

Ransomed to Love

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Date: 31 October 2015

Preacher: Benjamin van Rensburg

[0 : 01] A year or so ago, I read the following in a news article. Entombed at the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean in an upended tugboat for three days, Harrison Okena begged God for a miracle.

The Nigerian cook survived by breathing an ever-dwindling supply of oxygen in an air pocket. As the temperature dropped to freezing, Mr. Okena, dressed only in boxer shorts, kept playing for a miracle.

To this day, Mr. Okena believes his rescue after 72 hours underwater at the depth of about 100 feet is a sign of divine deliverance.

The other 11 seamen aboard the Jaskon died. Divers sent to the scene were looking only for bodies, according to Tony Walker. Project manager for the Dutch company DCN Diving, who were called to the scene because they were working on a neighboring whale field 120 kilometers away. The divers had already pulled up four bodies. So when a hand appeared on the TV screen, Mr. Walker was monitoring the rescue boat, showing what the diver in the Jaskon saw.

[1 : 18] Everybody assumed that it was just another corpse. The diver acknowledged that he had seen the hand, and then, when he went to grab the hand, the hand grabbed him.

Mr. Walker said in the telephone interview on Tuesday, it was a frightening experience for everybody. On the video, there is an exclamation of fear and shock from Mr. Okena's rescuer. And then, joy, as the realization sets in. Mr. Okena recalls hearing, there is a survivor. He's alive. Mr. Walker said Mr. Okena couldn't have lasted much longer.

And as you hear this story, you will agree that this was a dramatic rescue. And we can all relate with the situation this Nigerian man was in.

And we can imagine the fear that he experienced being really trapped in a bubble of air at the bottom of the sea. The situation was desperate.

[2 : 29] And he would not have lived much longer. And then, the people who came to collect the dead corpses, they found him.

And they rescued him. Now, it's unlikely that any of us experienced such a situation in the past or will in the future.

But all of us are here today because we were rescued. And in a spiritual sense, our situation was even worse than that of this Nigerian man.

When Paul wrote his letter to the church in Colossae, he said to the believers, and he reminds them, and he said that you were dead in your trespasses and sins.

We were not living in an air bubble, just surviving. But actually, when it comes to spiritual life, we were dead in our sin and trespasses.

[3 : 39] And then Jesus Christ came, and he rescued us. And he gave us new life. Peter, in his letter we have seen last night, he said that according to the foreknowledge of God, the believers were chosen before they could love God.

He already loved them and set them aside. And through his Holy Spirit, he sanctified them. He changed them and gave them a new way of living.

And he changed their hearts through the in-working work of the Holy Spirit. And then importantly, he said that they were sprinkled by the blood of Christ.

Moses sprinkled the people with the blood of the sacrificed animal. But the old covenant didn't work because of the condition of human hearts.

And the people rebelled against God. But the believers, they were sprinkled by the blood of Christ. Which means that when Jesus died on the cross, when his body was broken and his blood was shed, that they could receive forgiveness of sin and start a new life.

[5 : 01] And in the verses that we have read this morning, we will see how Jesus did this. He said the following in verse 17, he said, And if you call on him his father, who judges impartially according to each one's deed, conduct yourselves with fear throughout the time of your exile.

And then in verse 18, Knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver and gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot.

And let's for a moment pause and look at his words where he said that from your futile ways, you were ransomed or you were redeemed.

And for the slaves that were in the church or the household servants, this would have been a very familiar concept to be redeemed or to be ransomed.

The practice was in Greco-Roman society that the slave could buy his own freedom. And we know that in the first century, up to 90% of the people in the area around Rome, they either were from slave background or they were slaves themselves.

[6 : 25] So there were just an enormous amount of slaves who were doing most of the work. And it's only natural that some of them heard the gospel and became part of the church.

The slaves often suffered terribly, but sometimes their owners were kind and they could live a fairly normal life. Some of them could even, outside their duties, also work for somebody else and earn that money.

And especially if a slave was very skilled, they could build up some money. And then it would have been possible for them after a period of time to redeem themselves.

They could buy their freedom. And the way it worked was that they could go to the local temple and there they would pay an amount to the temple treasurer and he would take some commission.

And then the rest of the money would be paid to the owner of the slave. And then the slave become ransomed and he became redeemed.

