

More Precious Than Diamonds

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[0 : 0 0] so as we turn to this great theme I want to begin with an illustration the young people here will think this is quite hard to imagine but there was a day when we had cameras and when you had a camera you had to buy film I know it seems quite remarkable and when you bought film to put into your camera you had a choice of what kind of film you wanted to buy you could buy monochrome black and white film or you could buy kodachrome I guess that's a trademark name but I guess other films were available but the idea was you could have black and white or you can have color and most of the time you would get color film because you wanted color photographs when we turn to the bible we realize that when we describe the work of Jesus we don't just need one word or one shade of color we need a whole dictionary of words we don't need the monochrome we need the kodachrome because when we describe what Jesus has done we see it as it were as a diamond from all different angles and every angle it sparkles one of the big words in the new testament is the word justification we are declared right because of what Jesus has done the word justification is very much a courtroom word another big word in the new testament is the word reconciliation the word reconciliation is where two parties that aren't speaking to each other are now on speaking terms two estranged parties are now friends and of course that's not the language of the courtroom but that's the language of the relationship but our word tonight is a word not of the courtroom a word not of the of the relationship but a word of the marketplace of buying and selling you see the work of Jesus is so big so magnificent that one word one term one setting just won't do it so I don't want you to have a monochrome view of Jesus I want you to see the splendor of Jesus in all of its majesty in all of its beauty and the word that we're looking at tonight redemption is the idea of a buying and a selling of a setting free you see in each of these words when you think of reconciliation well you don't reconcile friends you reconcile enemies there's a problem that needs solved justification to be declared right you need to be declared right because we are naturally wrong and when we look at the theme of redemption we need to be set free why because we are by nature slaves slaves to sin slaves to self I want to do my thing my way my time that great anthem from the fellow New Jersey and Frank Sinatra I did it my way but that is a classic example of putting yourself at the center of your own life we need to be set free Jesus said whoever sins is a slave to sin but if the son sets you free you will be free indeed and the theme of redemption is a theme that runs throughout scripture the children of Israel in Egypt what were they they were slaves they were abused they were misused they were oppressed and what did God do he rescued them he set them free we are slaves and Jesus Christ has come to set us free the words in Titus chapter 2 capture this gem of a truth Titus chapter 2 from verse 11 and we'll look really briefly at the three passages just to see how this particular gem sparkles sparkles Titus chapter 2 at verse 11 for the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people it teaches us to say no to ungodliness

and worldly passions and to live self-controlled upright and godly lives in this present age while we wait for the blessed hope the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own eager to do what is good one of my recent trips to the United States I was in Washington DC and if you've never been to Washington DC you've been maybe to New York City maybe you've been to Florida but I tell you go to the nation's capital because there's so much to see the buildings the White House the Washington Monument Jefferson Memorial Lincoln Memorial the reflecting pool but one of my favorite places and I it's amazing I'd never been there before I'd walked past it but the you the United States archives are there and in the archives you have the original copy of the

Declaration of Independence you have the original copy of the Constitution and they were very much of interest to me but there was one document that I was interested to see even more it was

