

Redemption

A Sermon at Crich Baptist Church

By John Ward

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Let us just ask God to help us as we come to his Word. O gracious God, we ask that thou wilt grant us humble hearts and humble minds as we come to thy Word. We ask for the help of the gracious Holy Spirit, enlighten our minds, and shine light upon the sacred page, and may the glories of our Saviour be set before us again. These things, we ask in thy name, and for thy sake, amen.

Now dear friends, with God's help I want to turn our thoughts to that passage in Romans chapter 3, verses 21 to 25, and in particular verse 4, and that great word that is found there, the word redemption. We read there in verse 24, "*being justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.*" Dear friends: this section is one of the most important in Paul's mighty epistle to the Romans. In this section Paul uses words that are vitally important and absolutely imperative to a true understanding of the gospel. We shall only understand the gospel as we understand the full interpretation and meaning of these words which Paul uses here - righteousness; justification; propitiation; redemption and faith. These are mighty words indeed, and all that pertains to the gospel and to the Christian faith is contained in them.

It was brought home to me, the wonder of this passage just recently, in reading two accounts of the life of William Cowper and John Bunyan. William Cowper loved his mother dearly and when his mother departed this life. He was cast into the greatest depths of despair and his father didn't understand him, and he sent him away to school, and that made the situation even worse.

And yet, Cowper was such a wonderfully gifted man. Dr. Arnold used to tell his boys at Rugby School that Cowper was the '*Singer of the Door*', and Macauley described him as the "*forerunner of the great restoration of literature*". What an amazing and gifted man, and yet this man sought to take his life several times, and he was in several lunatic asylums. Fortunately he went to Dr. Cotton's private lunatic asylum, and he was greatly troubled at that time with this great question of sin - "*My sin, my sin.*" And he longs for a light to shine upon the road that leads us to the Lamb. And then wonderfully, in the great darkness of his soul, there comes light - "*the happy period that was to shake off my fetters, and afford me a clear opening of the free mercy of God in-Christ was now arrived,*" he says. "*I flung myself into a chair near the window, and seeing a Bible there, ventured once more to apply to it for comfort and instruction. The first verses I saw were in the third of Romans - Romans chapter 3, verses 24 and 25.*" And he goes on to describe - "*immediately I received strength to believe, and the full beams of the Son of Righteousness shone upon me. I saw the sufficiency of the atonement. He had made my pardon in His blood, and the fullness and completeness of His justification. In a*

moment I believed, and I received the gospel." Isn't that wonderful dear friends.

Side-by-side with this illuminating experience of Cowper's, a similar experience came to John Bunyan one hundred years before. To the soul of Bunyan the self-same text brought the self-same deliverance. *"Now,"* he says - *"my soul was clogged with guilt, and greatly pinched between these two considerations - live I must not, die I dare not. Now I sunk and fell in my spirit, and was giving up all for lost, but as I was walking up and down in the house, as a man in a most woeful state, that word of God took hold of my heart, Romans chapter 3, verses 24 and 25."* And he goes on to say - *"what a turn it made upon me, I was as one awakened out of some troublesome dream."* And this wonderful truth of the gospel; and of saving grace came home, forcibly and powerfully, to John Bunyan.

Well dear friends, let us look at this great passage, and this great word 'redemption', which Paul uses in verse 24. What a great word it is, for it is at the very heart and centre of the gospel. Paul uses the word elsewhere - in 1 Corinthians and verse 30, he says - *"but of Him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption."*

In Galatians chapter 3, and verse 13, it says there that *"Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the Law, being made a curse for us. For cursed is everyone that hangeth on the tree."* In Ephesians chapter 1 and verse 7, he says there *"in whom"*, that is in the Lord Jesus Christ, *"we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace."*

In Colossians chapter 1, and verse 14, very similar to the passage in Ephesians - *"in whom,"* that is in Jesus Christ, *"we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins."*

In Hebrews chapter 9, and verse 12 and 14-15 - *"neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by His own blood He entered in once into the Holy Place, having obtained eternal redemption for us."* *"How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered Himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works, to serve the living God? And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance."*

