam rolled. I can't be indecisive or I'll be lost. I have to be right in order to keep from being shamed.
- It's just too hard and frightening to speak the truth, so I just put up with it.
- I've got to work harder to justify my education, my wealth, my dreams, my existence.

The circle of generational brokenness can seem like a prison as secure as Angola. Our true design, our deepest heart, our fondest hopes have been kidnapped by all the diminishing strategies we've used to survive.

We can doubt that the redemption that is in Jesus is really sufficient for such strong bondage. The inner voices are so much more powerful than any outward challenges. Payment in currency wouldn't really get us free from this kidnapper. We need a ransom that works from the inside, the very inside of us and then moves outward to our external circumstances.

So Peter assures us. You were not ransomed with perishable things like silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ. Blood is life. It was life on life that we got ransomed. Life for life. Jesus' life for our life. We have to be careful here. Familiarity with the descriptions has led too many of us to see redemption as a kind of financial transaction: he buys us back. A legal maneuver that gets us out of jail because Christ takes the rap. Those images are true as far as they go. But our ransom works at a much deeper level.

Here's a question. To whom was the ransom paid? Christian thinkers have debated that for centuries. Was it the devil that held us captive by his deceit? So did Jesus pay the devil to set us free? Impossible! God does not negotiate with

terrorists. The devil's claim on us is illegitimate. So did God pay himself the ransom? Was God holding us as captives away from God? You don't pay ransom for what you already own.

*We* are the captives. And *we* are the captors. Our sinful choices have delivered us into permanent bondage to our sinful nature. We've enslaved ourselves! But we do not have the power to free ourselves. So God foresaw a plan before the world was made. A man sinned and brought the human race to ruin. A man would have to free the human race. A man would have to arise to break the generational captivity to sin and self. A man would have to come who would be faithful to God's design his whole life. He would be the obedient child of his loving, just heavenly Father. He would love God with all his heart, soul, mind and strength. His faithfulness would make him the first truly free human being since the Garden of Eden. But more, he would have to exhaust the power of captivity to self-centeredness. He would have to go to where our attempting to be our own gods always leads. He would have to go to utter forsakenness and isolation, to the very hell of separation from God and all human communion. The most obedient man would have to take the place of the most disobedient. He who knew no sin would have to be sin. From that position, for it really to work from the root up, from utter dereliction he would have to cry in faith "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit!"

Then, our captivity to sin would cease. The ransom of faithfulness would be paid within a human life. Then the defeat of death could occur in resurrection. Humanity remade in one man, Jesus Christ. The man who was the Son of God come among us. He takes as his own all the pain and distortion from the futile ways of life inherited from our forefathers. Then he reconnects us to our heavenly Father. To our true design.

Jesus lives out the first circle, the circle of God's design, right within the circle of brokenness. So he shatters that second circle from the inside out. We don't have to be captive to losing strategies of self, self, self. We are taken into Jesus, the new man, the third circle of redeemed humanity. He unites us back to the first circle and more, to an eternal communion with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Now, says Peter, do you really want to go back to the ridiculous futile ways of your former ignorance? Do you still want to pick up dead things and see if you can poke them alive? Do you still want to fit in with a world captive and crushed under its defiant enthronement of self? Of course not! Keep the arrows moving.

Keep believing and repenting and moving from the circle of sin to the circle of the gospel. More and more, deeper and deeper. The man for all men and women, boys and girls, Jesus, paid such a price to ransom you. Live in that freedom!