

THE STORY OF REDEMPTION

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When evangelist Dwight Moody held meetings in Chicago during the nineteenth century, a young preacher by the name of Henry Moorhouse came over from England and spoke to Moody's congregation. For six nights Moorhouse preached from the text John 3:16.

On the seventh evening, he told his audience he had been searching all day for another text but could not find any as good as the old one. He opened his Bible to John 3:16, sharing with them for the seventh time the grand story of redemption, revealing from the Word of God something of the love that transcends all knowledge:

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life”.

What a message there is in that verse! A wonderful, comforting message, a message of

In the beginning, people were created from the dust of the earth as children of God (Genesis 1:26, 27). They were made in the very image of God, with a spotless character like His.

Adam and Eve walked and talked with God. God placed them on Earth as His representatives and stewards. The world belonged to God, but God gave Adam and Eve the responsibility of caring for it.

God gave people life, righteous characters, a beautiful home, and kingly responsibility. But then came the tragedy of sin. Adam and Eve became the servants of Satan (John 8:34). They lost life, their righteous characters, their garden home, and the world with which they had been entrusted. Satan defrauded them of these gifts, substituting in their place a sinful nature, a marred world, bondage, and death.

Through sin, people became hopelessly lost. We were and still are powerless to help ourselves. Nothing we can do can atone for sin and commend us to God. Our every act is polluted by sin. Isaiah aptly describes the condition of humankind in these graphic words, *“Alas, sinful nation, a people laden with iniquity, a brood of evildoers, children who are corrupters! They have forsaken the LORD, they have provoked to anger, the Holy One of Israel, they have turned away backward.... The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faints. From the sole of the foot even to the head, there is no soundness in it, but wounds and bruises and putrefying sores; they have not been closed or bound up, or soothed with ointment”* (Isaiah 1:4-6). What a description of our condition. We are so sick we cannot be our own physician. We cannot save ourselves. We are desperately in need of a Saviour.

John 3:16, Henry Moorhouse’s favourite text, opens to us a door of hope. It tells us that redemption, the

price of sin, has been paid. It tells us that salvation, a way of escape from sin, has been provided. Let us take time to examine this text in detail and see what it tells us about redemption.

THE ORIGIN OF REDEMPTION

“For God so loved”.

We must never forget that the source of redemption is the love of God for the human family. The true origin of redemption is found in God’s love, a love that is infinite, eternal, unchangeable. The love of God was the grand motive that found a solution to humankind’s dilemma. God’s love prompted the greatest gift that has ever been given.

There was nothing in human beings that could accomplish the work of redemption. All we had to offer was our need, our sin and our helplessness. That condition called forth the benevolence in the heart of our Heavenly Father.

The apostle John, one of Jesus’ closest disciples, wrote the book that bears his name, and in which our key text is found. Words failed him in his attempt to express and explain the depth of God’s love for humanity. But what power there is in

that one word, “so”. It shows how God’s love is extended to the farthest extreme. It tells of a love that surpasses all earthly love. It speaks of a love that is all embracing. It breathes of a love that is as vast as the universe.

Though imperfect, illustrations can help us to understand a little more clearly something of the height, the depth, the breadth, and the length of the love of God for us. A father took his son for a walk to the top of the Cheviot Hills in the British Isles to teach him a lesson of the measureless love of God. The father pointed north over Scotland, south over England, east over the North Sea, and west over to the Atlantic Ocean. Then he said to his son, “God’s love is as big as all that.” His son, with unintentional but profound insight, replied, “Then we must be right in the middle of it!”¹ And

¹ H.M.S. Richards, *The Promises of God*, (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2004), 142.

how true it is. The human race is right at the centre of God's inexhaustible love. God's love is so great it extends even to the most depraved of sinners.

The pre-eminent attribute of our Creator is love. God is holy, righteous, just, kind, long-suffering, patient, understanding and sympathetic. But these all stem from the fundamental nature of God: love (1 John 4:8, 16). And it is because of the love of God that we may have redemption. The origin of our redemption, the source of your salvation and mine, is simply stated, "God so loved".

THE OBJECT OF REDEMPTION

“For God so loved the world”.

Of all God’s vast creation, our world is the one black sheep. It is the only part of God’s universe that has fallen. It has become the stronghold of Satan himself. As God looked down on this world His heart was saddened at the thought it had rebelled against His just government and had yielded to the great deceiver. His love yearned for its restoration. He longed to see it once more in harmony with the rest of the universe.

“For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). The purpose of Christ’s descent to this world was to seek and to save that which was lost. This world, this tiny speck of dust in distant space, became the object of redemption. It had become lost. God wanted it back. So, His love was extended to the uttermost in order to bring it back into harmony with the rest of creation.

According to many human philosophies, nothing was ever lost. Many would have us believe that the Genesis story is a mere myth; that there was no fall. According to evolutionary theory, the world is continually progressing, getting better and better. The Bible, the oldest and most accurate history of the human race, reveals that this is not so. Rather, there was a loss, a great and tragic loss. Only through the illumination of the Holy Spirit can we realise that we are lost and need to be found.

As we look at the cruel world about us, with trouble, strife and distress on every hand, we realise that it, too, is lost. There is something drastically wrong with our world and the human race. Men and women have called it by many names, but God calls it *sin* (1 John 3:4).

It is because this world is lost in sin that it has become the object of redemption. God's love has been poured out in a special way on our world in order that it might be saved and restored to

perfection. God's love embraces the world. It embraces humankind.

Our unworthy world became the object of His love. God could have taken this speck of a world, this tiny particle of dust in space, and wiped it out without another thought. But no! He loved the world too much to do that.