And a little bit later on, here in Romans chapter 8, when Paul is looking to that great consummation that shall yet be, in Romans chapter 8, verses 22 and 23 he says - *"For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body."*

Redemption is the word Paul uses to complete his picture of the saving work of the Lord Jesus Christ - righteousness, justification, propitiation, redemption. The root meaning of the word redeem is to set free by the payment of a price. Redemption stands against the slavery and bondage of sin. Paul has previously been referring to the slavery and bondage of sin, in verse 9 of this chapter. He declares that Jew and Gentile are all under sin. That is to say that all men are slaves to sin - under the dominion, power and control of sin. Their lives are in chains, and bound by sin, to such a degree and to such an extent, that of themselves they can never be set free. Paul knew this to be the case.

In a more recent time, so did John and Charles Wesley. How did Wesley put it? *"Long my imprisoned spirit lay, fast bound in sin and nature's night"- and that state and condition must have continued until - "thine eye diffused a quickening ray. It was only then that I woke and the dungeon flamed with light, only then that my chains fell off, and that my heart was free, and I arose, went forth, and followed thee."*

Dear friends this is the state and condition which calls for redemption. Enslaved and chained and bound by sin, redemption is a wonderfully rich word with strong connections with the slave trade. This is how we see it being used in Old Testament Scriptures in connection with the buying of slaves in the slave market. And what is necessary and required for the slave to be bought out of slavery and bondage and brought into freedom, or into the service of a new master. This is the background to the word redemption, this is what redemption stands for, this is what redemption means. It is therefore not surprising that the word is used in connection with the Apostles great subject and matter in this part of his epistle of salvation from sin. Slavery to sin is the awful reality. What can affect freedom from sin? This is the great question, this is the great issue, and the only answer is that which is found in our text, where Paul says being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Dear friends, what great questions of these words in Romans chapter 3 and verse 24 raise.

What is this redemption, what is justification, what is the efficaciousness of the Lord Jesus Christ's blood? To whom does this apply, does it apply to you and to me? If we are sinners of a truth, it does. How can I best illustrate it? Have you read the story of the emancipation or redemption of all the slaves in the West Indies? Well, a vast sum was given, voted by the English government for the complete redemption of the slaves. They were to be redeemed forever, forever to be emancipated and delivered and set free from the wretchedness and the misery of slavery. Now when the glad tidings of their redemption arrived in the West Indies, here is the question, how were they to know that it applied to them? Imagine an aged slave, with many a scar of whip and chain upon him making enquiry about this redemption. He might say, *"yes, I have no doubt that many millions have been paid, I have no doubt about the proclamation of redemption, it is all wonderful news, but how am I to know that it applies to me?"* What would you have said to him? Would you not have said, *"why are you not a slave? Are those scars, not real? Are they not proof that you are a slave, were you not born a slave? Have you not been living, and have been treated as a slave? If you were a free man it could not apply to you, but since you are a slave, it must. It does, it most definitely applies to you, believe*

this proclamation, and this very moment you are in perfect righteousness and free for ever." Isn't that the case, isn't that what you would have said? Oh, dear friends, let us apply it to ourselves.

You know, if we took our true place and owned our true condition as born slaves, conceived in sin, and shapen in iniquity, then most of the difficulties in seeing how redemption applies would disappear. Here's the question, have you and I ever acknowledged, do you and I acknowledge that by nature we are bond slaves to sin? Do you acknowledge that you are sold unto sin? The poor West Indian slave might possibly escape from his master, but have you and I not found out how utterly powerless we are to escape from Satan, and from sin. So, how futile to try and pretend that your situation is otherwise. How utterly futile to try and evade the ugly scars of sin. How futile to try and make yourself fit for heaven. If you think that you can do this then indeed you know not your need of redemption. Listen to what Paul says in chapter 7 of this epistle, as he describes his struggle and conflict with sin: he says -- *"I am sold unto sin"* -- note that term 'sold', sold, sold as a slave, he says - *"for that which I do I allow not, for what I would, do I not, but what I hate, that do I."* *"I know,"* he says, *"that in me dwelleth no good thing, for to will is present, but how to perform that which is good I find not."* He says, *"I see a law in my members, warring against the law of my mind and bringing me into captivity, which is in my members."* And he goes on to conclude this description of himself - *"O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death."* Dear friends, isn't this a perfect description of our state and condition as slaves to sin. And as Paul goes on to show there is only one means of liberation and salvation, it is in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The English government paid millions to set the West Indian slaves free. Dear friends, what is the price paid for your redemption? Do you think that it was silver and gold that was paid for your redemption? Not all the silver and gold in all the world could've done it. How splendidly the apostle Peter puts it for us in 1 Peter, chapter 1, verses 18 and 19 - *"For as much as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, such as silver and gold",* O no, a thousand times no! How then? - *"but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot."* Yes indeed, the Lord Jesus Christ is the one whom God has set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood.

