

Redemption & Forgiveness of Sins

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[0 : 00] Good morning, we're now going to read God's Word, the Bible. And there are going to be two passages this morning. The first one is Colossians chapter 2, and verses 13 to 15.

And the next one will be Romans 3, 9 to 26. The ESV has helpfully labeled the section Alive in Christ.

And we're just going to be reading the last few verses of that, 13 to 15. Chapter 2, Colossians. And you, who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, by cancelling the record of debt that stood against us with its legal demands.

This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame by triumphing over them in him.

[1 : 11] And then we turn to Romans, chapter 3, verses 9 to 26.

What then?

Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all. For we have already charged that all, both Jews and Greeks, are under sin. As it is written, none is righteous.

No, not one. No one understands. No one seeks for God. All have turned aside. Together they have become worthless. No one does good.

Not even one. Their throat is an open grave. They use their tongues to deceive. The venom of asps is under their lips. Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness.

[2 : 19] Their feet are swift to shed blood. In their paths are ruin and misery, and the way of peace they have not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes.

Now we know that whatever the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be stopped and the whole world may be held accountable to God.

For by works of the law, no human being will be justified in his sight, since through the law comes knowledge of sin. But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it, the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe.

There is no distinction, but all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified by his grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith.

This was to show God's righteousness because in his divine forbearance, he had passed over former sins. It was to show his righteousness at the present time so that he might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus.

[3 : 49] Why don't we pray as we come to God's word? Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we only see in part and we can twist and suppress the truth by our intellect or by our moral efforts.

We cannot reach into the heavens and see you as you really are. And so I pray that through your word, your holy word, give us a true and a clearer sight of who you are this morning, that we might stand in awe of you and then truly seeing ourselves in your great light.

In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. It's not easy for God to forgive you.

Let me repeat that. It's not easy for God to forgive you or me for that matter. Now I'm hoping your mind is a bit curious, trying to work out what I mean by such a statement and whether it is true, because it seems to fly in the face of the Christian idea of a forgiving God.

So let me, with such a statement, let me clarify what I don't mean. I don't mean a whole bunch of things, so let's clarify that. I don't mean that God is like us when we often keep a record of wrongs, when we'd rather cut people out of our lives rather than pursuing the painful path to peace.

[5 : 37] I'm not saying he's like us when we do those things. I don't mean that what you must do in order for God to forgive is difficult.

All religions talk about a fresh start, a washing of past wrongs, and some of the requirements are just really difficult. It's daily meditation.

It's daily prayers. It's a pilgrimage. It's all the Christian idea of like a monastery, like becoming a nun, giving up the pleasures of life and strict treatment of the body and the mind, and still, after doing all this, not being 100% sure that God has forgiven you.

So I don't mean what you must do to be forgiven makes it difficult for God to forgive. Or perhaps you think it is easy for God to forgive.

Simply go to the confessional, say the right words of repentance, have a priest come to you on your deathbed to give you the last rites, and it's just easy.

[6 : 46] It's all gone. Just do the right ritual and it's gone. All your sin is gone. Some people have that view of Christianity.

Or perhaps you have a view of God as if he doesn't want us to talk about our sin. It's just so negative. Surely God wants us to focus on a positive thing, positive relationship.

Or maybe you have a view of God that is like a harsh and critical father figure, like too many earthly fathers, as if God is ruthless, quick to anger and slow to forgive.

When I say it's not easy for God to forgive you, that is not because he is harsh or reluctant. It's not easy for God to forgive you and me because he's good.

And because our sin, as we looked at last week, is so awful. Now to get a feel for this, the Lord gives us the prophet Hosea.

[8 : 00] It helps us feel the problem. And the prophet Hosea's wife, Goma, whose affection and loyalty should have been only for her husband, instead she goes off and she pursues other lovers, thinking in these lovers she's going to get the protection and the abundant life.

Is it easy for Hosea to forgive his wife? No, not at all. There is a justice problem. God's law says such treatment deserves, such unfaithfulness deserves death.

There's a justice problem. There's a relational problem. A right jealousy produces anger. And there's a heart problem. Goma doesn't even want to come back.

She wants her lovers. She's captivated by them. Her heart is gripped by them. There's a heart problem. What a heart-wrenching picture of our problem with the Lord.

And it's even worse than that. Because we were made by the Lord. We belong to him. We owe all our affection and loyalty to him. He deserves all our trust to come to him as the source of all life.

[9 : 25] And yet, as we saw last week, we try to play God. We try and control our own lives. And we shake the fist at God's rule. And we commit spiritual adultery. Our heart goes to all other places to find life except the source of life.

And that heart problem produces evil words and behaviour. How can God, who is holy, easily forgive? There's a justice problem where a person sins, a person deserves to die.

There's a relational problem. God's jealousy for his own honour, his jealousy for our total affection is right and it produces anger, wrath.

And there's a heart problem. We are held captive. We're enslaved, convinced that life is found apart from intimacy with God. For Hosea to get Goma back, it came at great cost to him to redeem her.

