

PAUL'S THEOLOGY

Lesson 27

Salvation – Part 3 Metaphor – Redeemed

I grew up in a church home. I was blessed with a mother and father that taught us that we had no greater priority during the week than attending services at our church. Sunday morning, Sunday night and Wednesday night, we knew we would be at church. Never out of obligation, but rather always from opportunity.

In a home that had to look for money to cover even everyday expenses, much less unexpected ones, my parents always found a way to pay for every mission trip, every retreat, and even every social our youth group had at church.

I thank and praise God for my godly mother and father. As a result of their choices for our family, my mind writing this lesson on Paul's metaphor "redeemed" has constantly had choruses of various songs and whispers of bible verses on "repeat" ongoing. "Redeem" is a word that I well remember from my childhood worship:

"Thro' eternity my glad song shall be of the Savior's redeeming love" we would sing.

"There is a redeemer. Jesus Christ our Lord. Precious Lamb of God, Messiah, Holy One" was (and is) a favorite song of mine.

Number 357 in our song book was *"Redeemed, how I love to proclaim it! Redeemed by the blood of the Lamb; redeemed thro' His infinite mercy, His child, and forever I am."* The chorus then went, *"Redeemed, redeemed, redeemed by the blood of the Lamb. Redeemed, redeemed, redeemed, His child, and forever, I am."*

I clearly remember many times singing:

I will sing of my redeemer, and his wondrous love to me; On the cruel cross He suffered, from the curse to set me free. Sing, O sing of my Redeemer, with his blood he purchased me, On the cross he sealed my pardon, Paid the debt, and made me free.

There were many other songs, many passages of Scripture, which I could set out in this introduction. Suffice it to say, that I knew something of "redeemed", long before I prepared this lesson!

Still, it was interesting to study and read of the word, “redeemed.” There were several aspects to the word that, if I had known before, I had forgotten. I learned about some aspects of redemption in Roman culture and Roman law that were somewhat new to me. I am excited to write and teach about these things. These are not things that invalidate my childhood lessons on our redeeming Lord. Rather they compliment and flesh out those lessons. Even as I typed the words to the songs above, I marvel at the theological depth of words I had grown so accustomed to.

We point this out in this introduction because it may be similar to experiences by brother Paul. Paul grew up in a deeply devout Jewish home.¹ Paul knew of “redemption,” “redeemed,” and “redeemer” long before he fully understood what they meant. These terms were deeply rooted in multiple aspects of Paul’s religion. Yet as Paul grew up and lived in the Roman world, outside of Judaism, he came into constant contact with “redeemed” in a non-Jewish context. For the concept of “redeemed” had a rich and full meaning apart from that he had seen first hand growing up.

A number of scholars debate whether Paul writes about “redeemed” from his Jewish perspective or from the Roman one. I suspect he did both! I know firsthand from this lesson’s preparation how a childhood concept can be enriched by learning and expanding consciousness on fuller meaning of the term. I am able to write and think about it more fully, and it is exciting to do so.

We will not, therefore, be choosing between the Jewish heritage of “redeemed” and the Roman practice of “redeeming.” We will consider both, confident that Paul used the word with its depth and fullness of meaning!

“REDEEMED” IN JUDAISM

Paul was first and foremost a student of what we now call the Old Testament. To Paul, these books we call the Old Testament were simply called “Scripture.” In his studies of Scripture Paul was studying something written in Hebrew (with a little Aramaic). Yet the Hebrew had been translated, and Paul had become intimately familiar with these translations, into Greek (what we call “the Septuagint”).

Paul wrote his New Testament letters in Greek, and so he used a Greek word for “redeemed.” But because Paul was trained in Hebrew and the Old Testament

¹ See our lessons on the life of Paul, available for download at www.Biblical-Literacy.com. Especially on this point consider lessons 3 and 4 on Paul’s Jewish upbringing.

Scriptures, both in its Hebrew original and the Greek translation, we start by considering how the Greek word Paul used had already been used to translate three different root words from the Hebrew Old Testament, *g'l* (“set free”), *pdh* (“deliver” or “save”), and *prq* (“pull away from danger”). Therefore, we start our lesson considering these Hebrew words.

As we consider the Hebrew words for “redeemed” we quickly note that “redeemed” had a common usage for Hebrew life on a cultural and social level. There were policies of “redeeming” that existed as part of how Jews interrelated to each other. From those policies, Paul understood “redeemed” as part of one’s obligations to others in daily life.