[7 : 33] And it was seen that he was redeemed by one of the gods in the temple. And therefore, from then onwards, he didn't belong to the owner, but he was the slave.

He belonged to the god or one of the gods that was worshipped in the particular temple. Now, Peter is saying that you were not redeemed by gold or silver, like the way you can buy your earthly freedom, but you were ransomed by the blood of Christ Jesus.

When Jesus Christ died on the cross, he paid for you so that you can become free, not from slavery, but from the slavery of your sin and your iniquity and you can live in a new way.

Now, when we read the Old Testament, we also see that the theme of ransom and redemption is very, very prominent.

And the Jews in the churches, they would have been able to relate to the fact that we have been ransomed and redeemed by the blood of Christ Jesus. The one thing that we find again and again in the Old Testament is that God reminds the people of the past and very much part of their experience as the followers of God in this world was based on the knowledge that they had of what God did to them and for them before and for their forefathers and how he was faithful to the promises that he made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

[9 : 16] And often there's a reference back to the Exodus when God ransomed them, when God redeemed them, when God set them free from slavery in Egypt.

And then later on, again, God redeemed them from the Babylonians and he gave them the opportunity to go back to Jerusalem and to rebuild the city and to rebuild the temple and to worship God again.

And now Jesus is saying that as Christians, both Jews and Gentiles, they have been redeemed by the blood of Christ.

And we see all the signs and all the promises of the Old Testament came into fulfillment through the work of Christ Jesus on the cross.

You can imagine the night of the Passover before Jesus was crucified. There were many people from all over the known world who became Jews in Jerusalem and they were there to celebrate the Passover.

[10 : 31] And there were people from the provinces that Peter addressed his letters to. And that night, you could smell the food in all the Jewish homes and in all the rooms and they remembered the fact that God redeemed them from Egypt.

And then in one room, it was different because Jesus met there with his disciples. And in Luke chapter 22, we read the following, and when the hour came, he declined at the table and the apostles with him and he said to them, I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer.

For I tell you, I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God. And he took a cup and when he had given thanks, he said, Take this and divide it among yourselves.

For I tell you that from now on, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine again until the kingdom of God comes. And he took bread and when he had given thanks, he broke it and he gave it to them, saying, This is my body which is given for you.

Do this in remembrance of me. And likewise, the cup after they had eaten, saying, This cup is poured out for you. It is the new covenant in my blood.

[11 : 58] Jesus was saying to the disciples that as from then onwards when they meet and when they take the bread and break bread and when they take the cup to drink, it will not be to remember the deliverance from Egypt, the redemption from Egypt, but it will be remembering the fact that his body was broken and that his blood was shed for us to redeem us from our sin.

So tomorrow, we will be taking communion and when we take communion, we know that the bread and the wine, they are a sign and a seal of God's grace because what we have received from Christ chosen us to set us aside, the sanctification of the Holy Spirit, the sprinkling of the blood, the redemption, the fact that he ransomed us from sin, could only happen because Jesus Christ died on the cross.

There is nothing that we could do to earn it. We are not saved by merit and when we come tomorrow and take communion, we declare that we accept the work of Christ on our behalf and we do it in remembrance and a key word here is in remembrance of the fact that his body was broken, his blood was shed so that we can be redeemed.

And as we take communion, our faith is nourished, we remind ourselves of the fact that we have received grace and mercy, that we have received forgiveness and that now we belong to God because he's the one who rescued us, he's the one who gave us life and when we came to faith in him, we surrendered ourselves to him.

We've been ransomed by his blood and therefore belonging to him. And the implication then is that we will live lives that will bring honor and glory to his name.

[14 : 15] So when we come forward and take communion, we declare all these things that by the grace of God we have been redeemed and that the bread and the wine that it is a seal and a sign of the work of God and the grace that we have received.

But we also declare that we belong to God and therefore it's our desire to live for his honor and for his glory. It also means that there is a bond between us and God and also a bond between us ourselves.

And when we take communion together, we look at each other and we recognize that our fellow believers, as we come together around the table, have the same testimony of God's grace and of his faithfulness to us and of his work of redemption in our lives.

It's amazing grace that we have received. All the signs of the Old Testament, all that it was hoping for, came in fulfillment through Jesus Christ.