the original draft of the Emancipation Proclamation and there in the handwriting of Abraham Lincoln was the declaration which he wrote on the 22nd of September 1862 which would come into effect 100 days later on the 1st of January 1863 and in that Emancipation Proclamation he stated this and by virtue of the power and for the purpose of four said I do order and declare that all persons held as slaves within said designated states and parts of states are and henceforward shall be free and that the executive government of the United States including the military and naval authorities thereof will recognize and maintain the freedom of said persons so there's a declaration of freedom accompanied with power and with authority to achieve that freedom and that's what we have in the Bible that God is declaring his people to be free and he's accompanying that declaration with power and with authority to achieve that which he announces as we look at these three magnificent passages we could spend our time in any one of them and I'm just going to give you a little bit of a whistle stop tour to kind of to kind of set the scene as to why we need this why this is not an optional extra why this isn't making our life journey a little bit better but actually we desperately and personally need this truth we need to be redeemed so if you look with me at Isaiah chapter 35 just briefly we see first and foremost that the redeemed have a before and have an after you know those adverts that give you a picture before and a picture after if the product was a hair restoration product I would be a before you wouldn't want a hair restoration product with me as the after because that would not commend the product would it you want to see a difference and you want to see a difference for the better Isaiah chapter 35 shows a difference for the better a before and an after and the transformation has nothing to do with the people themselves because you notice first of all there's a setting here that's very unlikely beginning of chapter 35 the desert and the parched land the wilderness it's further described as the burning sand and the thirsty ground this is not a lush tropical paradise but the picture of the the scene is one of desert wilderness parched land there's not vibrancy there's not vitality there's not life and the picture extends to the people who inhabit this place not only is the place unpromising but look at the description of the people we're told in verse 3 that these are a people whose hands are feeble these are a people whose knees give way these are a people who have hearts that are fearful the picture is rounded out a bit in verses 5 and 6 because these are a people who are blind deaf lame and mute and you think this is not promising this is not a promising place these are not a promising people what's going to happen how can their fortunes be changed how can the situation be transformed do they have the power no they can't see they can't speak they can't hear they're lame they can't walk they're feeble they're weak they're frightened but then notice what happens here the desert and the parched land will be glad the wilderness will rejoice and blossom like the crocus it will burst into bloom i was delighted this week to look out into my back garden and to see the first winter crocuses they always come up sometime in february and you know that spring is not far away when you see those crocuses in my garden or if you're driving through the meadows you see them starting to pop up along the meadows spring is coming and you see the crocus and all of a sudden there's a transformation taking place in the surrounding within the environment but notice that the transformation is taking place in the people because the feeble hands are now strengthened the knees that are giving way are now steady the fearful hearts are now being strengthened the blind have can now see the ears of the deaf now unstopped the lame are now leaping for joy and the mute tongue is shouting how do we explain this how can we explain this transformation notice the words down from verse 8 and a highway will be there it will be called the way of holiness it will be for those who walk on that way the unclean will not journey on it wicked fools will not go about it no lion will be there nor any ravenous beast they will not be found there but only the redeemed will walk there the before and the after the week the blind the deaf the mute all of a sudden transformed the the land that was parched is now a land that is vibrant with life the people that are characterized by weakness and by disability are now characterized by life and by vitality why because they have been rescued they have been redeemed it's as if in this very visual chapter we have a preview of coming attractions you see the people of god need encouragement i need encouragement you need encouragement and here is a picture that is intended to encourage us a picture that is intended to put a smile on our face because we're told that there's going to be a redeemed people and they are going to be walking on a highway called holiness and they will be rescued by the lord and they will then enter the city they're no longer going to dwell in the wilderness they're no longer dwelling in the parched land they're no longer lame or deaf or blind or mute but they're singing with joy and they're entering the city of god and joy everlasting joy will crown their heads gladness and joy will overtake them and sorrow and sighing will flee away so the redeemed have a past and the

redeemed have a future we have a before and we have an after and the only way that we can explain the change from the before and the after is that there's been an intervention there's been a dramatic and a powerful intervention the lord has done this this is not our effort this is not our achievement this is the doing of the lord and it is wonderful in our eyes you turn to the second passage isaiah 43 and here we're told that the redeemed have a new identity you and i have a new identity we have a new identity through the one who redeems us chapter 43 now this is what the lord says you see what we think and what we say is important and words matter what you say how you say it is important of course but

what god says is of primary importance and if we find ourselves differing with what god has to say all i'm going to tell you is that someone's wrong if god says one thing and you say another someone must be wrong and i'm going to leave you to determine who that might be but this is what the lord says he who created you jacob he who formed you israel do not fear for i have redeemed you purchased at a cost a price paid i have summoned you by name you are mine created by god formed by god redeemed by god summoned by name and now belonging to god we have a new identity we have a new status we have a new standing and it's all because of that magnificent gem of a word redeem redemption and notice the picture continues that we are now accompanied through life's trials the waters the rivers the fire we will not be alone i will be with you says god you will not be burned the flames will not set you ablaze i am the lord your god in verse three the holy one of israel i give egypt for your ransom you see the idea of redemption and ransom these are two of the same themes a payment of a price to set free in the ancient world there were three categories of people who needed redemption there was the slave the slave did not have the resources to set himself or herself free they required a benevolent benefactor someone with power someone with resources someone that could pay a price that would set them free the other category of people is the prisoner of war somebody who is caught behind enemy lines that's not a good place to be if you're in one army and you're now behind the lines of the other army and they are holding you as prisoner a price must be paid to set you free and the third category was the condemned prisoner the prisoner on death row sentenced to death like barabbas in the new testament you see there were three crosses on good friday the two malefactors the two thieves and barabbas they were intended for crucifixion that day they were condemned criminals now you remember of course what happened pilot asked the crowd i'll give you a choice you can have jesus or barabbas released who would you like we've got the man who does good we've got the man who does bad give us barabbas away with this man and there was the condemned prisoner set free by the action of another so the redemption that is necessary is for the slave is for the prisoner of war for the condemned prisoner we cannot free ourselves those categories of people do not have the resources a ransom has been paid and notice that there's not only a ransom but there's a rationale in verse four since you are precious and honored in my sight and because i love you why does god care why does god do this why does he bother because there's not much attractive in us or about us but there's something about god there's something about what he sees and he sees a people that are infinitely valuable they're precious he sees a people that are not dishonored but honored and he sees a people and he says i love them and i will do absolutely anything for them isn't that magnificent that he looks at us with love and with affection

