



THE PAYMENT

SERIES: THE RESTORATION OF MANKIND

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Ephesians 1:7-8

Third Message

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As I watched the Presidential election returns on television the other night, the commentators were holding forth on the many changes we should expect under the new administration. One reporter seemed to sum up the feeling of many when he said, "On the one hand, we have a Democratic President and Democratic Congress, thus for the first time in many years the Congressional log-jam is broken and they have a new freedom to implement any program they want; on the other hand, they have no money."

How quickly we become disillusioned with the promises of men! People commit to certain schemes and programmes, but they lack the resources and the will to follow through on their promises. However, when someone commits to do something, and then makes the choices necessary to follow through on what they promised, and in the process pay the price demanded, how that changes everything. A few years ago my wife and I began planning a vacation in England to celebrate our twentieth wedding anniversary. I had two free round-trip tickets through one of the airlines' mileage programmes, and last Christmas I redeemed all of those miles I had travelled and gave the tickets to Emily. Our anniversary trip had been bought and paid for and there was no turning back. We both felt a great sense of satisfaction that what we had committed to do was coming to pass.

We have been studying in the glorious opening words of the book of Ephesians the blessings that Christians have in Christ. First, we learned that God the Father chose us from before the foundation of the world. Today we will see that he also secured the payment necessary to make our redemption possible.

I will begin by reading the opening statement of the blessing. Ephesians 1:3-6:

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavens in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before Him. In love he predestined us to adoption as sons through Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, which He freely bestowed on us in the Beloved.

And now the text that we will examine today, verses 7, 8:

In Him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins according to the riches of His grace which He lavished upon us.

Thus we come to the second blessing that we have in Christ, redemption from our transgressions.

I. The Meaning of Redemption

(a) The Definition of Redemption

The word redemption comes from the background of the slave market. It was used to describe deliverance from the power of an alien force that had taken dominion over a life, tyrannizing it

with hardship and abuse. The process of redemption involved three steps: 1) The payment of a purchase price in order to "buy back" (redeem) someone from slavery; 2) the restoration of the slave to one who possessed a more fundamental right and interest in him than the slave owner; and 3) this was followed by a manifestation of ecstatic joy on the part of the slave because of his newly purchased freedom. So redemption involved a price to be paid, a restoration of relationship, and an intense joy that was experienced in new-found freedom.

Next we will seek to discover what the word redemption meant to people living in Paul's day.

(b) Its Significance to the Greek

This notion of redemption would have had a great impact on the Greek world of Ephesus. Slaves made up a large proportion of the population in the Roman Empire. Historians, in fact, estimate that approximately one-third of the population of Rome were slaves. In that world slaves were considered as non-persons even by the classical philosophers. Aristotle wrote, "A slave is a living tool, just as a tool is an inanimate slave." Cato advised, "Sell worn-out oxen, blemished cattle..., old tools, an old slave, a sickly slave, and whatever else is useless." But the message of the gospel was redemption through Christ. It was he who bought men and women out of the slave market, purchasing their freedom through his precious blood. Is it any wonder that many became Christians and found true worth and dignity through the gospel.

But another grouping in this first century world, although they apparently were free, were almost as enslaved as the slaves who toiled night and day in the empire. I am referring to women. The ancient Greeks thought very little of women. They treated them as chattel, and put them almost on the same level as slaves. Women seldom ventured outside the home; even household chores were done by slaves. In only two realms, as prostitutes and priestesses, professions highly regarded in Ephesus, could women rise to equal status or perhaps even surpass men in influence. We have already seen that the city housed a three-story brothel. Ephesus also was the home of the great temple of Artemis. Although prostitutes were the most emancipated of women, however, the price of their emancipation was the shame of their occupation: They bore the stigma of selling sex as a profession. But then, through the preaching of the gospel, came the word redemption. God was far more interested in these women than the union of pimps who used them for their own profit, and this God had given testimony of his love by sacrificing his own Son to purchase their freedom from sin and death.