There is another level of understanding for “redeemed” found in the Old Testament. Paul’s study of Scripture taught him that God used “redeemed” as a metaphor, over and over again, for God’s relationship and work for Israel and the world. This was not just a past tense concept of God’s redeeming in Scripture; it had a strong prophetic and future element as well.

In other words, behind the Old Testament concept of “redeemed” we properly consider both the social level of “redeeming” as well as the metaphorical level. For it is the social level that gave meaning to the divine metaphor. Paul in his writings was using a word that, from his Hebrew heritage, had already seen not only social usage but also metaphorical usage for God’s work among men.

Social Redemption in Israel

We could write an entire chapter discussing whether “redeemed” in its Jewish social concept gave meaning to the metaphorical usage of God’s redeeming, or vice versa! There is considerable reason to think that God’s actions of redeeming Israel is what gave purpose and meaning to the social redemption of daily Jewish life. But we set aside that debate for a moment as we focus first on what the social redemption in Israel was about.

Social redemption in Israel is rooted in the obligation of one person to rescue another from a debt or obligation through payment of some kind. Jeremiah Unterman’s article on “Redemption (OT)” in the Anchor Bible Dictionary² does an excellent job of breaking out this social redeeming into categories:

1. Land and Houses
2. Indentured Servants
3. Cultic Offerings

² *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (Doubleday 1992) Vol. V at 650.

4. The Firstborn
5. The Wife of a Deceased Relative
6. The Owner of a Goring Ox
7. The Blood Redeemer, and
8. Ransom

These words show a level of complexity on “redeem” in its everyday usage. “Redeemed” reached deep into a number of parts of Jewish life. We shall briefly consider each of these aspects of redemption, but with the warning that we are setting out the general rules. There are exceptions and particulars that are beyond the focus of our present considerations.

1. Land and Houses

If you were a home owning Jew, and you needed to raise some money, one way you might do it was to sell your house, or part of your land. You could do so with an expectation the land or house (as long as it was outside a walled city) would revert back to your family during the year of jubilee, which occurred at 50-year intervals (Lev. 25:8-23). If the sale took place to a non-relative, then a kinsman was expected (but not required) to step in when able and “redeem” or “buy back” the land.

An interesting Old Testament story of this redeeming is found in Ruth. Chapter four of Ruth recounts Boaz finding the next in line kinsman who had the right to redeem or buy back the property of Elimelech. The kinsman expressed interest in the redeeming until Boaz informed him that the widow Ruth (a Moabite) went with the land. (This is the part of redeeming listed above as number 5 - The Wife of a Deceased Relative!) The kinsman did not want to dilute his own inheritance by taking a Moabite widow, and declined the opportunity to redeem the property. Boaz, next in line as the kinsman redeemer, then redeemed the property, getting Ruth, his true object of attention!

2. Indentured Servants

Not all Jews in debt had property to sell for fundraising. Some were forced to sell themselves into servitude to raise money or pay off debts. This was not a sale into slavery, but rather a sale of service that would also see release every fifty years at Jubilee. Not only at Jubilee, however, for release from servitude could also come if a kinsman exercised the right of “redeeming” and bought a relative out of servitude. This process was set out in Leviticus 25:35-55.

We see a real life example of this in 2 Kings 4 where a widow cried out to Elisha over a creditor coming to take her children into servitude to cover unpaid debts. Elisha has the woman collect empty jars that God then miraculously fills with oil. The woman takes the oil, sells it, pays off the debts and has money to cover the debts as well as future living expenses.³

3. Cultic Offerings

The phrase “cultic offerings” is offensive to some because it is used among scholars to refer to the practice of offering the sacrifices God called for from the Jews. To some people, the idea of Judaism and, by extension Christianity, being called a “cult” is negative. We step aside from a debate on that issue and note that the scholastic usage of “cult” is in the general sense of a “religious group” not with any sense of a negative or pejorative meaning.

This sense of “redeeming” is where Jews were allowed to buy back certain offerings to God for the value of the offering plus 20 percent. These opportunities for “redeeming” are laid out in Leviticus 27. If, for example, someone makes a vow to the Lord of an animal or house, then the donor may choose to redeem the animal or house. This means the person could “buy back” the item, at full value plus 20 percent (“one fifth”).

4. The Firstborn

In Exodus 13, Moses instructed the Israelites that once they came into the Promised Land they were to set apart to the Lord “all that first opens the womb” (Ex. 13:12). This meant that the first-born males of animals as well as sons. The practical implication of this meant that the sons (and in certain circumstances the animals) were “redeemed” or bought back from the Lord to whom they were dedicated. While this sacrifice was typically a lamb, in cases of poorer parent, doves could be substituted.

