

## **Advent, Part 3 - Redemption**

In February of 2001, some 22 years ago, a young Andy Little (that's me) was asked to preach his very first sermon in big church. The Faith Baptist Church in Mesquite, TX, was announcing me as the new youth pastor and as an "up and coming" preacher... so they wanted me to preach to the congregation on a Sunday morning. And so I did. And it was atrocious. It was so bad.

Listen, I'm not being self-deprecating... or falsely modest... or overly humble.. or anything like that. I'm being straight with y'all. It was really, really bad. I thought I had about 45 minutes worth of material, but I was done in 7 minutes... and in that 7 minutes I don't think I made one single coherent thought. I stammered and mumbled and painfully plodded my way through my notes, and to cap it all off... as I wrapped up my sermon... I called the magicians to come forward to play the altar call. Not the musicians, as was customary, but the magicians. My first sermon was a train wreck.

Four months later in June of the same year a young, and now homiletically insecure, Andy Little, is tasked to take a group of 13 teenagers to Hopewell, Jamaica... a little shanty town about 15 miles outside of Montego Bay, for a mission trip. And while in Jamaica, late on a Saturday night, the local pastor of Hopewell Baptist Church asked me to preach that Sunday morning the very next day... with a mere 14 hours notice. I initially declined the offer several times but the local pastor was very persistent, and, to be honest, a little intimidating, and he insisted that I preach to the congregation. I told him I did not have enough time to prepare a new sermon, so he suggested that I just preach whatever sermon I had most recently preached back home in Texas. So I had to tell him about the terrible, no good, awfully bad, dumpster fire debacle that was my preaching debut.

I told him about how I really struggled in my last sermon and that it only lasted for seven minutes. That's when he told me something that I thought I would never forget. He said, "Brother Andy, my people in my church people walk long distances to come to worship together on Sunday mornings and to hear the Word preached. Some walk for miles. They are not walking all that way to hear a short sermon. You have to make it worth their trip." And then he said, with authority,

"Son, you must preach for at least one hour tomorrow. If you think you are going to finish in less than an hour, start your sermon over and preach it twice."

Why am I telling you this story? I tell you this because I preached about a month ago and my sermon clocked in at about 27 minutes... which was apparently a little too short for some of you. I heard you. I received some good-natured ribbing about my diminutive sermon last month. So I'm here today to let you know that I've learned my lesson. And.. If I find myself nearing the end of my notes today, and its been less than 30 minutes, I'm just going to loop back to this very part of my sermon and just run it back again.

I'm just kidding. The Cowboys play at noon today so I'm going to boogie my way through this thing. And... to quickly finish that Jamaica story... I didn't have to preach my sermon twice to the hospitable Jamaican people that day. Something odd and marvelous happened that Sunday morning. I began to preach and those sweet Jamaicans just started talking back to me while I was preaching. They started yelling things like "glory to God", and "amen", and "won't he do it", and they would shout encouraging prompts like "go on, son" and "tell 'em" and "say it again". It was awesome. Their encouragement, their enthusiasm, and their joy for the Word was contagious... and it did something to me. Something came over me, and I began preaching to them with confidence, and authority, and in power. The more they shouted the more hyped I got. I went on and on preaching the word and when I finally reached the end of my notes it had been an hour and fifteen minutes! After the service, the local pastor came to me and was very encouraging. He said, "wow, Andy, that was really good. We want to invite you to come back next year and preach our revival meeting"! Which I ended up doing. Crazy, right?

I thanked him for the invitation and then I asked him if he could provide any constructive feedback... or perhaps some sage advice to a young preacher? That's when he offered yet another golden nugget of wisdom. He said, "Brother Andy, when you return next year to preach, I hope you get as excited as you got today. But I also hope that you choose to shake your hips a whole lot less than you did this morning." Apparently, I had gotten a little too caught up in the spirit that day.

