

“REDEEMED FOR WHAT?”

**Sermon preached by Elder William Nahhas
Kirkmont Presbyterian Church
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Texts: Ephesians 1:7**

When Pastor Carmen asked me to preach this morning I was seized with anxiety, trepidation. I have never preached a formal sermon before. I said yes because we must all serve in any capacity we can. Even though I felt inadequate and unable, I had recently been pondering the fact that God knows what I am capable of doing more than I do. It is not about me and what I can do, it is about God and what he can do through me, an unworthy sinner in the hands of an awesome God. So today, I pray that this sanctuary will be filled with the Holy Spirit and that this same Spirit would guide my thoughts and lips so that what I say and what you hear will be acceptable to God, our rock and our redeemer.

Before I start, allow me to apologize for my accent. Also, when Carmen reviewed my sermon, she told me that it was not “warm and fuzzy.” It is not designed to be warm and fuzzy. The Word of God is hard to accept by some and it bothers others, but it is the way of salvation to those who believe. Therefore, I do not apologize if I rightly interpret the Word of God, and I will try my best to do so today.

Hear the word of God. The Apostle Paul wrote “And you hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins. (Ephesians 2:1) But God who is rich in mercy, for His great love wherewith He loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us (made us alive) together with Christ, (by grace you are saved;) And has raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus: That in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches. of His grace in His kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. For by His grace you are saved, through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast. (Ephesians 2:4-9) In whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the richness of His grace. (Ephesians 1:7) Know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which you have of God, and you are not your own? For you are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are Gods. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20) For you are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God has before ordained (or prepared) that we should walk in them.” (Ephesians 2:10)

This is the word of God which I am unworthy to repeat, I pray that it will not return empty but would accomplish Gods will and His purpose. Amen.

The subject of this sermon is “The Redeemed of God.” After much thought, I decided that the title would be “Redeemed for What?” Before we can get into the substance of this discussion it is necessary that we be all on the same wavelength in understanding the meaning of the word

“redeemed.” This word has two types of interpretation, the worldly or the secular and the theological or spiritual. Let me give you some examples to try and clarify what I mean.

Let's say Charlie (I'm picking on Charlie), let's say Charlie has a little dog, one of those Mexican or Taco Bell things, and Charlie loves this dog; I mean he adores this dog. And one day the dog disappears and Charlie is beside himself with worry. He waits one week, two weeks, three weeks and the dog does not show up. Then somebody comes over to Charlie and says: “Listen, I found your dog. Your dog is sitting in the back yard of so-and-so.” And Charlie gets up in his pajamas, runs over to so-and-so's houses and says: “My dog, I found my dog. I want my dog back.” And the guy says: “What do you mean you want your dog back? This dog has been here for three weeks. He has gone through six 20-pound bags of dog food. He has cost me a fortune.” Now Charlie knows the dog can not eat six bags of dog food in ten years. But he loves the dog. And the person says, “I want \$500.” And Charlie loves the dog so much that he gives him the \$500, and buys back his dog! Yes, he buys back his dog. He “redeems” his dog.

Let's say one of you has a wife with expensive taste. (I'm sure nobody here does) and she wants a \$100 pair of shoes, and you do not have \$100. So you take the gold watch that your father had given you, you go to the Pawn Broker and you give him the watch and he gives you a \$100 and you go and buy the pair of shoes. Now your wife is very happy, but you are very unhappy because you do not have your watch anymore. So as soon as you earn some extra money, you go back to the pawnbroker hoping to buy back your watch. The fellow says “Give me \$300 and you can have the watch.” You love the watch, you pay more than its worth, and you give him the \$300. You “redeem” your watch.

The last example I have is a little closer to the theological or the spiritual meaning. In the days when slavery was common practice, slaves were not owned by themselves, they were owned by their master. If you wished to free the slave, you had to pay the master money and “redeem” the slave and give him his freedom.

Now the theological meaning is to “deliver from sin,” or in popular church language, “to be saved.” We are slaves to sin and the Devil, who owns us. If we want to be free from slavery to sin we must be bought back. This is basically the theological meaning.

