

Forgiveness And Redemption

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[0 : 0 0] We read the passage from Psalm 107, verses 1 to 3, and then the last verse of Psalm 107, and it's in your Bible or it's in your leaflet, whichever you want.

I'll give thanks to the Lord, for he is good. His steadfast love endures forever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he has redeemed from trouble and gathered in from the lands, from the east and from the west, from the north and from the south.

If you look at that word redeemed, you may remember that lovely aria, which goes, I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth.

And these are the words of Job. And the difficulty with a lot of religious words like Redeemer is that they refer to a fairly unique event in history, a fairly unique activity of God.

You may redeem checks and redeem mortgages and things like that, but for the most part, it's a strange and unfamiliar word. When Job says, I know that my Redeemer lives, he's referring to the fact that in the midst of his suffering, in the midst of a sort of loss of everything that he had, in the face of impending death, he says, I know that my Redeemer lives.

[2 : 0 4] What he means simply by that is that there is someone who is going to vindicate him. There is someone who is going to stand and justify him before men.

And it's that strange and wonderful function of God that he has, in Jesus Christ, become our Redeemer.

The one who stands and vindicates us. And that's why in Psalm 107, when it says, I know that my Redeemer lives, or when he has redeemed me from trouble, and let the redeemed of the Lord say so, that's the point that he wants to make.

And he makes the point over and over again in the psalm. If you were to look, for instance, at verse 6 of the psalm, it says, Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress.

And if you look at verse 13 of the psalm, you see, Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. And if you look at verse 19, you will see it says, Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress.

[3 : 5 1] And if you look again at verse 28, Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress. The thing that I want to tell you is that it's probably inevitable that you and I come to the point in our lives where we cry to the Lord in our trouble.

Now, if you are a self-made and self-sufficient person, to be caught crying to the Lord in your trouble is not something that you want to have happen.

It's not the way we are meant to behave. We are meant to brave it out somehow, to put up with the circumstances of our lives, and not to find ourselves crying out to the Lord in our trouble.

And all I can say is, may God grant you the grace to come to the place where you will cry to the Lord in your trouble.

Because it's probably only at that point that you can begin to see what God can do for you that you can't do for yourself.

[5 : 23] Most of us like to think that we are able to do for ourselves whatever needs to be done. And so we organize our lives in such a way that we are never caught off base, as it were. We are never caught in the kind of trouble where we have to cry out to the Lord. And I pray that that may not happen to any of you.

That you will come to the place where you have to cry to the Lord in your trouble. That he may deliver you out of all your distress.

Because that's what God longs to be able to do. And one lady, a member of this congregation, who impressed me very much when she described the cancer that she suffered from and was told that she had two years to live.

And five years later, she was telling me the story. And she was very thankful that she came to that place in her life where she cried to the Lord in her trouble.

[6 : 44] And he heard her and answered her. And you heard Patty Howard tell you tonight how she was brought to that place in her life.

And I suppose a lot of men, particularly, I guess the way we are brought up in our brave Western society, don't want to come to that place.

And so it becomes the chief characteristic of the male in our society that he never shows any sign of weakness. He never shows any need for anything beyond the resources he himself has.

And he carefully constructs his life so as to never have to admit a need which is beyond his own ability to meet.

And I think that's one of the tragic flaws in our society. That we can't come to the place where we can cry to the Lord in our trouble and allow him to do for us what he alone can do.

[8 : 04] I think if you were to take the New Testament or even the scriptures as a whole, you would see that the men who knew God were the people who in the course of their human life came to that place.

You would be delighted, no doubt, to read again the second chapter of the book of Jonah where he was in very serious trouble indeed.

And you may recall the story if you don't read the first chapter first. And then he cried to the Lord in his trouble and God wonderfully delivered him.

And I think if you look at that lovely story of the publican and the Pharisee in the New Testament, you see how the publican came to the place that the Pharisee couldn't even imagine.

The Pharisee was full of his own self-sufficiency even to the point that it says of him that he prayed thus with himself.