Ok, let's get to today's sermon. Today we are continuing in our Advent series... a Four-Part Series that covers the highlights of what some theologians call the grand

narrative, or the Metanarrative, of the Bible. Others call it the grand story of the Gospel. Or the highlights of history of all creation. Two weeks ago, Elder Lot did an excellent job telling us about the first part of the grand story... which is creation... where God created everything and said it was good. And then last week, Brother Anthony taught us well about the second part... The Fall of Man, where everything went wrong . Today, in our third installment, we will talk about Redemption... which... I gotta be honest.. I am geeked to talk about today.

Our outline today is very simple. Here is what I want to cover today...

- First, we'll try to answer the question "What is redemption? What does it mean? What does it mean to be redeemed"?
- Secondly, we'll ask "Who is in need of redemption? And why? Who needs to be redeemed, and why do they need to be redeemed?"
- Lastly, we'll ask "Who is it that can redeem? And how? How does this redeemer do their thing?"

### **Let's Start With Answering the Question... What is Redemption?**

As is true with many other words in the English language, the concept of redemption, or the act of redeeming something or someone, is often used in a variety of ways. If, for example, you are an avid shopper at the Consumer Value Store, otherwise known as CVS, you may be most familiar with the idea of redeeming a coupon... a buy one get one free or a fifty percent off coupon... something like that. If you are a world-traveling wanderlust, you may be more familiar with the idea of redeeming your frequent flyer miles or credit card points. If, like me, you are a faithful supporter of the Blue Star... the Dallas Cowboys... you may recall earlier in the season when the Cowboys top wideout CeeDee Lamb dropped an easy catch on a long fly route in the first half of the game. And, then, later in the second half of the very same game, CeeDee Lamb made a much more difficult catch for a touchdown. In doing so, the commentators said CeeDee Lamb has redeemed himself. He has righted his wrongs. If you were an Israelite in Old Testament times, living under the bondage and tyranny of Egyptian rulers for years, you would have pined for the day of your redemption, meaning you would

have eagerly awaited the day God would set you free... free you from your chains and deliver you out of Egyptian bondage.

Again, this concept of redemption is used and applied in several different ways. Even the Oxford dictionary has multiple definitions of redemption saying that redemption is 1) the action of saving or being saved from sin, error, or evil. And 2) redemption is the action of gaining or regaining possession of something in exchange for payment, or clearing a debt.

Here is my best attempt to define redemption in a simple, succinct way...

Redemption is paying the price to make things right

Redemption is paying the price, whether it be in cash, with blood, sweat, or service... to make things right.

Ok, so that's what redemption is in a nutshell. Now, let's answer the question...

### **Who is In Need of Redemption... and Why?**

Who is in need of redemption? For starters, I am. Like Taylor Swift says in her newest chart-topping single... It's me. Hi. I'm the problem, it's me. Who is in need of redemption? I am. I am in great need of redemption. Why am I need of redemption? Well, if redemption means, as we said, for someone to pay a price to make things right... then I am in desperate need of someone to make things right... because things are not right with me. I am not right. I am not whole. I have issues. And my biggest issue is that to the very core of my being I am a sinner. I sin... all the time. And it's been that way my entire life.

"Indeed, I was guilty when I was born; I was sinful when my mother conceived me." That's Psalm 51. From the moment I was conceived I have been a sinner. Before Andy had a name Andy was already a sinner. As I emerged from the womb on the day of my birth... I emerged a sinner. As the Psalmist said, "indeed, I was guilty when I was born." I was born a sinner. But my sinning did not stop at birth. It continued through my childhood. See that boy right there? See how innocent he looks. Let me tell you, that boy right there, he was not innocent. He may look innocent, but he was a sinner of the highest order. Though I obeyed my parents,

and I was polite, and said yes ma'am and yes sir, and made good grades, and tried to treat people well... though outwardly I may have appeared to be good, to be right, to be innocent,.. I was a sinner. You can't see it in this picture, but inside that boy's chest was a little heart that was teeming with all kinds of wickedness. Sure, he followed a lot rules, behaved decently, and did some commendable things. But, at the end of the day, that boy loved him some Andy, and he would ultimately choose Andy over everything else ten times out of ten.