Oh, dear friends, are we not all poor helpless slaves to sin? Well, if this is your state, then redemption is for you. The West Indian slave that believed the proclamation was that moment for ever set free. Freedom: freedom from slavery, what wonderful news. And it is even more so with the great gospel Paul preached. Freedom: freedom from sin and its enslaving power. Only the Gospel can achieve this, only the Lord Jesus Christ, the Redeemer, can break the power of sin, and set the prisoner free. There are wonderful words there of the Lord Jesus Christ in John chapter 8, and verse 36 - *"If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed."*

We have already quoted Charles Wesley and John Wesley, let me quote them again, he describes it - *"Jesus, the prisoners fetters breaks. He breaks the power of cancelled sin,*

He sets the prisoner free, His blood can make the foulest clean, His blood avails for me. Jesus, the prisoner's fetters breaks, and bruises Satan's head, power into strengthless souls He speaks, and life into the dead."

John Newton knew what it was to be a slave, physically, and spiritually. He was involved in the slave trade, and he himself became a slave to a most evil woman, and was treated in the most awful way, and he was also a slave to sin, and Satan treated him in a bad way. But, by God's grace, he was delivered and set free from both. It was my privilege once to be taken into his manse at Olney, and in his study over the mantelpiece, he had printed in bold letters the text from Deuteronomy chapter 15, and verse 15 - *"Thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt, and the Lord thy God redeemed thee."* In the light of that precious text John Newton prepared every sermon. Every time he sat down to prepare to preach the word of God, he was conscious that he had been delivered by the Lord Jesus Christ from the slavery and bondage of sin. Towards the end of his early pilgrimage he one day met William Jay, in Bath, and he complained that his memory was almost gone, but he said to William Jay, he said he – *"remembered two things"* – he remembered that he *"was a great sinner"*, and he remembered that *"the Lord Jesus Christ was a great Saviour."*

Dear friends may we never forget the horrible pit from which we have been digged. You know, if we are ever tempted to be lifted up with pride, then, we only need to look back on our past for a moment to be humbled, don't we? Reflect on the sins that bound us, until the Redeemer set us free.

Thomas Goodwin, the sturdy puritan divine, in a letter to his son said – *"When I was threatened to become cold in my ministry, and when I felt the Sabbath morning coming and my heart not filled with the amazement of the grace of God, you know what I used to do? I used to take a turn up and down among the sins of my past life, and I always came down with a broken and a contrite heart, ready to preach as it was preached in the beginning, the glorious forgiveness of sins."* *"I do not think"*, he says again, *"I ever went up the pulpit stair, that I did not stay for a moment at the foot of it, and take a turn up and down among the sins of my past years."* Would that practise not be to the great benefit of all our souls dear friends?

O dear friends, we are redeemed through Christ's sacrifice of Himself, and the shedding of His precious blood. You will have noticed in those verses I referred to earlier, the close connection of the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ with this redemption through His blood. We are not told to who the ransom price was paid. Some of the early church fathers thought that it was paid to the Devil, but I don't think so. We are not told to whom it was paid, but we are very clearly told what the ransom price was. And we are also very clearly told of the only person who could pay it. The ransom price was blood, and the only person who could pay that price was God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Mrs. Cecil Frances Alexander puts it so well in that lovely hymn of hers – *"There was no other good enough to pay the price of sin, He only, could unlock the gate of heaven and let us in."*

We are redeemed with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish, and without spot. We are told in Leviticus chapter 17, and verse 11 that – *“the life of the flesh is in the blood”*, and as the life of the flesh is in the blood, and was forfeited by sin, so life eternal can be imparted only by expiation made in the giving up of the life of the sinless Saviour, the spotless Son of God. Only He, because of His infinite perfections was capable of doing that.