[9 : 20] He even prayed to himself. And I suppose for a lot of us, our prayers are really an attempt to talk to ourselves, to talk ourselves into something rather than to praying to the God whose delight and desire it is to be able to meet us in our place of need and demonstrate to us his sufficiency.

So when the publican beat himself on the breast and said, God be merciful to me, a sinner, he was crying to the Lord in his trouble.

When David in Psalm 51 came to the end of himself and cried, have mercy on me, O God, there was a man, completely a man, and yet he was able to cry to the Lord in his trouble.

Paul, in the passage that I quoted this morning, came to the point of acute distress in his own life when he cried out, when he cried out, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of death?

He cried to the Lord in his trouble. The prayer book teaches us to cry to the Lord in our trouble when it says, we have heard and strayed from thy ways like lost sheep.

[10 : 57] We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts. We have offended against thy holy laws. We have done those things which we ought not to have done.

And we have not done those things that we ought to have done. And there is no good in me. And we learn to cry to the Lord in our trouble.

And my prayer for all of us in this week is that we might come to the place where without shame we may cry to the Lord in our trouble.

That he might deliver us. That he might redeem us as it is his purpose to do. I don't think that it's wrong even to say to you that our Lord Jesus on the cross came to exactly the same place in the fulfillment of his responsibility in becoming man when he turns and says, God be merciful to me.

He cries out from his heart and says, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? And never was there trouble like that.

[12 : 24] Never was there such forsakenness as that. Never has anyone plumbed the depths of the human predicament more deeply than that and to have cried to the Lord in our trouble.

And that's what we need to learn to do. If you come later in the week, I'll read you an excerpt from a letter that I want to tell you about of a lady who went out for her morning walk in Mexico City about six weeks ago.

And she found herself quite spontaneously crying to the Lord in her trouble. And it was a wonderful changing point in her whole life.

Now, you may think that God may have to use rather heavy equipment, heavy duty equipment to bring us to the place where we cry to the Lord in our trouble.

And that I think I would agree with you. God does. Because I think God understands the extent of our self-centered arrogance in a way that we don't.

[13 : 45] We don't know how desperately we cling to the reality of our own self-sufficiency and how completely contrary it is to our nature to be able to cry out to the Lord in our trouble.

Archbishop William Temple tells a story and it's a lovely story. He first quotes the verse from the book of Genesis. Let there be light and there was light.

You know, that's part of the story of creation and the stars that lit the night sky and the sun that lit the day and the whole lighting up of the whole of the universe was done in response to a command from the creator God.

Let there be light. light and there was light. Then he contrasts that verse with another verse which you will recognize too from the Garden of Gethsemane where it says of the Lord Jesus.

He kneeled down and prayed, Father, if you be willing, remove this cup from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but thine being done.

[15 : 18] And being in an agony, he prayed more earnestly and his sweat was, as it were, great drops of blood falling down on the ground.

And he said, think of those two verses. The one picturing the Lord Jesus in an agony and bloody sweat.

Praying more earnestly, let this cup pass from me. Nevertheless, not my will, but thine be done.

In contrast with the verse by which the whole universe was set ablaze with light, let there be light and there was light. The contrast between those two verses, one just has to do with a simple act of creation.

The other has to do with making a selfish soul into a loving one. And that's work.

[16 : 30] So you see what happens when we talk about Jesus, our Redeemer. we're talking about a singular, unique, and significant act that is right at the center of the whole of human history.

And that act is the cross of Jesus Christ. It's on the basis of that act that we receive the forgiveness of God.

Now, other religions don't like Christianity for this reason. And the problem they have is that God cannot forgive sins.

And remain God. It just is impossible. All of you who are heads of businesses know that when somebody basically violates the purpose of the firm of which you are the head, then there is no forgiveness for that person.

There is a pink slip. I admire the story of a large trust company in Toronto, where I'm told that when one of the members of this trust company is summoned to the boss's office because he has offended the business of that trust company.

[18 : 06] He has a brief encounter with the boss, returns to his office, finds the lock changed and all his property outside the door waiting to be carried away because that company cannot tolerate that kind of disloyalty.