But my sinning did not stop in my childhood. Fast forward a few years into my adolescence where I became a fantastic Pharisee. I became skilled at being outwardly righteous, but inwardly I was a whitewashed tomb. What does that mean? I'll let Jesus explain it. Jesus told the Pharisees in Matthew 23 <sup>27</sup> "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which appear beautiful on the outside, but inside are full of the bones of the dead and every kind of impurity. <sup>28</sup> In the same way, on the outside you seem righteous to people, but inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness." That was me. There was a thin veneer of goodness, a facade of faithfulness... but underneath that thin veneer was a heart that was rebellious against a holy God. Driven by insecurities and self-centeredness and idol worship... I sinned my way right through high school, and, then, right through bible college.

When I stood on the commencement stage at Arlington Baptist University in May of 2001 receiving my degree as a Cum Laude double major in Biblical Studies and Pastoral Ministries... I stood there a sinner. I may have graduated Bible college that day, but I did not graduate from my lifelong career as a sinner. After graduation I immediately went into the ministry... And guess what happened??? I just kept sinning!!!

All the way through my twenties... sin, sin, and more sin. And then, as I made my way through my thirties sin continued to abound.

And then.... Then I turned forty years old. And guess what my forties greeted me with? A divorce. A divorce from a woman to whom I was married for 17 years. So there I was at the ripe age of 40 and learning to be single for the first time in two

decades. And how do you think I handled this newfound single hood? You guessed it. I just kept sinning.

You know. there were some good and godly men who walked with me through that stage of life and they kept encouraging me to repent, to lean into Jesus and to let the Holy Spirit fill the voids in my life. They told me to take some time alone to really let God heal my wounds. They offered me good wisdom but I was not trying to hear it. Though I agreed with them in word, my actions betrayed a heart that was dead set on sin and disobedience. Though I would say, with my lips, things like "Jesus is enough", or, "Christ is sufficient" ... I was just being a hypocrite. I didn't want to lean into Jesus. I didn't want the Holy Spirit to comfort me. I wanted to find comfort.... elsewhere. So I just kept sinning.

As I look back over my life, its almost as though I treated the 7 deadly sins like a bucket list. I was like...

- Lust, check
- Gluttony, check
- Greed, check
- Slothfulness... check
- Wrath... check
- Envy... check
- Pride... Pride... check, underscore, circle, highlight, and check again.

Man have I been prideful. You know... It's been said that... "pride is a mother pregnant with all manner of vice"... meaning, pride is a pregnant mother that gives birth to all kinds of evil. The list of sins that spawn from pride seems limitless. This is certainly true for me. In my life, I have become all too familiar with the sins that are born out of pride.

You might be thinking to yourself right now... "Andy, you are really messed up. Man, you got some issues". And you would be right. I am a sinner... to the very core of my being. I was born in sin and I just never stopped sinning. Romans 7 hits hard for me and feels a little too close to home.

<sup>18</sup> For I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my flesh. For the desire to do what is good is with me, but there is no ability to do it... <sup>21</sup> When I want to do what is good,<sup>[e]</sup> evil is present with me. <sup>22</sup> For in my inner self<sup>[f]</sup> I delight in God's law, <sup>23</sup> but I see a different law in the parts of my body,<sup>[g]</sup> waging war against the law of my mind and taking me prisoner to the law of sin in the parts of my body. <sup>24</sup> What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?

What a wretched man I am. Who will redeem me from this body of death?

So, yeah. I'm messed up, man. I am in desperate need of redemption. But you know who else is messed up and totally in need of redemption??? You. You are. Oh, yes, you are. You may not want to admit it, but, you, my fellow sinner, are just as depraved as I am. Like me, you were born a little sin baby and, like me, you never stopped sinning. That might sting to hear. But, like the kiddos say, it is all facts, no cap. It's just the plain truth. You are as depraved as I am. How do I know this is true?

Look at Romans 3...