This notion of redemption then would have had a profound impact on both slaves and women in the Greek world.

But there was another world where this word would resound with significance.

(c) Its Significance to the Jew

Israel, of course, was born in slavery in Egypt. The nation en-

dured 400 years of cruel, bitter servitude in that land, building cities for Pharaoh. But in Exodus 3, God told Moses, “I have surely seen the affliction of My people who are in Egypt, and have given heed to their cry because of their taskmasters, for I am aware of their sufferings.” God bared his holy arm and unleashed ten plagues on Egypt, the last of which, the death of their first-born children, was the purchase price of Israel’s freedom. Israel, of course, sprinkled the blood of an unblemished lamb on their doorposts so that the Angel of Death would pass over them and not strike dead their firstborn. For the Jew, therefore, this idea of redemption would conjure up a great show of power, involving nations and people, that they might have freedom to serve a new master who loved them.

But Israel soon fell into sin and was subjected once more to exile and slavery. That is when the prophet Isaiah promised another deliverance and new Messianic age of freedom. He wrote,

**“The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me,
Because the LORD has anointed me
To bring good news to the afflicted;
He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted,
To proclaim liberty to captives,
And freedom to prisoners...”** (Isaiah 61:1)

God would bare his holy arm once more to deal with the enemies who tyrannized Israel, redeeming her in the process.

Thus to the slaves of the first century, to women and to Jews, the word redemption would have great significance.

(d) Its Significance Today

As I prepared to preach this text I asked myself, to whom would this word redemption have special significance today? Who are today’s slaves, in other words? I think of a generation of children who suffered physical and emotional abuse as they grew up. As children, they forced themselves to block out the pain, but the deep aches in the soul are now resurfacing in their adulthood. Even though time and distance separate them from their abusers, tyranny lives on as memories still haunt and control them.

To dull this pain from their past, many seek to escape, using means which seemed innocent at first but have now turned into raving addictions and obsessions. Men become “workaholics.” They try to keep busy so that they will not have to deal with the pain of their past, or they become masters at controlling their environment so that they never have to risk anything. Others get caught in bouts with lust, pornography or alcohol, whatever it takes to dull the pain. But there is no escape. Occasionally these men themselves vent over their abusive past and become abusive in turn.

Abused women fall into some of the same patterns. At times their busyness may look like a passion for good deeds, but what they are really doing is withdrawing so that they will not have to communicate with those closest to them. They never sit still to hear the inner voice of the pain that is devouring them. Other symptoms take the form of eating disorders as a kind of self-protection, or licentious behavior to hurt and control men whom they see as tyrants.

The singer Madonna is much in the news these days. I watched a television documentary on her life the other day and I was interested to learn that she played a rape scene in a movie several years ago. The director complimented her on her acting, and asked her how could she bring such realism to the scene. “It was easy,” she replied. “I was raped once.” It occurred on me that her licentious behavior may well be a cover-up for that deep

hurt and pain which she feels as a result of that one childhood incident.

So it is to this class of people that the apostle Paul brings this good news of redemption: to the Greek, to the Jew, and to the modern-day slaves of Silicon Valley. There is Someone who cares far more about you and has a more legitimate claim on your allegiance than the current tyrant who is abusing you. Not only did this Someone think of you before time began, but he has paid the purchase price to free you, and in him you have redemption.

The question then logically follows, what was the cost to God to buy our redemption?

II. The Price of Our Redemption

Here is what Paul says (verse 7):

In Him we have redemption through his blood,

Ever since my daughters were born, I have been planning to send them to college. Recently, however, when I heard how expensive college has become, I discovered how naive I am about these matters. A friend who has a daughter in a college out of state told me that it costs him \$18,500 a year for her board and tuition! I was speechless. We can have the best intentions in the world, but we had better count the cost.