And yet, our God forgives us. How can he do that? And I I know as a minister of a congregation that you get into trouble time and time again because there are so many people who've done so much for the life of the church, who've worked and slaved and given themselves hour after hour to the work of the church, and then along comes some insignificant little pup of a person who is received into the church, claims the forgiveness of God, claims full standing with those who've served long in the life of the congregation.

And that person is accepted unconditionally. And that offends our sensibilities. And it offends our sensibilities because somehow God has made a mistake in forgiving people.

He can't do it without creating enormous problems. And you know in your own life how true that is because you and I suffer from the same total incapacity to really forgive somebody, to really come to the place where somebody who has crossed you can be forgiven.

It's just too costly. And you shouldn't have to pay the cost. After all, it was them that caused the offense. And you see, that's why at the center of the whole of history is this unique act of God by which we are redeemed, by which we are forgiven.

[20 : 30] It's, you know, people tell you over and over again, why, why, why doesn't God do something here and now? I mean, it was echoed in the sketch we had tonight.

Why doesn't he do it the way we think he should do it? Because, in fact, he has done it. And the place where he has done it is at the cross of Jesus Christ.

You see, what has to happen is that a totally self-centered person has to become Christ-centered.

The mind which is the expression of the arrogance and sufficiency of self is a mind which has to be replaced by the mind of Christ.

A transaction has to take place and that transaction takes place when Jesus, the Son of God, comes under the condemnation of men.

[21 : 47] And under that condemnation is taken and scourged and a thorn of crowns is put on his head and he's led out bearing a cross and he comes to a hill shaped like a skull and the cross is laid on the ground and nails are driven through his wrists and feet and then the cross is lifted up from the ground and dropped into a hole and there he is left to suffer and to die.

And the result of his having done that is that in a sense God's case is complete. He no longer owes us anything.

He has given us his dearly beloved son and we have nailed him to the cross.

And at that moment the writing is on the wall. It's finished for us. We have proved who we are.

We have demonstrated who we are. We've demonstrated how we think. We've demonstrated what we are. And there's nothing more to say.

[23 : 18] But God still has something to say because it is from the lips of that man who hangs on the cross that the word of forgiveness comes to you and me.

Do you see the significance of that? God, I suppose, we could imagine in his omnipotence and in his authority and in his power could say, your sins forget about them.

We're buddies, we understand each other. But that's not good enough. Because what God wants to do is to demonstrate the reality of his love to you.

And you only understand the nature of the love of God, not in the beauty of creation that surrounds us, because that has gone on day in and day out for thousands and thousands of years, the only way you and I can understand the reality of the forgiveness of God is when they are spoken from the lips of the Son of God with the crown of thorns nailed to the cross.

And that's the only way we can understand that God's purpose towards us is love. And the response he wants from us is the response to that love, which in itself must be love.

[24 : 55] You see, that's what has to happen to us, is that we have to come to the place where we love him because we recognize that he has first loved us before the foundation of the world.

In a sense, Christ is crucified, and in that crucifixion has demonstrated his love to you and to me. And there's a hymn written about that love that tries to say probably much more eloquently than I can say what that love means.

And I want you to sing that hymn now. I want you to sing to it's a what I've just told you, and I want you to sing hymn number 258 in your book, and perhaps to sing it at least in the first verse, fairly quietly.

and then perhaps we can sing with greater feeling as the time goes on. But stand will you and sing with me hymn 258.

Please be seated. Thank you. they cried to the Lord in their trouble and he redeemed them from their distress.

[26 : 47] What essentially we have to know is that God's approach to you and me is in the person of Jesus Christ who has died on the cross for us.

A powerless, apparently, a powerless person who can offer us nothing to deliver us but the reality of his love.

And that's hard to accept. And it's hard to accept because we can't believe that God could love us, but even more difficult to accept because in our pride and in our self-sufficiency it's very difficult to respond to that love except with love.

There's no other adequate way to respond. And there's a story which wonderfully illustrates it which I'm going to tell you though probably you're all familiar with it.

