

Sermon 5, Our Richly Gracious Redemption in Christ, Ephesians 1:7-8

Proposition: Those in Christ have a richly gracious redemption procured at the cost of Christ's own blood.

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Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we continue this morning to look at the magnificent doxology with which Paul opens his letter to the Ephesian church. We have already seen the rich spiritual blessings we have from God the Father, and principally the blessing of being chosen or pre-decided on by our Father. We come today to the rich spiritual blessings we have from Jesus Christ, the Son of God. The principal spiritual benefit He grants to us is not election — that's the Father's gift. It's not sealing — that's the Spirit's gift. The principal spiritual benefit Jesus Christ grants to us is *redemption*. Paul describes in the text before us something of the nature of our redemption and something of the measure of our redemption. What I hope to show you this morning is that those who are in Christ have a richly gracious redemption, one that He procured for them at the cost of His own blood.

I. The Nature of our Redemption, v. 7

Let's dive into this text, then, and swim in the overflowing ocean of the grace and bounty of Jesus Christ in His saving work for sinners like us. Indeed, Paul begins "in Him" but then adds the key subject word "we." What I'm about to write, he's saying, and what I am therefore about to preach to you, is true only of "we." Who are the "we"? Church people, to begin with — this letter was dispatched to a local church. But clearly not all church people have all the spiritual blessings listed here. Why not? Because the blessings for only group of people. They are for those in Christ.

A. It Is a Redemption in Christ

Indeed, we have already seen that God chose us in Christ and that we are accepted in Christ. Now Paul adds that we have redemption, in its entirety, in Christ.

What does this mean? We have already talked about it a little bit with respect to this book of Ephesians, but let's go back to Genesis 3. There we see two primary groups of identified: the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent. These two will be hostile toward one another. But a great champion will come from among the seed of the woman and crush the head of the serpent at the cost of a wound to his heel. Ultimately, brothers and sisters, the message of the Bible is that the seed of the woman are not primarily the progeny of Eve but rather the progeny of Jesus Christ, who is the new Adam and the head of the new humanity. He talks in the Gospels regularly about His people, His sheep, those whom the Father has given Him, etc. Isaiah 53 and Psalm 22 tell us that He has a seed, and that He will look at this seed and be satisfied for the heavy price He paid for them. This seed of the woman, then, is all those who look to God as their Father and Christ as their Redeemer. The New Testament usually uses the phrase "in Christ," rather than the phrase "seed of the woman" or "His seed" to designate this group. But ultimately, it is one and the same group. We call it the invisible church, the company of the elect, the redeemed, or simply those who are truly born-again Christians. So those who are in Christ are those who rightly belong to this group of the woman's seed. Those who are in Christ, seen from another angle, are those who have believed *into* Christ and been baptized *into* Christ (as the NT writers regularly speak). Why do you need to believe *into* Christ? Because that is how you become one who is in Christ. You must be one who has believed into Him. In short, when Paul says "those in Christ" he is also saying "those who have believed in Christ" or "those who have been incorporated into the body of Christ." In union with Christ, you also become united to the church which is His body, as Ephesians 2 will elaborate at length.

So when you read that "in Him we have redemption," realize that Paul is saying that redemption belongs to all those, but only to those, who have believed into Jesus Christ such that they are in Christ — incorporated into His mystical body, represented by Him in His atoning work, and united to Him in all the promises and blessings He receives from His Father. So when Paul says that "in Him we have redemption," Paul means that "we" church people have redemption insofar as we are believers in Jesus. Everyone who has faith in Christ has redemption in Christ. In general, that is supposed to be true of church people. But the challenge is there and remains there: you need to believe in Jesus Christ! You need to be united to Him by faith. I ask you this morning: Do you believe in Jesus? Have you trusted in Him and are you currently trusting in Him for salvation? Does Paul's "we" include you? If not, then you don't have redemption.

What is redemption? Redemption is purchased freedom from bondage. It's not stolen freedom (i.e., freedom gained by running away and hiding), nor is it simply rescue from a less-than-ideal situation. In its root, redemption means purchased freedom from an ongoing condition of bondage. Paul says that in Christ, we have redemption — present tense. He doesn't use the perfect tense, "In Christ we have had redemption," or the future tense, "In Christ we will have redemption." He uses the present tense: *We have redemption*. Right now, we are having purchased freedom. We are enjoying that purchased freedom in an ongoing way.