[17 : 30] you see so often it's easy to think that god is fed up he's fed up with us he's gotten tired of us he's a bit annoyed he's disappointed but i find i'm often reminded in god's word that he's not fed up that he's not constantly disappointed but he looks upon me with great affection because he says it and he shows it and then the last we talked about identity and we're now described here as children i know the doctrine of adoption is most visible in the new testament and the ascription to god of the of that great term father is most obvious in the new testament but there are glimpses of it even in the old i will bring your children from the east verse five i will say to the north give them up and to the south do not hold them back bring my sons from afar and my daughters from the ends of the earth god says i've got a family here it's a very large family and they're scattered and i'm going to gather them each one i don't care whether they're in the north or the south or the east and the west i don't care how far they may have wandered but i will gather them each and everyone everyone who is called by my name whom i created for my glory whom i formed and made so not only is there a before and after but there's a now a new identity we belong to god we are his he is ours he has paid a great price to set us free because he loves us he looks upon us as precious and honored and he says you are now part of my family and we come to those few verses in titus and you see if you're reading through this short letter of titus uh you know obviously wasn't written by

the uh the cretan tourist board because uh paul is telling us that ministry in crete is tough because the cretan people are tough uh some of the ancient authors said that there are no ravenous beasts on the island of crete because the local inhabitants make up for that that deficit in fact the quotation that paul gives from the cretans themselves one of crete's own prophets has said it cretans are always liars evil brutes lazy gluttons there's not much particularly attractive about this people but paul says to titus you're going to crete because you're going with a message and you're going with a message of redemption that points to a redeemer you see redemption is a noun it's a thing redemption is the payment of a price to set one free but the noun implies an actor a subject that there is one who redeems one who pays one who sets free and in these three four verses here verses 11 to 14 you have a whole volume of theology i teach systematic theology and you know it's just it's just remarkable what paul is saying here but what i want you to notice is that to be redeemed you need a redeemer and the redeemer is none less than god himself the son jesus christ for the grace of god has appeared god has come down god has come down to our level the gospel is jesus arriving he has arrived and he's arrived for all people all different kinds of people all different kinds of backgrounds there's a welcome mat that is now out and the remarkable truth and i can't really explain this is that somehow some way god is saying to the eight billion plus people on this planet you are welcome you are welcome to come whoever

you are you are welcome to come wherever you're from you are welcome whatever you may have done or may not have done the offer is now there because of the arrival of the redeemer and we're now told that not only has an offer come but the redeemer is actually at work in the lives of his people you see there's an offer of change there's an offer of transformation which is accompanied with power in verse 12 it teaches us to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions and to live self-controlled upright and godly lives in this present age there's a before and there's an after the before is we said yes to ungodliness and worldly passions and we said no to self-controlled upright and godly lives in this present age the offer of the gospel is for anyone and for everyone but the benefits of the gospel are for those who take up the offer who accept the invitation who enter in to the welcome you see the grace has appeared to all but it teaches us you and me if your faith is in jesus christ it teaches us so instead of saying yes to ungodliness and worldly passions we're now taught by god to say no you see there's a before and an after and instead of saying no to upright and godly lives we're beginning to say yes so the arrival of jesus has changed our hearts changed our lives changed our focus changed our actions changed our behavior we live upright and godly lives in this present age while we wait for the blessed hope the appearing of our great god and savior jesus christ if anyone comes to your door and says nowhere in the bible does the bible describe jesus christ as god well you take your bible out and you say well look at verse 13 great god and savior that's who jesus is he is our god he is our savior we need a redeemer who can do the work of redemption who has the authority and power of god because we can't do this for ourselves i can't do it individually we can't do it collectively only god can redeem and only god does redeem but notice here that paul is saying to titus and eventually then to the cretan people there are two big bookends to life there's the first arrival of jesus and there's the second arrival of jesus and we are now living between these two big bookends bethlehem born in bethlehem 30 years relative obscurity three year preaching teaching ministry you know the story betrayed handed over arrested condemned executed dead buried risen ascended seated but he's coming again the story of jesus has not yet concluded the last chapter has not yet been written and paul is saying we say no now to ungodliness and worldly passions we say yes to living upright and godly lives in this present age why because he's coming back you see the redeemer has come and the redeemer is coming the redeemer has come to put the welcome mat out but the redeemer is coming and when he comes he draws human history to a close he draws this era to an end but we live in the light of that coming and verse 14 draws the whole thing together because we said we need a redeemer to accomplish redemption for the people how does redemption happen well we have jesus christ who is none nothing less than great god and savior