<sup>9</sup> What then? Are we any better off?<sup>[d]</sup> Not at all! For we have already charged that both Jews and Greeks are all under sin,<sup>[e]</sup><sup>10</sup> as it is written: **There is no one righteous, not even one.** <sup>11</sup> **There is no one who understands; there is no one who seeks God.** <sup>12</sup> **All have turned away; all alike have become worthless. There is no one who does what is good, not even one.**<sup>[f]</sup> <sup>13</sup> **Our throats are an open grave; we deceive with our tongues.<sup>[g]</sup> Vipers' venom is under our lips.<sup>[h]</sup>** <sup>14</sup> **Our mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.<sup>[i]</sup>** <sup>15</sup> **Our feet are swift to shed blood;** <sup>16</sup> **ruin and wretchedness are in our paths,** <sup>17</sup> **and the path of peace we have not known.<sup>[j]</sup>** <sup>18</sup> **There is no fear of God before our eyes.<sup>[k]</sup>**

You know this is talking about us, right? You.. And I... we're both in this sinking ship together. So is everyone one else who has ever lived on this sin-soaked planet we call Earth.

We are so utterly depraved that even if we could gather up all of our righteousness, and all of our goodness, and all of our good deeds, and lump it together into a

pile... the Bible says that that pile of our pseudo-righteousness would be as disgusting, worthless, and as offensive as a pile of bloody, rancid, menstruation rags compared to the righteousness and holiness of God.

Again, the question at hand is "Who is in need of redemption?" You know I am. I hope you know that you are, too. In fact, the entire world is wrong and is awaiting redemption in order to be made right. The whole earth, all of creation, groans collectively, eagerly anticipating our redemption. We all cry out, some subconsciously deep within their spirit, others aloud with our mouths, Oh what a wretched person I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death?

Who will deliver us from this body of death?

### **Who can redeem us? Who can make things right?**

Enter Jesus... Jesus is the One. Jesus is our only hope for redemption.

Look at Ephesians 1:7

<sup>7</sup>In him (Jesus) we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace

Look at Colossians 1:13-14

<sup>13</sup>He has rescued us from the domain of darkness and transferred us into the kingdom of the Son he loves. <sup>14</sup>In him (Jesus) we have redemption,<sup>[E]</sup> the forgiveness of sins.

And check this out...

Luke 21:25-28

<sup>25</sup>“Then there will be signs in the sun, moon, and stars; and there will be anguish on the earth among nations bewildered by the roaring of the sea and the waves. <sup>26</sup>People will faint from fear and expectation of the things that are coming on the world, because the powers of the heavens will be shaken. <sup>27</sup>Then they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. <sup>28</sup>But when these things begin to take place, stand up and lift your heads, because your redemption is near.”

Jesus is our redeemer. He's the One. He is the hero that champions our cause. He is the One in whom we have redemption. Our sin has messed everything up. But, Jesus. But, Jesus, has paid the price to make things right.

How is this so? What did Jesus do to redeem us?

1 Peter 1:18-19 says

<sup>18</sup> For you know that you were redeemed from your empty way of life inherited from your ancestors, not with perishable things like silver or gold, <sup>19</sup> but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of an unblemished and spotless lamb.

As I said before, within me... sin abounds. But because of what Jesus did... Where sin abounds grace abounds even more!!

Jesus redeemed us with his blood. In Jesus, God's wrath is no longer upon us!

Are you familiar with the concept of propitiation? So propitiation is a biblical word and it speaks to the way that Jesus pacified and satisfied the wrath of the Father that was rightly due towards us. Earlier I shared with you how sin sick I am and how sin has saturated my life and how I have a great propensity towards sinning (and so do you). Now I do not want to be too cavalier in saying these. Are they true? Yes. Am I a constant and continual sinner? Yes. But I can only confess these things so casually, without fear and trembling, because I am sure of one thing... I know my redeemer lives. If it weren't for Jesus my Redeemer, this sin that is in me and all around me would be a much more terrifying thing to discuss. That's because my sin is an act of war against a Holy God. It is creation plotting a coup against its creator. My sin is an affront to God and is putrid in his site and is provocative and is deserving of the full force of God's wrath. God hates my sin. And, if it weren't for Jesus, God would rightly and utterly destroy me because of my sin. But, Jesus appeased, or satisfied, the wrath of God by absorbing all of God's wrath upon and unto himself. The wrath that was due for us Jesus took for himself. That's what propitiation is.