But of course, if we are redeemed, then we must be redeemed from something. What? Paul doesn't say here directly, though he does say that this redemption results in forgiveness of sins.

B. It Is a Redemption from Sin

And sin, brothers and sisters, is ultimately what this redemption is a redemption from. We have redemption from sin. That is, we currently possess purchased freedom from bondage to sin. We talked about this at length in our mini-series on Baptism and the Life of Christ a few months ago. Recall, if you would, that there we looked at Romans 6 and saw that in baptism into Christ, we died to sin as power. Sin was a tyrant that sought to (and succeeded in its seeking to) rule us body and soul. Sin is a power that has "the sons of disobedience" over a barrel. Because of their bondage to sin, in any situation they have only two choices: to sin or to sin. That's right — though they can choose which sin to sin, they can't choose whether they will sin. This is because they refuse to love the LORD their God with all their heart, mind, soul, and strength, and therefore no matter what they do it isn't done out of love for Christ. Thus, it is a sin. Again, they can't choose whether to sin, but only which sin they want. But all those in Christ have been freed from this bondage to sin. In Christ, you no longer have to sin. You can choose to sin or not to sin. You have the freedom and the power to say "no" to sin of every description if you have been united to Christ by faith. That is what Paul means when he declares that you have been redeemed from sin. Your freedom has been purchased.

So is there some sin that drags you down? Something you do that you just keep doing, even though you don't want to do it? Some sin that is ruining your life and your family's life? In Christ, you have the power to stop that sin. You have freedom from that sin!

So why do we still sin? Well, as I said, in Christ we have the power to sin or not to sin. You can use your power for evil if you so choose. What, then, can give you the strength to turn away from sin and only do what is right? You must stay close to Jesus Christ. It is *in Him* that your freedom from sin is found. That means that if you want to be free from sin, you need to be close to Jesus. You are objectively in Him if you are a believer, but you need to subjectively realize that closeness by spending time with Him.

So often we sin because we've already sinned and so we think, "I already blew it. A little more won't hurt." NO! That kind of thinking is deadly in the Christian life. You have redemption, you are enjoying freedom from bondage to sin, through the blood of Christ.

C. It Is a Redemption through Blood

What does that mean? We have been given freedom from bondage through the payment of a price. That price was the blood of Jesus Christ.

Isn't that a little odd, in some way? You can comb the rest of this chapter and you won't find any other bodily fluids mentioned. Indeed, this whole chapter seems much more like a head-in-the-clouds sort of account, dealing as it does with cosmic and spiritual realities throughout. It refers to God and the Holy Spirit and principalities and powers, and its main emphasis is clearly on the non-physical side of human beings. Yet suddenly, without explanation,

Paul drops in this bodily fluid reference as though it's perfectly clear what he's talking about and why he's talking about it. And so it is, for anyone who has read the rest of the Bible.

The redemption from bondage to sin that we enjoy was purchased at a price. That price was the blood of Jesus the Son of God. Yes. However odd or backwards or barbaric such a thing may seem, it is nonetheless true that in order for you to be set free from bondage to sin, the Son of God had to become a man and had to die in way that shed His blood.

Why is that? Ultimately, because the price of sin was too high for any mere creature to pay. Sin is an infinite offense because it is directed against an infinitely holy God. It took an infinite God to pay that infinite price. But the price was death, and God cannot die as God. So He became man to die. The shedding of His blood showed that He was truly man, truly dying in the place of those who had infinitely offended an infinitely holy God.

If you reject the blood of Christ, you haven't been delivered from bondage to sin. If you are offended by bodily fluids and think that salvation needs to be wholly "spiritual," then the historic Christian faith as taught by Paul in this verse isn't for you. If you are offended by "cosmic child abuse" and hate the way that God gave His only Son's life for the life of so many wicked human beings, then historic Christianity isn't for you. Sin is so bad that someone has to die for it. Either you die, or someone dies in your place. The glory of the Christian faith is also a stumbling stone and a rock of offense. People hate the truth that God's Son shed His blood so that all those who believe into Him could live. But that is the way, and the only way, that any person could ever be delivered from the power of sin. Those in Christ have redemption through His blood. They have the forgiveness of sins. But none of it would be possible without Christ spilling His blood, being poured out to death in the place of those who so richly deserved to die for their offenses against God's perfection. Only by looking at the death of Christ can you see how bad sin really is, and how good God really is. Brothers and sisters, this is why we insist that the Incarnation is a core doctrine of the Christian faith. If you don't believe that Jesus Christ was God come in the flesh who shed His blood to pay the price for human sin, then you are not a Christian. But if you do believe it, then you should be praising God for the blessing of redemption through the blood of Christ!