Man is almost as naive about his own soul as I was about the cost of a college education. The words of the psalmist are instructive here:

**No man can by any means redeem his brother,
Or give to God a ransom for him—
For the redemption of his life is costly,
And he should cease trying forever—** (Psalm 49:7-8)

One of our elders has had a problem with his kidneys for many years. He is a borderline case for a kidney transplant, but as of now his situation is not quite critical enough for him to be a candidate for a transplant. As I was thinking about his situation recently, it occurred to me that in order for my brother to be restored to normal functioning, it will cost nothing less than the life of an individual. Someone must die so that he can be healthy again. So it is with all of us in the spiritual realm. “In Him we have redemption through his blood,” says the apostle. How expensive was our redemption to the Father? We were worth the life of his Son. He had only one Son and he loved only one Son, and he gave him up for you and me. What does that say of how highly he thinks of us?

So we have the definition and the cost of redemption.

What then is the nature of our freedom?

III. Freedom for the Redeemed (Psalm 32:1,2)

In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.

It may strike you as odd that Paul speaks about redemption, about removing a tyrant from your life, in terms of forgiveness. “What has that got to do with redemption?” you ask. “I want to be freed from my tormentor!” But the apostle’s words are no more surprising than Jesus’ word to the paralytic, “Your sins are forgiven” (Mark 2:5). What kind of freedom was this? Well, it was, in fact, a much bigger thing than his merely healing the man. Jesus healed him to demonstrate to the Pharisees that he had the power to forgive sins. Why? Because sin was a far greater tyrant than Egypt to the Jew, than Rome to the slave, than

their abusers to the women and children in our own day. Sin is more enslaving, more abusive, more controlling, more damaging than any flesh and blood tyrant.

This text in Ephesians, I believe, may be a quote from Psalm 32:1-2. In that psalm we have a description of this tyrant of sin, which Paul merely summarizes in Ephesians. This psalm, which was written by David after he had committed murder and adultery, will be helpful in our study of the Ephesian text. David wrote,

**How blessed is he
Whose transgression is forgiven,
Whose sin is covered,
How blessed is the man
To whom the Lord does not impute iniquity,
And in whose spirit there is no deceit.**

Four words in these verses describe the tyrant of sin and its consequences. Then there are four words describing God's actions toward sin.

(a) The Cruel Tyrant: Sin

The Actions of Sin

The first word used to describe sin is *pesha'*, meaning, transgression. This word describes rebellion that results in a high-handed breach of relationship, a casting off of one's allegiance to God in order to do what one pleases. David, I think, could be said to have fallen into the sin of adultery in the heat of the moment, but his murder of Uriah was the premeditated, calculated crime of a rebel.

The word for sin is quite the opposite of the word for transgression. If transgression is high-handed rebellion, sin is not doing what one should do; it is missing the mark. In David's case, he withdrew from fighting a holy war to pursue personal pleasure, and then he summoned Uriah back from the battle-front as part of his scheme to cover up his sin. But David came under conviction when Uriah protested, "The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in temporary shelters, and my lord Joab and the servants of my lord are camping in the open field. Shall I then go to my house to eat and to dine and to lie with my wife? By your life and the life of your soul, I will not do this thing" (2 Sam. 11:11). David's suggestion would be like Prime Minister Churchill calling home from the front lines one of his commanders during the Normandy invasion and telling him to rest and enjoy an evening with his wife. This is sin: failing to do what we know we should do.

The Consequences of Sin

The next word David uses for sin is "iniquity." This word comes from the root "to bend or twist, to deviate from the way." David is saying that he distorted, perverted and made things crooked. The word is used not only of the deed but of its consequences. Misdeed and punishment, guilt and consequences are closely tied together in the OT. David perverted the office of king for personal pleasure. Even worse, he perverted his friendship with Uriah, one of his mighty men, a friend who had given him his loyal love, and then he perverted the office of holy war to murder him. So David admits in the psalm that he was a rebel, a sinner, and a pervert.