and what does jesus christ do you see paul is clear here we need to know who he is and we need to know what he has done we need to identify jesus we need to identify who and we need to identify what he's great god and savior and what does he do he gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own the same theme the same echo that we have in isaiah 43 you are mine we belong to him he has paid a price to set us free and that price has drawn us to himself we are no longer slaves to sin we are now sons of the living god we

are brought into a new relationship into a new fellowship we have been redeemed from wickedness we have been purified and we have now become a people who are his very own eager to do what is good it's remarkable at the end of chapter one the apostle paul says to titus the cretins claim to know god but by their actions they deny him they are detestable disobedient and unfit for doing anything good not very hopeful not very optimistic it's not a very positive slant on human nature and i think we need to be realistic this is what i am like i think this is what you are like i think this is what we are like i think this is what the world is naturally like that we are detestable disobedient unfit for doing anything good but enter jesus enter jesus and everything changes enter jesus he arrived he gave himself for us to redeem us everything changes we now have new desires we now have new motivations we now say yes when we used to say no we now say no when we used to say yes and instead of being unfit for doing anything good we are now a people who are eager to do what is good this is our desire we want to do what is right we want to do what is good we want to demonstrate the reality of our new identity we want to demonstrate the the before not the before but the after the after effects of his of his redemption the after effects of his payment price he has paid a price to set us free we want to honor god with our hearts we want to honor god with our bodies we want to honor god with our lives as a small way of saying thank you thank you thank you thank you thank you thank you for who you are thank you for what you have done thank you for what you are doing thank you for what you will accomplish i want to say thank you and the best way of saying thank you is to live lives that are characterized by good doing what you are doing doing what is good doing what is good doing what is good doing what is good doing what is good doing what is good chapter 3 verse 8 of titus puts it this way this is a trustworthy saying and i want you to stress these things so that those who have trusted in god may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good these things are excellent and profitable for everyone there's a before and there's an after we can do what is good that is profitable for everyone because we have a redeemer called jesus great god great savior who has done great things for us who does great things in us and will use us as illustrations to show what the gospel can achieve in the lives of ordinary people like you and me ordinary people extraordinary extraordinary god extraordinary god extraordinary god we need a redeemer and we have one the message of redemption sparkles throughout the gospel it's this multi-faceted diamond every angle that you look at it just dazzles you we don't deserve it we don't understand it and yet he readily readily gives it to us because we are precious in his sight we are honored and god says i love you let's pray father we thank you for the work of the gospel we thank you for the person of jesus we thank you for who and what he has done it's our prayer tonight that you might remind us of how great and how good he is that what he says he means and what he says he accomplishes we thank you that we have the great preview in the old testament and the great fulfillment in the new of all that has been promised and all that has been achieved we thank you that a price has been paid a great price and by that price we are set free set free from sin set free from evil set free from darkness we are now set free to live in the light and to live in the love and to live in the joy and to live in the peace that belongs to the children of god those who have been drawn from the north and from the south those who have been summoned from the east and from the west we thank you that we have in jesus christ the redeemer paid a price yes we are now a set free people help us to live a life that is characterized by this freedom to say no to ungodliness and worldly passions and to say yes to living upright and godly lives in this present age time is short we await the return of jesus or we await our reunion with jesus either way time is short may we use this time to your glory and for the good of others for jesus sake amen amen we're now going to sing our closing hymn the power of the cross let's stand together to sing these words oh to see the dawn of the darkest day christ on the road to calvary christ on the road to calvary tried by sinful men torn and beaten nailed to a cross of wood christ on the road to calvary christ on the road to calvary sin for us, took the blame, bore the wrath we stand forgiven at the cross.

O to see the pain written on your face, bearing the awesome weight of sin, every bitter thought, every evil deed, crowning your blood-stained brow.

[33 : 48] This the power of the cross, Christ became sin for us, took the blame, bore the wrath we stand forgiven at the cross.

Now the daylight flees, now the ground beneath, quakes as its maker bows his head.
Curtain torn in two, dead are raised to life, finished the victory cry.

This the power of the cross, Christ became sin for us, took the blame, bore the wrath we stand forgiven at the cross.

O to see my name written in the woods, for through your suffering I am free.

[35 : 47] death is crushed to death, life is mine to live, one through your selfless love.

Christ became sin for us, this the power of the cross, Christ became sin for us, Christ became sin for us, took the blame, took the blame, bore the wrath we stand forgiven at the cross.

These are the final words of the short letter of Jude.

To him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to present you before his glorious presence, without fault and with great joy. To the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power, and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord before all ages, now and forevermore.

Amen and amen.