D. It Is a Redemption Resulting in Forgiveness

We have objectively been delivered from the power of sin by the payment of a ransom. That ransom consisted in the blood of Christ. One consequence of having been delivered by ransom from the power of sin is that the sins we have committed in the past, and the sins that we commit in the present and will commit in the future, have been or will be forgiven. To "forgive" a sin is to take it away, to suffer its consequences yourself rather than taking them out on someone else (either the original sinner or someone weaker than you who is a safe target). In short, because of Christ's death you have God's promise to not hold your sins against you and to not make you suffer the eternal pain that they inflict. (Forgiveness is not the same thing as removal of all consequences. A forgiven sin can still impact your life. But forgiveness does remove *punishment*, or retributive justice, whereby God exacts from you the pain that your sin deserved.)

So often we sin because we've already sinned and so we think, "I already blew it. A little more won't hurt." NO! That kind of thinking is deadly in the Christian life. You have redemption through the blood of Christ, which means that you have the forgiveness of sins. At any and every moment, you can go to Christ and be made clean, restored to the fullness of intimacy in your relationship. That means that you shouldn't say, "I've already sinned, so I'll sin a little more while I'm out here away from God." No. Finding yourself far from God is not an excuse to flee even farther from Him. The promise of the forgiveness of sins means that you can return to God any time! To abuse that forgiveness is truly heinous. Saying, "I will do this evil thing now because I know God will forgive me" is the same as saying, "I will continue to hurt this person who's in my power because the pain hurts him and not me." Forgiveness is literally absorbing the pain caused by someone else's sin rather than taking the pain out on the original perpetrator of the sin. To say, "I will keep sinning because I have forgiveness of sins" is ultimately the same as saying "I will keep lashing my Savior's back, keep making His blood flow, because it's no skin off my nose!" Brothers and sisters, forgiveness rightly understood is one of the most powerful motives we as Christians have to stop sinning.

It is also one of the most powerful motives we have to forgive others! Brothers and sisters, Paul will exhort us later in this letter to be kind and tenderhearted, forgiving one another even as God in Christ has forgiven us. Is your life marked by forgiveness? Do you get mad and get even? Or do you bury the sins that other people sin against you, covering them over with love and grace? When someone hurts you, do you hurt that person back? Do you cherish a grudge or a certain amount of bitterness in your heart? Do you tell those close to you all about how awful so-and-so was and how you can't believe it? You aren't allowed to live that way in the kingdom of God. If you won't forgive — even if you won't forgive just one sin that you consider to be particularly egregious — then you are claiming that you have more right to be offended than God does. Ultimately, you are telling the world that the blood of Christ means nothing to you, and that you will bitterly cherish the hurt done to you for as long as you live.

Will someone who looks at your life believe you when you make the following claims?

1. I have freedom from sin's power through the payment of a price
2. That price was the blood of Jesus
3. That freedom was given to me when I believed into Jesus
4. That freedom results in God forgiving my sins and in me forgiving others' sins

Does your life make it seem like those are true? Obviously, claims 2 & 3 can't be seen or touched or verified by human senses. But claims 1 and 4b can. Guess what, brothers and sisters? If people look at you and don't see you living like someone who is free from sin's power and don't see you living free from bitterness and unforgiveness, then they aren't going to believe claims 2 & 3 either.

II. The Measure of our Redemption: God's Grace, vv. 7c-8

This redemption through the blood of Christ was measured by a particular standard. It was all given in accordance with this standard. The standard is the overflowing riches of God's grace.

We talked last week about how God's grace is His undeserved favor towards us. Paul tells us three things about it here.

A. God's Grace Abounds toward Us

First of all, he tells us that God's grace is rich and abounding or overflowing. God doesn't just have a small soft spot towards us. God's favor is indescribably bountiful! All we can say about it is that there is too much of it. It overflows, and it overflows in our direction.

