

A Better Story: Redemption

Introduction

Over the last couple of weeks, we have been looking at how Christianity has a better story. We began with God being the creator of the universe rather than the universe just coming into existence all by itself. We showed how a creator gives the world meaning and purpose and helps us to look beyond our own interests to the good of the world and to others. Last week we looked at The Fall, and we recognised that while God made the world good, it is no longer as good as it could be because of our sin. We saw how corrupt and polluted we have become, that even though we may not be as bad as we could be, sin has affected every part of us. We talked about how we are enslaved to sin, that it is like an addiction which we cannot break free from. And we saw how sin breaks down our relationship with God as well as with each other. Sin is serious. Something we need to be saved from, because the punishment for sin is serious. Today, we are going to look at how God saves us from our sinfulness. He frees us. He redeems us. Today's talk is all about redemption.

Redemption and the Old Testament

Redemption is paying a ransom price to secure freedom. The classic example from today's world is Cash Converters; the pawn or hock-shop. Let's say that you need some money, so you take something of value to Cash Converters; maybe your grandmother's wedding ring or something. You give your item to the pawn shop, they give you some money and a ticket of redemption that is good for a few months. That means that if you want to get your grandmother's ring back before it is sold to someone else then you have to take your redemption ticket and buy the ring back. Of course, there is some interest on top. One of the best examples of redemption in the Old Testament of the Bible is found in the Kinsman Redeemer or what you could call the Family Redeemer. Leviticus explains what the Family Redeemer was.

Leviticus 25:47-49 "If a foreigner residing among you becomes rich and any of your fellow Israelites become poor and sell themselves to the foreigner or to a member of the foreigner's clan, ⁴⁸ they retain the right of redemption after they have sold themselves. One of their relatives may redeem them: ⁴⁹ An uncle or a cousin or any blood relative in their clan may redeem them. Or if they prosper, they may redeem themselves.

In other words, if you were to become a slave, then someone in your family had the right to go and buy you out of that slavery. It may have cost them a lot of money, but the Family Redeemer bought your freedom so that you could be restored to the family once more. Examples of this are people like Ruth and Naomi being bought out of their poverty by Boaz to restart the family. In the book of Hosea, we see Hosea buying his wife out of prostitution to restore the family. And then there is the example of God saving his people from slavery in Egypt so that they could be restored as his people. As King David said in one of his prayers...

2 Samuel 7:22-23 "How great you are, Sovereign LORD! There is no one like you, and there is no God but you, as we have heard with our own ears. ²³ And who is like your people Israel-- the one nation on earth that God went out to redeem as a people for himself, and to make a name for himself, and to perform great and awesome wonders by driving out nations and their gods from before your people, whom you redeemed from Egypt?"

God saved the Israelites from Egypt. He redeemed them from slavery and freed them so that they could be brought into a relationship with him. God was their God and they would be his people.

Redemption in the New Testament

In the New Testament, we see Jesus as the redeemer of God's people.

1 Peter 1:18-19 For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

Last week, we spoke at length about our sinfulness, and we said that we are like slaves to sin. We are addicted to it, we cannot break free from it, we are in bondage to sin, and only Jesus can pay the ransom price to free us from sin. You see, sin leads to death and that death is both spiritual and physical. When Adam and Eve first sinned, they had a spiritual kind of death, in that their relationship with God was broken by their sin. Later, they had a physical death, and that physical death reminds us of the spiritual death, the broken relationship, we have with God. In order to pay the ransom price for our sin, God had to die. Jesus, who is the second person of the Trinity, and therefore God, died a physical and spiritual kind of death on the cross. It was not that God ceased to exist when Jesus died, it was that Jesus had to receive all the wrath of God the Father for our sin. It was like the relationship between God the Father and Jesus was broken in some way. A kind of spiritual death. Jesus did this by dying on the cross. It was there he spilled his blood and paid the ransom price for us as he was physically put to death. The great cost of sin is death and Jesus redeems us by his death which will ultimately free us from the penalty of sin and death and give us life eternal.

Romans 6:23 'For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord.'

A Framework

To explain this further, I want to use the same basic outline as we used last week when we looked at the problem of sin, though I will reverse the order for this talk. Last week we heard that sin is relational, moral, and universal. This week we are going to see how our redemption is universal, moral, and relational.

1. Universal

Last week we heard how sin is universal, that it affects everyone. It does not matter what age you live in or how old you are, what country you are born in or what culture you are shaped by. Rich or poor, male or female, "good" or "bad" - every single person has a problem with sin whether they recognise that or not. In the same way, redemption is available to everyone. No matter who you are, you are loved by God, and his offer of forgiveness is for you. In this way, redemption is universal, but we also have to be careful not to think that every single person who was ever born is actually redeemed. You see, God has redeemed his people, but there are those who refuse to be his people. So, redemption and salvation is universal in that it is available to anyone and everyone, but it is not universal in that it only applies to those who are God's people. Now, you may ask, "Am I one of God's people?", especially if you don't normally go to church and you have been invited by someone to join us today. Well, that is a good question and the best answer is to say, "If you are unsure, then why don't you become one of God's people today?" It is as simple as asking God for forgiveness, and living with Jesus as your Lord and God. As the apostle Paul said in...