The Root of Sin

Deceit is the fourth word David uses here. He is referring to his treachery and lies. "Deep in my spirit," he admits, "I am more like the devil than God." Lying and deceit brings treachery

and destruction upon others.

What can we say to this? Let us agree with David when he says that blessed is the man or woman who comes to terms with their own depravity and admits they are rebels, treacherous liars and perverts. When we come to that place where we admit that we have been so tyrannized by sin that we make this confession, then the blessing opens up to us and we discover that God unleashes all the forces of heaven against our sin.

This is described by four verbs in the text.

(b) God's Breaks the Back of the Tyrant

First God is said to *forgive* transgressions. "How blessed is the man," says David, "whose transgressions are forgiven." "Forgiven" means, "to lift up and bear it." David's sin was a heavy burden that was weighing him down. What he is saying is that the hand of God was heavy on him, bearing down night and day, causing his body to groan and waste away; his vitality was drained as with the fever-heat of summer. Guilt is like a weight, and the greatest testimony of its weight is the amount of effort man spends to dull its voice. Why do we drink? Why do we take drugs? Why do we fill our lives with distractions? It is because we don't want to be alone with our thoughts. Charles Haddon Spurgeon wrote the following powerful statement about guilt:

O believe me, guilt upon conscience is worse than the body on the rack. Even the flames of the stake may be cheerfully endured, but the burnings of a conscience tormented by God are beyond all measure unendurable... Give me into the power of a roaring lion, but never let me come under the power of an awakened, guilty conscience. Shut me up in a dark dungeon, among all manner of loathsome creatures —snakes and reptiles of all kinds — but, oh, give me not over to my own thoughts when I am consciously guilty before God!

The burden of guilt due to sin is too heavy for anyone to bear. This is why God mercifully lifted it from our shoulders and laid it upon his Son. And, as we know from the prophet Isaiah, the weight of that sin was so heavy it crushed our Lord (Isaiah 53:4,6,10).

So our transgressions are forgiven.

Next, says David, our "sin is *covered*." Not only does God deal with the guilt of sin, he deals with the shame we feel on account of it. When we sin, we hide ourselves from God and others because we feel dirty. Adam and Eve used fig leaves to cover themselves after they had sinned, but God told them they needed a fur coat, not fig leaves, to protect them. In the shedding of an innocent animal's blood he clothed them so that the Holy God could look upon them and they would feel no shame before him. This is what God does with sin: he covers it with blood. And this is what gives us the freedom to be open and vulnerable.

Then, says the psalmist, God "*does not impute iniquity*." In the OT, once the guilty verdict was announced, the sinner was sentenced to slavery. But if we are in Christ we don't have to live under the tyranny of slavery to addictions. Why? It is because "the Lord struck Him with the iniquity of us all" (Isaiah 53:6). Not only are we forgiven, but also there is no condemnation. We do not have to continue living out the perversions which we have chosen for ourselves. We have freedom from our addictions and behavior.

Finally, says David, "Blessed is the man in whose spirit there is no deceit." How could he say that when he had just spent all his energies scheming to kill Uriah and steal his wife? It is because there was no deceit in his new spirit, for he had become a

new creation. This was the petition he made in Psalm 51: "Create [the same word that is used in Gen. 1] in me a clean heart O God, Renew in me a steadfast spirit." God had to do a creative miracle in David's life, on a par with his work in creation when he brought light out of darkness, in order to change David and answer his prayer. So David was not just forgiven, when he looked within himself he discerned that he had a new spirit. God's Holy Spirit seeks out truth, moving us to confession, to be open about our sins. This is why we can live with integrity: We have nothing to hide because we have been forgiven.

Are these not the greatest blessings in life: forgiveness of sins, freedom from guilt, shame, slavery, and hypocrisy? David says he was blessed, the same term that Paul uses in Ephesians, meaning that he had been restored to the joy of being spiritually productive. God did not set David aside. No, he used him mightily. Because he was open and vulnerable about his sin, we today read the scriptures that he wrote and we find them to be spiritually productive in our lives. If you repent of your sin, no matter what it was, and if you are open and vulnerable about it, God will bless you as he did David and make you useful in his Kingdom in the process.