A real life example of this redeeming the life of a firstborn is found in the actions of Mary and Joseph in the birth of Jesus. Jesus was the first-born son of Mary’s womb, and as such belonged to the Lord. To redeem him, or “buy back” Jesus into their home, Mary and Joseph took Jesus to Jerusalem. Luke explains they went, “to present him to the Lord (as it is written in the Law of the Lord, ‘Every

³ Technically the widow did not “redeem” the sons because she found her answer and provision before the sons went into servitude. Had Elisha and God’s provision come a bit later, then upon getting the funds, the woman would have redeemed them. As it is, however, it still illustrates the principle of indentured servitude behind the redeeming.

male who first opens the womb shall be called holy to the Lord.’)” (Lk 2:22-23)⁴. It was during that visit that Mary’s sacrifice of purification was offered (a pair of birds, the poor person’s offering under Leviticus. 12:8). It was also during this “buy back” that Simeon pronounced his blessing on God for letting him see the Christ child before his own death. (See Luke 2:22-38 for the full story.)

5. The Wife of a Deceased Relative

We noticed earlier about the redemption of land that included that of the widow Ruth. It is not fully clear on the source of Jewish law on the redeeming of a deceased relative’s widow. Scholars generally believe it arose out of the instructions in Deuteronomy 25:5-10. The Deuteronomy instruction concerns the widow who has no children from her deceased husband. To keep the family progeny within the family, and to ensure offspring, the widow is to be taken as wife by her dead husband’s brother.

This was the basis for the legal technicality brought before Jesus by the Sadducees in an effort to stump him! Luke 20:27-40 recounts the story. The Sadducees asked Jesus about who would be the proper husband in a resurrected world in a situation where a woman’s husband died, leaving her childless. Then the deceased husband’s brother redeemed the wife and married her, only to die himself before she bore a child. More brothers stepped up until she had been married seven times. The Sadducees then asked, “In the resurrection, whose wife will the woman be?” Jesus was not stumped. Ironically, once he gave a thorough and well-balanced answer, it was the Sadducees who were stumped! As Luke noted, “they no longer dared to ask him any question.”

6. The Owner of a Goring Ox

Exodus 21:28-32 sets out the law pertaining to a man who has an ox with a reputation for goring people! If the goring is not a first time offense, and the goring results in the death of a man or woman, the ox’s owner is to be put to death. In that event, however, there was a provision for paying a “ransom” or a sum that would redeem the life of the owner.

7. The Blood Redeemer

In the sense of a “blood redeemer” the word takes a slightly different turn. When a person was murdered, the job of seeking out justice fell to a kinsman. The nation of Israel did not have a police force that worked in tandem with a District Attorney for justice! The closest male relative to the murder victim was responsible for putting to death a murderer who acted with premeditation. If one accidentally committed the murder, one’s choice to avoid the blood redeemer’s

⁴ God had also made provision for the Levites as a chosen tribe in the role of temple service rather than all the first-born sons (Num. 3:11-13).

vengeance was to flee to a “city of refuge.” (Numbers 35 has the details on this!) In this sense, the buy back requires the blood of a killer as the proper payment for the killer spilling blood. The murdered person’s blood “pollutes the land” before the Lord. It takes the blood of the killer to cleanse and remove the pollution (Num. 35:33).

Examples of this are found in several places in the Old Testament. An early example is found in Judges 8:18-21 where Gideon kills Zebah and Zalmunna after those two had killed Samuel’s brothers. Later in 2 Samuel 3, we read about Abner killing Asahel. Asahel’s brothers, Joab and Abishai, then found Abner, and killed him.

8. Ransom

Ransom is the price paid for various acts of redeeming (buying back). In that sense, it is really a culmination of the various aspects of redeeming set out earlier. The English Standard Version frequently translates “ransom” as “redemption price” (see, e.g. Numbers 3:46, 48, etc.). The word is worth setting out in this lesson because there are times where no earthly price or ransom is deemed adequate for the circumstances. In Numbers 35:31, for example, the Jews were told not to accept a ransom for the life of a murderer.

After considering the day-to-day uses of “redeeming” in Jewish culture and life, we now turn to the metaphorical usage.

Metaphorical Redemption in Israel

Day to day, the redeemer was most often a kinsman who came to rescue or fix the problems of those in need of redemption. These common examples made the “redeem” metaphor especially useful for understanding what God has and will do. God is, as Lyall refers to him, kind of our “super relative.”⁵ We were made in his image (Gen. 1:26). God had Moses tell Pharaoh, “Thus says the Lord, Israel is my firstborn son, and I say to you, ‘Let my son go that he may serve me.’” (Ex. 4:22-23). Paul would have understood the intimacies of the Old Testament claims to God as our ultimate redeemer.