Have you thought of yourself in that way — as the recipient of the manifold grace of God? Some people think of themselves as unlucky, as downtrodden and unappreciated and unable to catch a "lucky break." But Paul tells you that if you are in Christ, then God's grace has overflowed toward you.

So do you live joyfully? Do you walk around literally singing the praises of God, who has overflowed with favor toward you? In one of his hymns, Isaac Watts speaks of "the favorites of the Heavenly King" who "may speak their joys abroad." Is that your identity? Do you think of yourself primarily as one on whom rests the favor of Almighty God?

The United States, with its sense of chosen-nationhood, prints the motto *annuit coeptis* on the back of its dollar bills. That has certainly been true of the U.S. in many ways. But only the Christian can truly claim God's favor — not, perhaps, on his undertakings, but certainly towards his person. God has favored you!

B. God's Grace Is Wise

More than that, He has done so wisely. That is, God's grace is dispensed according to God's wisdom. So the God's favor is the measure of our redemption, and God's wisdom is the measure of God's favor. His wisdom is that whereby He understands all knowledge, especially theoretical knowledge. God knew perfectly how His grace would affect us, and He showed it according to His wisdom.

C. God's Grace Is Prudent

God's prudence is that quality by which He always knows what ought to be done and how it ought to be done. It is like wisdom, but particularly applicable to practical life. God lavished His grace on us in full knowledge of what it would do and how it would work. In other words, this was no fly-by-night, seat-of-the-pants decision. God's decision to lavish saving grace on you in all wisdom and insight was something He committed to in eternity past with full knowledge of how it should be done and what it would entail.

In short, you need not worry that He will ever change His mind. Once again, we see that God does not regret saving us! On the contrary, His wisdom and insight were as fully operative in His decision to redeem by Christ as His grace was.

We know that that's not always how these things work. It's possible to say, "I want to adopt this hurting little foster baby" or "I want to marry this poor girl whose home life is so bad" or "I want to give money to the shelter for the sake of this injured puppy" or to make any number of decisions to do something charitable based on mercy and grace alone. We have compassion on misery, or our undeserved favor moves us to decide to try to deliver someone from the bad

situation he or she lives in. We start the process, and only then do we realize that the decision to try to help was made without much wisdom or insight. Only then does the true magnitude and difficulty of the task strike us.

Such is not the case with God's mercy to us in Christ. The decision was made in all wisdom and insight. The overflowing grace of God was given to us in all wisdom and insight. In other words, He knew exactly what would happen and exactly how messy it would be *and He still chose you. He still died for you. He still redeemed you and has given you the forgiveness of sins.*

Brothers and sisters, if that doesn't make you praise God, then nothing will. Redemption is not an accident or a fluke. It wasn't a nice idea that Jesus had when He had no idea how hard it would be. *Not at all.* The blood of Christ was spent to save the seed of the woman, to save those united to Christ by faith, with full knowledge, wisdom, and insight.

We praise God for His gracious salvation. We praise Him for His mighty salvation. But how often do we praise Him for His *wise* salvation? Do you see the wisdom and insight of God Himself shown in your salvation? Do you seek that wisdom and insight for your own daily life? And do you worship Him for it?

So tying the pieces together, we see that we have redemption through the blood of Jesus Christ, and that the basis of that redemption is the grace of God. Why did Jesus die? Why did He give His life to purchase our freedom from bondage to sin? Because of His rich grace. God is a gracious God, and He is fully aware of the cost and results of that grace! That is the message of these verses. The redemption that you and I have in Christ is purely a result of God's free favor demonstrated toward us in all wisdom and insight.

Brothers and sisters, as recipients of the manifold grace of God, I urge you to be gracious to one another in your homes, in your social worlds, and in your workplaces. Be kind to that nasty person. If you say, "Well, he doesn't deserve it," all the better! Grace can only be shown to people who don't deserve it, you know. And you didn't deserve the Son of God's death on your behalf. How could you deserve such a thing? Yet you have it. You are free from bondage to sin through it. And if you are united to Christ by faith, then you experience the overflowing riches of God's grace.

Freed from sin's power, recipient of the manifold grace of God, beneficiary of divine wisdom and insight — stop thinking of yourself as someone who enjoys sin, and start thinking of yourself as someone that God favors in Christ. As the whole book of Ephesians shows, doing so will change your life. Amen.