So we are redeemed, and the fee for our redemption was the death of God's Son, Jesus Christ. This was the purchase price necessary to achieve the great freedom which is found in the forgiveness of sin.

Now we come to the final question. Having paid such an enormous price to free us from our sin, how does God feel about us? When we stand in glory, and when we see his face, what will we see?

IV. The Face of Our Redeemer

...according to the riches of His grace, which He lavished upon us. (Eph. 1:8a)

(a) Unspeakable Generosity

Lest there be any doubt about your standing of forgiveness, look at the face of your Redeemer: it is a countenance of unspeakable generosity. If Israel rejoiced that the Lord spared no expense to rid them of their Egyptian servitude, so too God spared no expense to redeem us and lavish upon us forgiveness in Christ. This is not the kind of grudging forgiveness we receive at times from those whom we have offended, it is like the forgiveness extended by the father to his prodigal son in the beautiful NT story. The moment the father saw his boy on the horizon (it is obvious he had been looking for him daily), he picked up his skirts (a shameful thing in that culture) and ran to him (compromising his dignity as an old man) to embrace him and forgive him. His son didn't even have time to make his little speech of confession. Before the boy realized what was going on he was the guest of honor at a lavish party which the whole village entered into to celebrate his return. This is the face of our Redeemer — a countenance of unspeakable generosity.

Secondly, when we look upon him in glory, we will notice something else.

(b) A Strange Silence

Whenever godly men in Scripture lose a son we find a testimony about their deep grief. In Abraham's case, for instance, we

feel the piercing panic and terror of his anticipated grief as he hears the words, "Take now your son, your only son, the one you love, Isaac, and go to the land of Moriah; and offer him there as a burnt offering..." But even these words, heartbreaking as they were, were not as painful as Isaac's question moments later, "My father, Behold, the fire and wood, but where is the lamb for the burnt offering?" (Gen. 22:2,7).

And what of the grief of Jacob, who thought that Joseph, the son of his old age, was dead? Here is a description of his grief, from Genesis: "Then Jacob tore his clothes, and put sackcloth on his loins, and mourned for his son many days. Then all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted. And he said, 'Surely I will go down to Sheol in mourning for my son.' So his father wept for him" (Gen. 37:34-35). Jacob was inconsolable in his grief over Joseph.

But I believe there is no cry in Scripture as piercing as the cry of David at the death of his son, the wicked Absalom. In one of the most beautifully poetic lines in the Bible, David cried,

**"O my son Absalom, my son,
My son Absalom!
Would I had died
Instead of you,
O Absalom, my son,
My son!"**
(2 Sam. 18:33)

I have been to that mountain, and I will never forget the sickening feeling of panic, the sense of terror I felt in my helplessness at the death of my son. It took 15 years of thinking before I finally wrote a testimony to my grief for a boy I had known but nine precious days.

How can we imagine the Father's grief when he ascended Mt. Moriah with the Son whom he had known from eternity? I find it strange that when he journeyed to Moriah, with his Son, his only Son, the one whom he loved, and placed him upon that altar and walked away, there is no word about his grief. There the forces of hell did what they pleased with Jesus. They stripped him naked. They abused him and spat upon him. They beat him to a bloody mass. Then they mocked him. Isn't it peculiar that there is no word of the Father's grief? Perhaps this was why heavens were darkened during those three hours — to cover his weeping face in order that his generosity towards us, not his grief over his only Son, would draw us to himself.

Wesley's hymn puts this so beautifully,

*Arise, my soul, arise.
Shake off thy guilty fears.
The bleeding Sacrifice
In my behalf appears.
Before the throne my Surety stands,
Before the throne my Surety stands;
My name is written on His hands.*

Whatever tyrant has been abusing you is now of no account, for the payment has been made in full in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen.

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