And our only hope is redemption. We need a redeemer. And we're going to look at that, what redemption means today. It is a beautiful concept.

[10 : 47] So if you're overwhelmed by the weight of what I just said, please hang in there. And redemption is wonderful. Just two comments before we dive into what redemption means.

I'm leaning heavily on a theologian called Leon Morris and he's got this book and a chapter that goes into much more detail than I can do in a single sermon.

So if you would like a copy of that chapter, get in touch with me. I'd love to share it with you. I'd also recommend using the sermon outline with all the Bible passages.

Redemption comes up so much in Scripture. Why not use those to go and do your own study and devotion and prayer, either privately or with your family?

So what is redemption? We need to buy back this word from our culture because our culture uses redemption in a very different way to what the Bible means.

[11 : 55] So for example, you might remember a couple of years ago, the Aussie cricketers, Steve Smith, captain of Australia and vice captain David Warner, they got caught for ball tampering.

Do you remember this? And they were banned from cricket and their reputation was just shot. But once they returned to test cricket, the media completely changed their tone about these two men. Their cheating was wiped from the record. Their reputation as worthy representatives of Australia was restored. How? By performing well, by hitting a century, by performing.

They redeemed themselves, commentators were saying, the media were saying. Or the classic movie, Shawshank Redemption.

If you haven't seen it by now, oh, I don't know, you don't have to watch it, but if you haven't seen it, spoiler alert, I'm about to ruin the movie, but I blame you. How does an innocent man restore his freedom after getting a life sentence for something he didn't do?

[13:11] He must make it happen. He's got to escape and win back his freedom. He did it. Scripture knows nothing, nothing of being able to redeem yourself.

You can't. The other surprising thing about redemption, it was a common word in biblical times. It was, any Greek speaker would know the word. It wasn't, it wasn't in the religious sphere, although the Old Testament talks about redemption a lot, but every Greek person would understand it. And it had two primary settings, prisoners of war and slaves. It means more than being delivered, it's more precise a meaning than that.

So picture a prisoner of war, especially if they're nobility. They were worth a great deal to their family and society back home.

[14:18] So the captors would send a message saying, here's the ransom price if you want this prisoner back. And they would, if they wanted them back, they would send the money over and that person would be restored to their home and to their position in society.

Or picture a slave. If someone wealthy enough wanted to, out of the generosity, or whether the slave saved up enough money over years, then they could pay to the temple of the gods, whatever the gods were, and they would buy their freedom.

So for example, there's an inscription, we know this because we have inscriptions from back in that time period. Here's one of them. It recorded the date and then it said, for freedom, a female slave whose name is Nicaea by race, a Roman, with a price of three minae of silver and half a minna. For freedom. Redemption is about someone who is a slave or in captivity being set free by payment of a cost, a price.

Which begs the question for us, who or what are we held captive by that we need freeing from?

Now, I think to feel the weight of this, I want to compare it to other narratives out there in our public community.

[15:53] marketplace, a public square. Lots of people offer a diagnosis of the main problem of our society, of humanity, of Western culture.

Let me just give two examples. There's more than this, but one is systemic racism. That's the primary problem in our society. Seeing racism not as just this odd, awful occurrence, and it is awful, but seeing it as built into the fabric of Western culture.

That's one narrative at the moment. So that's the main problem. Another popular narrative at the moment is the ever-increasing and even unstoppable destruction caused by climate change.

That's the great evil of our times. Now, there's many more voices out there. There's only one voice who dares to say that the most serious problem isn't actually outside of us.

It's inside each one of us. It's in our very nature. Jesus said, everyone who practices sin is a slave to sin.

[17:11] Amen. Amen. The problem isn't that we make mistakes every so often. The problem isn't outside of us.

The problem is inside of us. Like Goma, we haven't only committed spiritual idolatry, but by doing so, our hearts have now, we've given our hearts over to someone who controls our heart.

We are held captive by sin and its consequences. And we heard it in our readings today. We heard it in Romans chapter 3, verse 9, which says that both Jews and Greeks are under sin.

That's an interesting preposition, under sin. Not just we commit sins, but we're under it. Meaning we're under the power of sin. It controls our hearts.

Or in Colossians 2, before knowing Christ, we are dead in our trespasses and in the uncircumcision of our flesh. That's a Jewish way of saying there's something rotten inside that needs to be cut out.

[18:23] The problem is in here. Again, leaning on Leon Morris, he helps us grasp the point. He says this, we who belong to God because he created us have gotten into the power of a strong

enemy from which we cannot break free.

If I can say it reverently, God, if he wants us back, must pay the price. So because we are captives inside our very nature, that's why keeping God's laws, it can never work.

It can never set us free because that's just external change. It's not internal. Romans 3, 19 to 20 is the climax of the argument of the first three chapters.

All people, religious or otherwise, are in danger of the anger, the wrath of God because no one lives up to what they know to be true about God. Romans 3, 19, by works of the law, no human being will be justified, declared good in his sight since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

God's law is good. It reveals God's character. God's law teaches us what is good and what's evil. There's nothing wrong with the law but it has no power to free us on the inside.