And we were lost and we were in need of somebody to come and redeem us. Stanley Jones, for many years, he served the church in India and he was especially active at universities to work with young people, to debate others, and to really share the gospel of Jesus Christ and to discuss it and to preach it and to proclaim it.

[15 : 58] And one day, after a meeting, he received a letter from a student saying the following, he said, according to my belief system, we believe there is a power behind things that is.

There are powers too great for our frail being, and I wish then that there was a God who would be kind to me, who would feel my weakness, and who would deliver me from the mess of sin and temptation.

And here you had a student, obviously he was religious, but he was looking for grace, he became aware of the fact that he was a sinner, and he didn't know where to turn.

And then Jones wrote the following, he said, can we come to this young man like that with an argument, a doctrine, a superior book, unless we can gently and quietly, but with a radiant positiveness, share with that young man our own deliverance and victory, we had better not come.

Has Christ any answers to a letter like that? A young man needs something more than Jesus as an example or a moral teacher. What he needs is new life, and he needs Jesus as a savior, not just as an example.

[17 : 16] And Stanley Jones, he realized that what this man needs is not moral teaching. but what he needs is to hear the gospel of Jesus Christ, how to be redeemed, how to be rescued from our sin.

He needs to hear that when Jesus Christ died on the cross and when his body was broken and his blood was shed, it was for the forgiveness of sin. And he needed to hear that when God came to us in Christ Jesus, it was to show us and to convince us of the love and the grace and the mercy of God the Father.

Peter continues and he says that we were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from our forefathers. And it's interesting that he refers here to the ways of our forefathers.

Usually in the first century this would have been seen as something that was positive. Even today sometimes we may say we need to return to the ways of our forefathers.

And normally that's in a positive way. Now Peter is not saying here that they have been rescued from the sinful ways of their forefathers. Certainly he includes this in this when he said the futile ways.

[18 : 48] But he says really that everything that the forefathers did, both the Jews and the Gentiles, it was futile because they didn't know the love of Christ.

They didn't know the rescue of Christ. They didn't know the redemption and salvation of Christ Jesus. And therefore this was futile. And this refers to the Gentiles going to the temple and being religious.

and he said that's futile because Christ is not at the center and salvation is through the blood of Christ Jesus. But it also referred to futile ways of the Jews who thought that they could save themselves by, for example, keeping the tradition of the elders like many of the Pharisees did. Peter says that all this is futile if we don't accept the salvation that comes from Christ and him alone.

In Istanbul often people would come and they would say, you know, they would want to discuss Christianity as people who have no church background or people who are from Muslim background.

[20 : 04] And they would say something like, we know people who are not Christians who are much better people than the Christians that we know. Christians and then I would say, yep, that's very sad.

Christians should live in a different way. But what is very important is to know that we are not saved on the basis of our good works.

And the people that you know, they may be better than a lot of Christians, but they're still not good enough to save themselves. And in that sense, their goodness is futile because it will not save them.

They may be higher up in terms of good and bad, but they still very, very far from God what expect them to be. Therefore, also for them, the only way of salvation is through the blood of Christ Jesus. Only he can redeem and ransom them. When we take communion tomorrow, we will say that the fact that the body of Christ was broken and the blood was shed means that we also will live in a new way for the glory and the honor of God.

[21 : 26] And when Peter wrote in verse 16, he said that the people should be spiritually alert, that they should be sober-minded.

literally he's saying there you should gird up the loins of your mind. He's saying like Roman soldiers, when they prepare themselves for action, they will gird up their loins so that they can run.

Otherwise, if they're in a normal position, they can't run very fast or be active. And he said in the same way, we need to prepare our minds so that we can live in a new way.

And last night from the scripture reading, we have seen that God is preparing for us an inheritance that cannot perish, spoil, or fade. And we always need to keep that in mind, that God's work also includes a future of an inheritance that is with God, that nothing can spoil, or cannot fade, and it cannot perish.

But in the meantime, we need to live our lives in this world. In 1989, the marathon world was shocked when a woman with the name of Rosie O'Donnell won the prestigious Boston marathon.

[22 : 45] When her name was read out, nobody knew about her, and everybody was surprised. She never won anything before. And then people looked at her, and she didn't even look like an athlete.