God rescues individuals over and over in the Old Testament. As Jacob blessed Joseph in Genesis 48:16, he spoke of God’s work as “the angel who has redeemed me from all evil.” Isaiah 29:22 speaks of the “LORD who redeemed Abraham.” In 2 Samuel 5:9 David testifies of the Lord who “has redeemed my life out of every adversity.” God also rescues/redeems groups from adversity and evil. Psalm 25:22 echoes the common call on God to “redeem Israel out of all his troubles.”

⁵ Lyall, Francis, *Slaves, Citizens, Sons: Legal Metaphors in the Epistles* (Academie Books 1984) at 165.

One of Scripture's greatest testimonies to God as redeemer is found in the Exodus story. In the Exodus story, God takes the mantle of redeemer, proclaiming, "I am the Lord...I will redeem you with an outstretched arm" (Ex. 6:6). After the Red Sea rolled over Pharaoh's troops, Moses and Israel sang a song. In that song, they all sang:

You have led in your steadfast love the people whom you have redeemed.

Moses reminded the people that they should remember, "It is because the LORD loves you and is keeping the oath that he swore to your fathers, that the LORD has brought you out with a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt" (Dt. 7:8).

God tied Jewish law and behavior on redemption to his own actions on Israel's behalf. Deuteronomy 15:15 reinforced that, "You shall remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God redeemed you; therefore I command you this day..."

God was also the redeemer of Israel from the exile and destruction that followed their course of sin. In Hosea 7:13 God explains his desire to "redeem" the Northern Israelites if they would but genuinely seek it. Similar passages are found throughout the prophets as the key to the restoration of Israel as a nation.

This is a good time to point out that translators have an alternate word to use for "redeemer" in some instances. The alternate word is "deliverer." These passages show well the context of that meaning. God as a redeemer, as one who "buys back" those in need of ransoming, comes in to deliver the one in need. God delivers from danger, from suffering, and from adversity. God as redeemer is God as rescuer and God as deliverer.

As we consider this brief review of many of the passages that taught of redemption in daily life as well as religious consciousness, it is without question that a devout student of the Old Testament, like Paul, grew up deeply aware of many lessons about redeeming. The added information Paul got considering the redemption practice in the Roman world would have only enhanced his already significant understanding of the import behind the word.

REDEEMED UNDER ROMAN LAW

As Paul wrote of "redeemed" and its related words (redemption, redeeming, etc.), Paul used the Greek word *lutroo* (λυτροω). This Greek word we translate in

various forms as “redeem,” “set free,” “deliver,” “ransom,” and “liberate.” This is the same Greek word that the Jews had used to translate the various Old Testament passages we noted above. This word would certainly convey the meanings of the Old Testament concepts we have discussed, but it would have conveyed something further.

Under the Roman culture (and the Greek one as well) *lutroo* was the word used when buying someone back from slavery. When wars were victorious, prisoners taken in war were held as slaves and/or hostages. One of the main reasons for conducting war was to acquire slaves and workers. A contemporary of Paul’s named Plutarch (ca. AD 45-120) wrote a series of biographies. While writing about the Roman statesman Marcus Cato (BC 240-149) Plutarch noted that Cato:

Bought those prisoners of war who were young and still capable of being reared and trained like whelps or colts.⁶

Prisoners of war were classic examples of slaves who were offered up for “redemption”:

The prisoner, who was like captured booty...took on an exchange value and would not be freed except for ransom.⁷

Once a prisoner/slave was bought back (or “redeemed”), whoever provided the payment became the new owner of the prisoner/slave.⁸

No doubt this cultural experience, which was beyond the confines of Paul’s Judaist training, provided another layer of enrichment behind using the word “redeemed” in reference to the believer’s life before God.

We turn now to Paul’s direct usage of the word in various forms.

PAUL’S USAGE OF “REDEEMED”

Paul wrote with some form of the word “redeemed” in a number of passages including these:

Rom. 3:23-24 All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus

⁶ Plutarch, *Marcus Cato* 21.1 (Loeb Classical Library v. 47, Transl. by Bernadotte Perrin).

⁷ *Theological Lexicon of the New Testament* (Hendrickson 1994) Vol. 2 at 427.

⁸ See *ibid.* and the references therein.

1 Cor. 6:19-20 You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body.

1 Cor. 7:23 You were bought with a price; do not become slaves of men.

1 Cor. 1:30-31 And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."

Eph. 1:7 In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace.