[19 : 59] Knowing God's law only highlights the gap between how holy he is and my character. It gives me knowledge of sin. He doesn't free me from sin.

And I find Colossians 2, 23 startling. So all these religious rules rules. Picture a monk again in a monastery who struggles with lustful thoughts.

A monk in a monastery struggles with lustful thoughts and they are depriving themselves of sleep, they're depriving themselves of food so that they can pray, so that they can memorise and study scripture.

And Colossians 2 verse 23 says all these rules, this kind of way of religion, these have indeed an appearance of wisdom in promoting self-made religion and asceticism and severity of the body, but they are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh because all that rule keeping doesn't get to the lustful heart.

It's of no value. We need a redeemer. God must act contrary to what we deserve.

[21 : 34] He must take the initiative to set us free. The silence after Romans 3, 19 and 20, that every mouth will be stopped before the judgment seat of God.

The silence is broken into in verse 21, but now, but now, God has acted.

God's righteousness comes in. Jumping to verse 23, all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified by his grace as a gift.

How? Through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Now, here the price paid, whom God put forward as propitiation by his blood to be received by faith.

God the father put forward his son for our redemption. And the son gave himself willingly for our redemption.

[22 : 44] He stated his willingness very clearly in Mark 10, 45. Even the son of man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

It's not easy for God to forgive you. It came at a great price.

His son, his blood. There's no such thing as cheap forgiveness. The word propitiation, we don't have time to go into it fully, but it gives a sense of why a price must be paid, because propitiation is about taking away the judgment and the anger that our sin deserved.

It's taken away. But don't try to work out who God paid. That's pushing the picture of redemption too far.

The early church fathers came up with these narratives of God paying Satan. It just doesn't work. That's not in Scripture. That's not the point of who God paid.

[23 : 54] We need more pictures of understanding salvation than redemption. That's why we have other words like justification and reconciliation and atonement.

We need other words. So don't try and work out who God pays. The important thing is a price had to be paid, and he paid it. His payment not only covers all those after Christ died, it also covers all those who trusted in God's promises before Christ died on the cross.

It covers all who belong to God in all of history. And like the inscriptions of the slaves whose price was paid for freedom, all those who receive God's redemption as a gift are actually set free.

Free now from the penalty of sin, free now from sin's control over us, and when Christ returns, free from sin's presence and all its consequences once and for all.

So Christian in the room or listening in, when your guilt and shame piles up, when sin says you can't let me go, you have to give in, look to the cross and see the inscription for freedom.

[25 : 31] You are free. no price left to pay, no anger of God at you, you do not have to listen to sin.

For freedom. I think the hymn, I can't remember which one it is, it says, when Satan tempts me to despair and tells me of the guilt within, upward I look and see him there who made an end to all my

sin.

And this freedom, this redemption, scripture speaks of as full and forever. The consequences of sin, the corruption of our bodies, even the corruption of the whole world.

Jesus' blood redeems it all. Redemption is a big concept. It's not just the removal of sin, but it's actually the restoration of us back to God and the restoration of our bodies and all things.

And it is forever. Hebrews 9, 12 says that by Christ's blood, he is secured and eternal redemption. It's forever.

[26 : 53] Like a prisoner of war, our souls and bodies have returned home to God forever. Forever. Forever. Forever. Forever. Forever. So do you see the heart of God, your redeemer?

The kind of God he is. It's not easy for God to forgive you or me. It's not. You and I deserve nothing but his wrath and justice.

To be left in the embrace of our lovers, reaping the misery and death of sin's hold on us, nothing in us can prompt God to act to save us. As Morris said, if God wants us back, he must pay the price and he did.

Your freedom, your restoration came at great cost. The blood of his only son. So how should we respond to such a God who would pay such a price?

We need to see God as he is. He isn't reluctant to forgive. He's not reluctant. He isn't critical and harsh. He wants you back.

[28 : 10] He isn't simply okay with you going through the motions saying you're sorry, acting as if unfaithfulness doesn't matter. It does matter. It mattered so much that his son had to die.

But he takes no pleasure in you trying to redeem yourself by your own performance. He wants us back.

He is our redeemer. He is paid the price to bring us home. So how do we respond? We should respond in awe.

What a God. God. God. He is worshipping God. We should respond in faith, receiving his grace as a gift. Gratitude and living in the freedom of belonging to Christ, body and soul.

If we see God for who he is, then the mark of a Christian life, whatever we're going through, in sorrow or good times, whatever is happening, the mark of a Christian is expressed by singing.

[29 : 33] Because how else do you respond to awe, to how good God has been to us? Singing is the best way to do it.

That's the mark of not only the Christian life, it's going to be the mark of the heavenly life. We join the eternal choir of heaven that's pictured in Revelation 5.

And they sang a new song. Worthy are you, for you were slain. And by your blood you ransomed people for God, from every tribe and language and people and nation.

And you have made them a kingdom and priests to our God. And they shall reign on the earth.

Worthy are you. You sampai you. Samun