And it's the story of the Grand Inquisitor from the Brothers Karamazov by Dostoyevsky. And you will know that in the streets of one of the great cities in Spain during the days of the Inquisition Christ appeared in the streets and brought comfort to the blind and to the sick.

[28 : 40] And in the cathedral square when a procession was moving across the square carrying the coffin of a young boy escorted by his mother Christ as of old stopped the procession of death and commanded the little boy to come back from the dead.

And he did. And just as he did, the story tells us, the Grand Inquisitor came out of the great Gothic doors of the cathedral dressed in a black casket with two bodyguards beside him.

And he pointed to the figure of Christ and said, arrest that man. And Christ was arrested and taken away and detained in the dungeon.

And in the night the Grand Inquisitor went down to see him and said to him, I know who you are.

And you are going to make again the mistake you made before and he described the period of Christ's temptation when he was offered to make stones into bread that people may eat.

[30 : 15] He was offered authority over the kingdoms of this world. And in addition, he was offered that if he would drop from the highest pinnacle of the temple and be rescued before he was dashed to his death.

And the Grand Inquisitor said, those are the things that men want in their religion. They want bread and you offer them love.

They want authority mystery and you offer them love. They want mystery and you offer them love.

love. It's taken us hundreds of years, the Grand Inquisitor said, to correct that.

Now the church is again in the position where because of its wealth it can offer men bread, because of its authority it can command men to obey, because of its preservation of the mystery of religion, it can enthrall men's minds.

[31 : 37] And so tomorrow you go to the stake to be burned. And Christ didn't answer him. The story says that the figure of Christ stood up and walked across the little dungeon room and kissed the Grand Inquisitor full on the lips.

And the Grand Inquisitor said, go. And Christ left. And the Grand Inquisitor had the opportunity to change his whole way of life.

And he didn't. And when you and I are confronted with the cross of Jesus Christ, the fact that the only basis on which God wants to relate to you is the basis of his unconditional love, demonstrated not by dreams and fantasies, but demonstrated by the reality of Christ's death on the cross.

love, when you and I are offered that love and asked to respond to that love, we perhaps would prefer bread and authority and mystery.

Instead of capitulating faith from the proud castle of our self-sufficiency and taking the mind of Christ in place of our own mind and the mind of love in place of our own selfishness.

[33 : 41] love. And so we need opportunity to come to that place where we can respond in love to the love which God has demonstrated to us on the cross.

And each night at the conclusion of this service, we're going to have a short epilogue service over there in the chapel.

And at the short epilogue service, night after night, Sunday, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday, you will be asked very simply whether you will receive from Christ that gift of love and whether you can in faith respond in love to the gift that you've been offered.

And it may be that you have never done that in your life. You have proudly and defiantly resisted the claims of Christ, your Redeemer.

You have never come to the place where you cried out to the Lord in your trouble and allowed him to do for you what he alone can do.

[35 : 11] You may never have come to that place in your life. And the purpose of the epilogue service is to allow you a moment in which consciously and in the full possession of all your faculties, you acknowledge that love which God has shown us in Christ, and you seek to respond in love to that.

Janice and Jeff will talk to you about it. There will be those there who will share with you about it.

and I'll be there if you want to talk to me about it. But I think all of us need a place and a time in our lives when consciously and deliberately we commit all that we know of ourselves to all that we know of God.

And that's what the epilogue service is for. And if you want to stay behind for it, let me say you're wonderfully welcome. And if you don't want to stay behind for it, you're wonderfully free not to.

Not only are you free not to, you're free to go over to the hall where there's coffee, there's opportunity for discussion, there's books to see, and people to meet.

[36 : 52] You may find yourself in the happy position waiting for somebody who did decide to go to the epilogue service. So both those options are open to you, and I invite you prayerfully to do that.

It means that everybody who, when we finish the service, I want people who want to go to the chapel to go directly there, and people who don't, to go directly to the parish hall for coffee, so that the church is quiet as soon as possible at the end of the service.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
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