Now that we know the definition, the question remains “How does one get redeemed or saved.” There is a book by R.C. Sproul, called “Saved from What?” The point of this book is that there are many people who want to be saved, but they have very little idea what they are to be saved from. They do not know that they are heading in a certain direction, and they need to be saved from that end result, that being the wrath of God! At any rate, how do we become members of this unworthy group of sinners who become redeemed? As we all know this desire to be saved from hell, as defined by various religious groups and people over time, has been present throughout human history. Many ways and means have been described. How many people do you know who believe that God will rule in their favor, simply because they are not as bad as someone else. But allow me to tell you, ladies and gentlemen, IT CAN NOT BE DONE!! The creator indicts us all for breaking His law. None is righteous, no not one. Left to our own devices we are all heading in the direction of eternal punishment for we are debtors who can not pay the debt.

Now, we are not talking about forgiveness among humans. We are not talking about a person who wrongs another. The individual at fault may feel guilty. He confesses to the victim hoping to be forgiven, and makes amends hoping for redemption. Instead we are talking about us, who by nature are sinful and who are slaves to Satan. We can not free ourselves by our own efforts, no matter what they may be. Gods' word is very clear on this subject. The reason we are so helpless as you heard from the scripture reading, is that in our natural unredeemed state we are dead. D.E.A.D. Dead! We are not a little under the weather. We are not suffering from the flu that is going around. We are not in the ICU at deaths door and soon will be dead. We are dead, and believe me; dead people can not do anything to remedy that situation.

Now, as you probably know, I am a Gynecologic Oncologist. I treat women with Gynecologic Cancer. Unfortunately, some of them, in spite of my best efforts, will die. When that happens, the nurse will call me and say: "Mrs. Jones has passed away. You have to come and pronounce her dead."

Allow me to give you a purely theoretical example to illustrate our unredeemed spiritual state. The nurse tells me "You really have to come in. You have taken care of this woman for so long. Her family thinks highly of you. Her daughter believes that you can still do something miraculous and save her, in spite of the fact that the resident pronounced her dead ten minutes ago." Let us assume that I have a magic potion. If she can take this magic potion she'll wake up. So I stand at the door and I say "Mrs. Jones this is the magic potion. Come over here to me. If you do, I will give it to you and you will be well." Of course she is not going to get out of bed and come over. So I walk to her bed and I say: "Here is the magic potion. Open your mouth." She is not going to open her mouth. I say, "I will open your mouth for you, and I will put the medicine in and I will make you swallow it. But even if she does swallow it there is no circulation, she can not absorb anything and nothing is going to happen.

When Lazarus had been dead for three or four days he did not suddenly realize that it did not smell too good in the tomb, so he decided to get up and get out. Christ had to call him out of the grave, "Lazarus come forth." Everybody agreed at that time that this was a supernatural event. It was a miracle. Dead people do not get up and walk out of the grave on their own.

The inevitable conclusion is that, theologically, redemption is also a supernatural event. It is God who calls from spiritual death to spiritual life. It is God who determines from the beginning of the world, purely on the basis of his own will, to elect (or choose) a group of people who he purchased (or redeemed) using the most precious currency of all time, the blood of his Son Jesus Christ, who died on the cross in order to save those given to Him by His Father.

Now let me use another example. If a Boy Scout wanted to earn a merit badge, the scoutmaster would assign him a list of required tasks. When the tasks are successfully completed, he will be given his merit badge. But suppose the Scout Master says: "Here Jon, I have this merit badge for you. Take it. You do not have to do anything to earn it. In fact you cannot earn it even if you tried. You have been chosen by the High Council based on their secret will, not on you or what you have done. Further more, you cannot lose this badge and it cannot be taken way from you. You do not have to do anything to keep it. If you wish you can hide it in a metal safe and never

look at it again. You can forget about it. Or you can put it in a glass case and glance at it every now and then. Or you can wear it on our chest and walk around boasting that you earned it. Or you can be so overwhelmed by this gracious act of receiving something that you do not even deserve. Therefore, out of gratitude you cannot but go out and do the good works that you were supposed to do in the first place, with no motive other than to demonstrate your thankfulness for being chosen.” I guarantee you, ladies and gentlemen, that even though he does not have to, this Boy Scout will spend the rest of his life looking for little old ladies who need to cross the street.

Now having identified the redeemed and how they are saved, what remains is to try and find the purpose and the reason for this complicated and at times seemingly unfair process. If God is so sovereign over all things, and if He is loving and omnipotent, and if He could speak the word and all that is in it and create all out of nothing, why does He not just wave his magic wand and redeem everybody. Did Jesus just have enough blood to redeem only a few people? Did God run out of his currency and therefore had to be on a budget, redeeming only some over the course of history and condemning others to eternal damnation? “Foul!” We cry, “That’s not fair.”