Propitiation is like if there were a freight train that was loaded to the brim with the full measure of God's holy wrath and it was barreling down upon you, and you were tied to the railroad tracks, bound there by your sin and deserving to be utterly destroyed. And as the freight train of wrath approached your doomed and hopeless self bound to the tracks, in steps Jesus. And not only does Jesus remove the chains that bound you to the track to spare you from the wrath of God, but then he does the unthinkable. Jesus stands there on the track awaiting the speeding train to face it head on so that He may absorb the complete and entire measure of God's wrath that was supposed to be for you.

Could you imagine that? That's a wild example, I know. But could you imagine that? That's what your Redeemer did for you. Jesus took all of God's wrath upon himself, so much so that God's wrath towards us was fully satisfied.

Galatians 3:13 says

<sup>13</sup> Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, because it is written, **Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree.**<sup>[1]</sup>

We were cursed by our sins, but Jesus became a curse for us, that we may be redeemed. And in doing so, Jesus fully satisfied, or propitiated all of God's wrath that was meant for us. What a redeemer He is!

**Ok, so in summary,** we asked the question "what is redemption"? And we said, in laymen's terms... Redemption is paying the price, whether monetarily or sacrificially, to make things right.

There are a lot of biblical words that are theological synonyms. Propitiation (as we discussed), expiation, atonement, salvation, and redemption... these are all different ways of saying virtually the same thing.. Jesus paid the price to make things right.

We then asked "Who is need of redemption, and why? And we discovered that all of us are in desperate need of redemption because of our constant sin and continual acts of aggression against our Holy Creator God.

Then we asked, "Who is it that can redeem? Who is our redeemer?". And the answer is very clear. There is but one who can redeem us from our sad, sinful state... and Jesus is His name. Jesus is our redeemer.

This holiday season, as we gather with friends and family to celebrate the birth of Jesus, let's be mindful that we are celebrating the One who was born to redeem mankind. Jesus was born to suffer on our behalf, to receive the blunt force of God's wrath on our behalf, to endure death by crucifixion on our behalf, to pay the price on our behalf to make things right... Jesus was born to redeem the otherwise irredeemable.

If you are here this morning and, perhaps, you are feeling like you are a lost cause... like you are just too messed up... like there is no hope... like you have too many issues... like you've done too many terrible things for God to ever love you and call you His own... if that's you.. let me tell you this...

Apart from Jesus, you would be right. The guilt and shame and condemnation and damnation you are feeling... the feeling that God is mad at you and the ominous sensation down deep in your gut that a severe punishment is looming... would be justified. Apart from Jesus, such a punishment would await. Apart from Jesus, doom and gloom are certain. Apart from Jesus, we are irredeemable.

BUT.....

In Jesus, everything is made right. Jesus redeems. Jesus paid the price to make things right. Jesus suffered an innocent, brutal death, and then raised from the dead, thereby satiating the wrath of God , conquering death, hell, and the grave, and freeing us from the curse of our sin.

Jesus did that. Jesus did that for you and Jesus did that for me. If you haven't already done so, can I encourage you to receive Jesus' work of redemption. Can I encourage you to just let it be true.. for you. Look, it's true, regardless, but it's good to just let it be true for you... let it be so true to you that it sinks in and takes control of your heart. Let it be so true that you can stand firmly upon it and say with conviction...

I know that my Redeemer lives,<sup>[h]</sup> and at the end he will stand on the dust. <sup>26</sup> Even after my skin has been destroyed,<sup>[i]</sup> yet I will see God in<sup>[j]</sup> my flesh. <sup>27</sup> I will see him myself; my eyes will look at him, and not as a stranger.<sup>[k]</sup> My heart longs<sup>[l]</sup> within me. (Job 19)