



July 27, 2014

Vacation Bible School Sermon Series – Who Is Like the LORD?

3. **REDEMPTION** – God saves us from sin and death and makes us His own by the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ

Luke 23:39-47

The man who hung on the cross next to Jesus was a criminal. He was a man who once knew what it was to be free: to do what he wanted, when he wanted, and walk about as he wished. But now his hands are tied and he sits in a six by eight room, surrounded by cold walls of stone. He has been convicted as an insurrectionist – an enemy of Rome who will face the worst punishment that their law can inflict: death by crucifixion. It is just a few hours now before these hands will be untied and nailed to a wooden cross. As he stares out a small window he views a world that does not belong to him and a life that is lost. He is guilty and has come under the control of Rome. There is no escape.

A prisoner is a person who has lost his rights to freedom. Prisons are facilities designed for this very purpose. Under the control of the state, the purpose of a prison is to punish criminals by forcibly confining them and denying them certain freedoms. In the case where the death penalty is imposed, the criminal loses all freedoms, even the right to life.

To belong to God is to be free. To be His own means full access to His kingdom and the privilege to live under Him and serve Him freely. This was God's design and intent for His creatures. He created man in His image with freedom to represent His righteousness on earth. Mankind had unrestricted access to His presence.

Adam once enjoyed such freedom – a paradise where he could walk freely, doing those things which please God. But that freedom was lost; it was forfeited in an act of disobedience. With fall into sin, Adam and Eve unrested God's intentions, incarcerating all creation to the control of sin. This means that however we might strive to please God, apart from Christ, our hands are tied. Every thought and action is confined to the cold walls of a fallen world.

We look out through a small window to imagine a paradise of what should be: how we should be thinking, and what we should have done differently. We are criminals in our own way, convicted of rebelling against God – taking what we should not have and desiring what is not ours. Our lives demonstrate discontentment and dissatisfaction, revealing how poorly we have represented God's intentions for this creation. Apart from His grace, we face the impending penalty of hell, losing the right to life with God forever. There is no escape – or is there?

Today's lesson is about redemption. In his catechism, Martin Luther expresses the meaning of redemption in the Second Article of the Apostles' Creed by saying, "He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned person, purchased and won me from all sin, from death, and

from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and His innocent suffering and death.”

The price of freedom was great – not something as measly as gold or a work of man, but it required the precious blood of God’s own Son. An exchange was made – the Great Exchange. God would choose His own Son to take the place of a condemned criminal. Jesus was the legitimate Son of God, perfect and free from all sin, yet He would allow His hands to be tied and His palms to be pierced. The cross was the place where Jesus became sin for us and faced the wrath of hell on our behalf. It was this exchange which gave the righteousness of God to us, redeeming us from sin, from death, and from the power of the devil. By His death and resurrection, Jesus restores the joys of Eden to a fallen world and speak words of comfort to a dying sinner: “Today, you will be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43).

Luther’s explanation goes on: “He did this that I should be His very own, live under Him in His kingdom, and serve Him in eternal righteousness, innocence, and joy; just as He is risen from death, lives and reigns in eternity.” In His resurrection, Jesus made us God’s own. Escape is yours – not just escape from something dreadful, but we escape toward something joyful. The ropes are loosed and we live. By faith we may now walk freely into God’s presence and in our own resurrection, we enter the paradise of new creation for eternity. We are His very own – not by coercion or confinement; rather we love and serve Him because of the love with which He first served us (1 John 4:19).

Redemption is “to liberate by means of a ransom payment.” God’s most wonderful work is to save you from sin and death and make you His own by the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ. Who is like the LORD?