You see we have no answer to this age-old dilemma and God has chosen not to specify His reasons within His Word. Therefore, we must not speculate. In fact God tells us in Deuteronomy 29:29 that this is Gods business and not ours. Our finite and simple human mind cannot fathom the mind of God, nor should we try; for God is God and we are not, and for that we must never cease to give thanks.

However, I do not agree with Kipling who wrote “Ours is the not to reason why, ours is to do or die.” For God has given us a discerning intelligent mind, and we must use our mind in interpreting and understanding what God has chosen to show us in his Word. The Bible tells us we must use our mind and question every spirit to determine if it is truly from God. We are not robots, and therefore, we have the capacity to understand what God is saying to us. But, I do agree with the saying “that some Christians are so heavenly bound that they are no earthly good.” And therein lies the answer to the question “Redeemed For What?”

One of the greatest myths, and I even dare say frauds or heresies, that gained popularity through the growth of certain movements in the 20th century church was the pseudo gospel of self redemption or self salvation based on the old Pelagian or Semipelagian heresy claiming that the Holy Spirit is nice to have around just in case, but in general we have it within ourselves to achieve our own salvation, using a variety of means. This salvation by works theology taught that God so loves that He would not let anyone go to hell. He gives people the means to achieve their own salvation. This available means of salvation ranges from universal salvation to the name it and claim it gospel, to answering alter calls in churches or crusades, to speaking in tongues, to accepting Jesus as your personal savior, and the list goes on and on. The emphasis was on salvation or redemption as an end in itself; and once achieved the recipient could sit back and bask in the glow of smug assurance that he or she did it. Such a person felt that the goal had been reached, a ticket to heaven had been secured, and spend the rest of his or her life as usual looking with holier than thou pity at those poor other people who could not and did not make it and therefore are doomed to spend eternity burning in hell.

Of course, the reward for redemption is to spend eternity with Christ in the heavenly places. But this is the ultimate reward. The question that every person redeemed by God should answer is “What do I do in the mean time?” I’m nearly sure that just about now someone in this congregation, who is still awake, will jump up and say “Ah ha! I caught you. There you go talking about works theology again.” No, my friend, the works that I am about to speak of do not and cannot secure salvation. The shed blood of Christ on Calvary has already done that. This is a done deal so that no one can boast. What I am talking about now are the works that, just as the redeemed were chosen by God from the beginning of the world, these works also were chosen and prepared for the redeemed to walk in them. We know that salvation causes us to be heavenly bound; of that there is no doubt. Yet, we still have an earthly journey to complete. Whether the remainder of this journey is short or long doesn’t matter. What matters more is what we do along the way. This is what the Book of James is all about. One is saved only by faith alone, in Christ alone; and that salvation is a gift of God, sealed by the Holy Spirit and can not be lost. But, even though it can not be lost, this faith can be dead if it does not produce good works, just like a dead tree can not produce fruit and a dead woman can not bear a child.

I do not know what works God has chosen and prepared for us. Only God knows that and He has ways of revealing these works to us if we develop the desire to be constantly tuned to His will and to the needs of the people and the world around us. My purpose today is not to list for you, or to have you make a list of, specific works that you should go out and do. Rather what I am trying to communicate to you, as people bought back from sin and Satan and redeemed by God is to develop such a deep overwhelming attitude of humility and gratitude, and a watchful awareness, so that when God presents you with opportunities to serve Him through serving others you will be able to recognize these tasks, sometimes small and insignificant, as works prepared for you by God. Your heightened sense of alertness created by your deep gratitude will enable you to recognize these opportunities for what they are, lest they pass you by never to present themselves again.

So my friends, the redeemed of God, as we talk about stewardship, remember that pledging, tithing and giving to God is not a one time deal, but a daily event. Go out into the world and look to the works that God has prepared for you. Do you have a broken relationship that needs to be restored? Do you turn your face away from the poor, the hungry and the downtrodden? Are you uncomfortable and stay away from the sick or the bereaved? Do you pray with the Psalmist that you will walk with integrity of heart within your house and that you will not set before your eyes anything that is worthless? Do you walk with integrity in your work and in your play? The need is all around you. Do not keep your redemption secret. God had redeemed you so that He may be glorified. So glorify Him, not only in word but also in deed. Let your gratitude, love and works shine before men so that all may know who has purchased you, and to whom you belong, and that you have been raised from death to life through him, who himself died for you. AMEN