Ephesians 1:7-8a In him [Jesus] we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace ⁸ that he lavished on us.

Now, there was another part of the universal part of sinfulness which we looked at last week and that was the idea of "Total Depravity". We saw how total depravity did not mean that we were as bad as we could possibly be, rather total depravity meant that no part of us is untouched by sin. Total depravity talks about the extent of our sinfulness and that every part of us is corrupted or polluted by sin. If Jesus truly redeems us from our sinfulness, then every aspect of ourselves is redeemed. Whether that is how we treat others, how we spend or save our money, how we use our power and position, or how we use our time. Every part of us is redeemed by Jesus and so every part of us belongs to God. There is no place for those who act like Christians on Sundays but then totally ignore God in every other part of their life. No, being or becoming a Christian is a whole of life commitment.

Moral

And that brings us to the issue of morality. Over the years, people have often thought that they needed to be good to get to heaven. That if they were good, moral people, then God would be impressed by them and say that they were good enough to be part of his Kingdom. But we have just seen that people are corrupt, polluted, and totally depraved because of sinfulness. The truth is that even the best of us cannot keep God's law all the time. Like an arrow with some of its feathers torn off, we will miss the mark. So, if we are to compare ourselves to the standard of God's law, then we cannot reach that standard. In fact, the only thing God's law can do for us is to point out our failure to keep his law, to point out our sinfulness and how we ought to be condemned on the Day of Judgement. That is the curse of the law, that it cannot save us, just condemn us. In writing to the Galatians, Paul said that Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law.

Galatians 3:13-14 *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole."¹⁴ He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit.*

What we see in these verses is Jesus redeeming his people by taking the curse of judgement from us. Jesus paid the ransom price of being cursed so that we do not have to feel the sting of that curse, which is being condemned to hell. When we talk about being saved, we are being saved from hell. When we talk about being redeemed, we are being redeemed from hell. Because the ultimate spiritual death is being in that broken relationship with God and receiving the wrath we deserve. Well, if Jesus has redeemed us from sin, death, and hell, then how should we live? Paul wrote to Titus and said...

Titus 2:11-14 *For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people.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,¹³ while we wait for the blessed hope-- the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ,¹⁴ 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.*

Jesus gave himself to redeem us from all wickedness. He paid the price of the curse, he paid the price of death, he paid the price of our sinfulness so that we are no longer slaves to sin. Now, this does not mean that we will never sin. We will still fall to temptation, but we are no longer under sin's bondage, we are no longer the property of the slave master known as sin and death. No, we have been set free from that slave master, so

that we can live for Jesus. Living for Jesus means that we no longer live in ungodly ways, chasing after worldly passions, because worldly passions are just for this life. We are people living for eternity, living for Jesus, and eager to do good like Jesus did good.

2. Relational

But when it all comes down it, sinfulness and being redeemed from sinfulness is relational. Last week we talked about Adam and Eve's sin being more about breaking their relationship with God than about breaking the rules. We also talked about some of the many word pictures that the Bible gives us of sin being the breaking of our relationship with God. We talked about the Prodigal Son, who told his father that he wanted all the wealth his father could give him, but he didn't want to be with his father, he wanted to disown his father. So, he ran away from his father's family with his father's money and spent it on parties and wild living. We talked about sin being a betrayal like when a person commits adultery, betraying their spouse. It is not just about what they did, it is how it breaks the relationship. Sin is relational and therefore, so is redemption. Paul says in...

Galatians 4:4-7 But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵ to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship. ⁶ Because you are his sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, "Abba, Father." ⁷ So you are no longer a slave, but God's child; and since you are his child, God has made you also an heir.

This reminds me of the Family Redeemer, the Kinsman Redeemer, we spoke about at the beginning of this talk. The Family Redeemer was the person who would pay the bond money to the slave owner, the ransom price, to free their relative. But notice that in their culture, people were not redeemed to go about living with whoever they wanted to, they were redeemed back into the family. This is what we see in Galatians 4. Jesus not only redeems us from the slavery of sin, he redeems us into the family of God. When the Prodigal Son returned, he wanted to tell his father that he did not deserve to be called his son, and was happy to simply be one of his father's servants. But his father would have none of that. The son had returned and he would receive all the honour and benefits of being that man's son. The redemption Jesus offers us does mean that we will live God's way, but we also have all the honour and benefits of being a child of God.

Conclusion

My friends, sin is serious. It breaks down our relationship with God, it affects our ability to do what God expects of us, and every part of us is affected by sin. Ultimately, we are enslaved by sin. But the redemption Jesus offers us is total, it changes the way we live as we live for Jesus, and it takes us from being a slave to sin headed for condemnation and hell, to being a child of God who is promised an eternity with the Father in heaven. Be redeemed today. Thank Jesus for taking on the curse of the law so you do not have to. Ask for forgiveness for all your sins. And live with Jesus as your Lord and Saviour. I pray that you would see how important it is for you to turn to God, ask Jesus for forgiveness, and commit your life to him.