Col. 1:13-14 He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

1 Tim 2:5-7 For there is one God, and there is one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all, which is the testimony given at the proper time.

What shall we make of Paul? Knowing now the background he had behind the words used, what does the greater context of Paul's theology on our redemption and God our redeemer teach us? We suggest a number of things!

First, we note that Paul speaks of the *cost* of redemption. We were bought from slavery to sin; we were bought from life in bondage at a dear price. God did not redeem us from sin simply by paying some money. Nor did he work out some swap with land, cattle or some similar possessions. God bought the Christian; God redeemed the Christian, with the "**blood of Christ**" (Eph1:7). We have our redemption "**in Christ**" (Rom. 3:24; Eph. 1:7).

When Paul wrote of our redemption in 1 Timothy 2:6, he used the Greek word we have discussed (*lutroo*) but added a prefix to it (*anti-*). This prefix "strengthens the idea of substitution."⁹ Paul is making the point that God did more than "pay" a ransom; God *became* a ransom. Christ substituted himself on behalf of humanity, paying the full ransom as a substitute for us!

This same idea of substitution is found in Paul's letter to the Galatians. Paul explained:

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us (Gal. 3:13).

Redemption cannot be found anywhere else. Before conversion, we are prisoners of slavery, bound over to sin. Here is the thrust of Paul's metaphor. God paid the

⁹ *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (InterVarsity Press 1993), article by Morris, Leon at 785.

price that would set us free and deliver us from sin and its consequences. The ransom set us free and transferred our “ownership” from sin to God our Redeemer. Now we belong to him. He is our owner. Being redeemed by God in Christ, we should never live as if we were not redeemed!

Paul makes this tie nicely into our lesson of last week in Galatians 4:4-5 where he wrote:

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.

We have redemption in Christ that has set us free but not simply to be God’s slaves. We have left slavery behind. God has set us free at a price so we might be his sons and daughters.

There is a two-fold thrust here we must not miss. It is a reason some scholars struggle over precisely how to best translate the words on which we focus in this lesson.¹⁰ Should we use “redeemed,” should we use “ransomed,” or should we use “delivered”?

Care is needed here to convey the fullest depth of Paul’s word. For “redeemed” does a wonderful job in the English at expressing both what we have received from Him, as well as the cost of the process. Yet “ransomed” gives extra focus on the cost, which should never be minimized, when considering how great the cost was. Moreover, “delivered,” emphasizes the result on the Christian as God brings release from sin, and its consequences. We see deliverance from our own inadequacies; from the troubles we bring upon ourselves, from frustrations, from fears, and from the persecutions and bondage of this sinful world and those that live in it. This is certainly something worthy of focus on bringing forth praise to our delivering God!

Paul means to convey all these truths, which brings us back to the hymns where we started this lesson:

*Redeemed, redeemed, redeemed by the blood of the Lamb.
Redeemed, redeemed, redeemed, His child, and forever, I am.*

¹⁰ Consider in this regard the chapter by B. B. Warfield in his book *Biblical Doctrines* entitled “Redeemer” and “Redemption.”

POINTS FOR HOME

1. *“The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many”* (Mt. 27:28).

Jesus himself recognized his role as deliverer, redeemer, and ransom for man. Paul was not the originator of this metaphor, God was. It is one that God planted into Scripture from the very beginning. God was redeemer in the Old Testament; God is redeemer today. Jesus Christ understood his purpose as Messiah and willingly became the substitute price for us. Shall we ignore so great a salvation?

2. *“Christ redeemed us”... “gave himself as a ransom”... “he delivered us to his Son in whom we have redemption”* (Gal. 3:13; 1 Tim. 2:6; Col. 1:13-14).

We need to focus on each facet of this word, applying it to every part of our lives! Christ redeemed and bought us back to God. He did so at great personal price, his own blood. As he did so, he brought us into a new relationship, free from slavery to be sons. Now, in light of that, ask yourself this question: what is my bondage today? What is the area where I am walking in worry, anxiety or defeat? Set this area before God your Deliverer. He has given his blood to bring you to safety and sonship. What do you truly have to fear?

3. *“We wait eagerly for... the redemption of our bodies.”*(Rom. 8:23).

God is not done with us. The state we are in today, redeemed though we are, is not the final state of our being! Praise God that we have a full redemption of our body coming in the day of Christ. Christ did not buy us back with partial payment. We have the now of “redemption” but we also have the “not yet” that fully manifests the redemption’s effects. For that we groan and wait with faith. Meanwhile, we walk daily, with the realized truth that God bought us with a precious price, and we are his.