The blood of Christ is of infinite preciousness because of its infinite value to God, and to the redeemed. It is precious because it will never lose its power, in cleansing the vilest of sinners. O dear friends, never, never degrade, nor depreciate, the value of the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. What a great dishonour we bring to God, and to the Lamb, when we deny, or limit, its value, and its effectiveness, and its atonement. Let us realise that the Lord Jesus could do no more, than when He sacrificially shed His blood for you, and for me. Nothing else can redeem us. Nothing else can take away our sins.

I think that it was Dr. T. L. Culyer who said – *“Every true preacher of the gospel strings all his pearls on the red cord of the atonement. He rings all the changes on the precious blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.”*

How true are the words of the Reverend R. Lowry DD – *“What can wash away my stain, nothing but the blood of Jesus. What can make me whole again, nothing but the blood of Jesus. For my cleansing, this I see, nothing but the blood of Jesus. For my pardon, this my plea, nothing but the blood of Jesus. Nothing can for sin atone, nothing but the blood of Jesus. Naught of good that I have done, nothing but the blood of Jesus. This is all my hope and peace, nothing but the blood of Jesus. This is all my righteousness, nothing but the blood of Jesus. O, precious is the flow, that makes me white as snow. No other fount I know, nothing but the blood of Jesus.”*

You will recall a little earlier in the year dear friends, that we had that snow, and during the midst of it, on two bright days, I was up there walking on the Howden moors, and at Bleaklow, and the whiteness of the snow was so intense in the sunlight, that you could barely look into it. Listen to the Psalmist – *“Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow.”* O how precious is this blood, that can make one so vile and sinful as I am, whiter than the snow.

In conclusion, this great doctrine of redemption is at the very heart of our salvation. It is a most glorious work. It is the work of a sovereign and almighty God. And it sets forth His infinite perfections, He who was the great God of Creation – think of bringing the worlds and the universe into being, and sustaining them. O His sovereign power, what is that, compared with His great sovereign power in this matter of salvation, and redemption? It is a continuous work and a progressive work, and the different tenses found in the Greek New Testament indicate this progression, that we have been redeemed, that we are being redeemed, that we shall yet be redeemed.

In 2 Corinthians, chapter 1, verses 9 and 10, Paul declares that – *“we have the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God who raiseth the dead: who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in whom we trust that He will yet deliver us.”* You will note the tenses in these words – past tense, present tense, and future tense. In the Lord Jesus Christ we have a redemption which is at once continuous, and permanent, and perfect. It is a past act – we have been redeemed, it is also a present experience – we are, even now being redeemed by the power of God. But equally and wonderfully true, we shall yet be fully and completely redeemed, from the very presence and power of sin.

The apostle Paul looked forward to that great day, and every Christian should do also. Romans chapter 8, verses 22 and 23 – *“For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.”*

I was reading sometime ago dear friends, of a physician who was noted for his skill. After his death, when his books were examined, several accounts had written across them in red ink – *“forgiven, too poor to pay.”* His wife was of a different disposition, and she sued those people for the money. The Judge asked the question if the hand-writing in red was her husband's, and when she replied that it was, he said – *“then there is not a tribunal in the land that can obtain the money where he has written forgiven.”*

What a wonderful assurance we have too, dear friends. Nothing, nothing can annul our forgiveness through Christ's blood. This is your assurance, if you put your trust and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. To quote Charles Wesley again – *“We all are forgiven for Jesus sake, not because we deserved it, not because we merited it – for Jesus sake! As our title to Heaven, His merits we take.”*

May we be able to – by God's grace, may we be able to sing with Fanny Crosby – *“Redeemed how I love to proclaim it, redeemed by the blood of the Lamb, redeemed through His infinite mercy, His child for ever I am.”* O dear friends may we catch a glimpse of the place which the redeemed hold in the heart of the Redeemer. And may it bring us in adoring wonder before the one who has so loved us, and given Himself for us. Amen.