And then people started to ask questions, and it became clear that she actually didn't run the marathon. she just jumped in for the last few kilometers and crossed the line first. Peter is saying, there is an inheritance for us, but in the meantime, in the light of what God did in the past for us to set us aside, we need to live in a certain way.

And in order to do that, and to do that effectively for the glory and the honor of God, we need to be sober-minded. We need to gird up the loins of our minds so that we can think clearly.

And how important is it not in the world that we are living in today? A few years ago, I saw a photo of an advertisement in a magazine, and this advertisement on a big billboard in the U.S.

was advertising the services of legal experts, a legal firm. And it said simply, it says, life is short, divorce now.

[24 : 05] And you can see the thought behind it. It says, well, if you are struggling in your marriage, why bother? Life is short, divorce now.

And obviously, they know a lot of people will respond to that and simply get legal advice, get a divorce, and start over again. There is no consideration for the word of God.

But Peter is saying we should be sober minded, we should be alert that we will not be deceived, so that as people who have been rescued and redeemed and ransomed by the work of Christ Jesus, that we also can live in a new way, that we can be holy as he is holy.

And then the example that he gives there is that we would love each other as brothers and sisters. Tomorrow, when we take communion together, we will recognize the work of Christ in one another. And we will do it as a community. And we will do it together, because through the love of Christ, we also love one another.

[25 : 22] Peter ends this section and he says, since you have been born again, not of perishable things, not because of perishable seed, but of imperishable through the living and abiding word of God.

And then he quotes all flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass. The grass withers and the flower falls, but of the word of the Lord remains forever.

And this word is the good news that was preached to you. Peter and Mark were very closely associated with one another, and traditionally the gospel of Mark is seen really based on the testimony of Peter.

They worked together, and Peter was an eyewitness, and traditionally it's seen that Mark recorded the testimony of Peter in the gospel of Mark.

And strikingly, he starts his gospel with the following work. He said, the beginning of the gospel, or the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. And at the time when Mark wrote his gospel, the world really looked at Augustus Caesar as the person who brought good news.

[26 : 39] In the city of Plinia, there's an inscription that reads as follows, the birth day of the God, referring to Augustus Caesar, marked for the world the beginning of good tidings.

Mark for the world, the beginning of the gospel, through his coming. And people saw Augustus Caesar as a kind of a savior, because he established peace within the Roman Empire, and with the nations around him.

And now Mark, he's writing his gospel, and he said, the beginning of the gospel of good news about Jesus Christ, the Son of God, and he said that the one who brought the gospel, the one who brought the good news, is not Augustus Caesar, but it is Jesus Christ.

And the good news is not just temporary peace among the nations and among individuals, but it is peace between God and humankind. And the good news is that God in his mercy came to us to reconcile us through the work of Jesus Christ.

Christ. And Peter is saying that, he said, since you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but imperishable through the living and abiding word of God.

[27 : 51] And he said, all flesh is like grass, grass, withers, flowers, falls, but the word of God remains forever. And he says, when you look at the cities and the towns and the villages where you live, you will see the temples, and they will be very prominent, and they will be signs of symbol and power, signs and symbols of the emperor, and of the gods.

And as you stand against them, you may feel yourself very small, but remember you have received new birth, and all earthly power will be like grass and like flowers, and it will come to an end.

But the word of God will last forever, and that is the gospel of Jesus Christ. Let's give thanks for the fact that we were redeemed, that we were saved from death.

We were dead in our sin and in our trespasses, but in his mercy, God came to us in Christ Jesus, and through the blood of Christ, the price was paid for our sin.

What a joy, what a reason for celebration, what a reason for gratitude, what a reason to want to live for the honor and the glory of God.

[29 : 21] Let's continue to give thanks for what God has done, and live for his honor and glory.

Let's pray together. our Father in heaven, we do thank you for your kindness to us.

We thank you when we were dead in our sin and trespasses, that you came to us to redeem us, to save us, and to rescue us. We thank you that you loved us long before we turned to you, and long before we surrender to you, and that you have chosen us and set us aside to be your children.

We thank you, Lord, for the obedience of Christ, for his willingness to suffer for us on the cross, for his body to be broken, and for his blood to be shed, so that we can be redeemed.

And help us, Lord, to live lives that are holy, and to become holy as you are holy. help us to love one another, help us to live in obedience to you, and to glorify you through our lives.

We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.