He loved not one, or a few of us, but the world, all 7.8 billion people. Plus, all those that ever have lived, and ever will live. Not just those of our nation but of every country, culture, and colour under the sun. He loved presidents, prime ministers, military generals, university professors, businessmen and women, doctors, lawyers, farmers, gardeners, hairdressers, builders, taxi drivers, manual labourers, teachers, boys and girls. He loved "the world", the fallen human family, both good and bad. He loves us all. His longing is that none will perish. "*Why will you die?*" He pleads (Ezekiel 18:31). The whole world became

the object of redemption.

There was nothing in the world to attract or deserve His love. He loved the world, not only as He made it, but when it was sunken in sin. We know God loves all holy beings. But God loved the world in its disobedience and sin. It was the magnitude of His love, not the attraction of the world, that motivated God's offer of redemption.

There was everything in the world to repel God's love. To divine holiness, our world was not only unattractive, but utterly repulsive. Despite the deceptions of Satan, the fall of Adam and Eve was ingratitude and treason of the worst kind. Even after the promise of redemption was given, the vast majority of Earth's inhabitants rejected God's gracious promises and spurned His love. How great, then, must be the love of God, when He chose to follow through on the plan laid "from the foundation of the world" (Revelation 13:8)! Though it deserved only punishment, God loved

the world in spite of itself. The clouds of wrath hung over it. Justice called for and demanded retribution, but mercy made a treaty with it, and became responsible for all its heavy claims. What must be the greatness of love that did all this!

God loved the whole world, not a part of it, or a few of its inhabitants, but all alike and all together. He might well have made a selection, but the selection of divine love was the whole world. Here is revealed love that is boundless, fathomless, inexhaustible, and infinite.

A friend of mine shared this personal experience with me. While completing his tertiary education, he was asked to assist in teaching a church Bible class for children aged from four to six years. He usually sat on one of the small chairs with the children so he could identify with them. One morning the leader called four children to the front. She handed them each a card with a picture of a bird to hold up. She spoke about each bird and then

said, “God made the birds. God loves the birds.” She repeated the process with four more children holding up pictures of animals. She ended with, “God made the animals. God loves the animals.” This was followed by four children holding up pictures of flowers. Again, she ended with, “God made the pretty flowers. God loves the flowers.” Then four children held up pictures of sea creatures. Not surprisingly, the leader ended with the words, “God made all the sea creatures. God loves all the creatures in the sea.” Finally, four children held up pictures of people. When she finished talking about people and telling the children that God loves everyone, a little six-year old boy sitting next to my friend, turned his head, looked at him for a moment, opened his mouth, and in his childlike simplicity, said, “Yes, Sir, God loves even you.”

Let me remind you that God loves even you. You are the object of redemption. God’s love has as its object this world and every individual who lives

on it. God's love embraces those who reject it as well as those who accept it. One day, even those who have chosen to reject God's love will finally realise something of the depth of God's love and patience toward them. His love is extended to the whole world.

THE PLAN OF REDEMPTION

“He gave His only begotten Son”.

Love is measured by the gifts it offers and the sacrifices it makes. In the light of this, how great is God’s love to the world! He gave His Son. To give a holy being, such as an angel, would be a great gift and a manifestation of great love. But God went infinitely further: He gave His Son. Love that is genuine is always demonstrated by action. It is so with God’s great love. His love for sinners led Him to give all that He had for their salvation. “He gave His Son.” God’s Son was the gift of God’s love.

“It was Satan’s purpose to bring about an eternal separation between God and man; but in Christ we become more closely united to Him than if we had never fallen.” In taking our nature, the Saviour has bound Himself to humanity by a tie that is never to be broken... God ...gave Him not only to bear our sins, and to die as our sacrifice;

He gave Him to the fallen race.”² He still is, and will always be, the “Man Christ Jesus”; the perfect man, the God-man. God’s unspeakable gift is His Son, Immanuel: “God with us”.

And in the redemption plan the Son of God assumed not only our human nature, but also the responsibility for our transgressions. “For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him” (2 Corinthians 5:21). Christ became our sin bearer. God’s plan to save man entailed untold sacrifice on the part of both the Father and the Son.

The penalty of the law had to be met. The law demanded the death of the sinner, and its demands could not be put aside. Sin once committed must receive its just consequences. To release the

² E. G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, (1898, repr., Warburton, Australia: Signs, 1978), 25.

sinner from the penalty of transgression, God must provide a substitute equal with Himself. Therefore, in the person of Christ, the Creator and Upholder of the universe must take upon Himself the burden and guilt of man's sin.

That explains what Christ came to do. The plan of redemption was that Christ would die in our stead. "Christ was treated as we deserve, that we might be treated as He deserves. He was condemned for our sins, in which He had no share, that we might be justified by His righteousness, in which we had no share. He suffered the death that was ours, that we might receive the life which was His. *'With His stripes we are healed'*."³

Jesus actually became a curse in the sight of God for man. "Christ has redeemed us from the curse

³ Ibid; Isaiah 53:5.

of the law, having become a curse for us (for it is written, *'Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree'*)” (Galatians 3:13). In that awful hour when Christ hung on the cross, God had to look on Him as the chief of sinners. It was there that He laid on Him the iniquity of us all and could have no fellowship with Him. That helps us to understand a little more clearly why Christ cried out in agony upon Calvary, *“My God, my God, why have You forsaken Me?”* (Matthew 27:46).

God had to forsake His Son, so that the price might be paid for our redemption. God gave His only begotten Son.

“But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).

“For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved” (John 3:17).

Christ was sent to save. May we never forget that marvellous thought! It means that if I had been the only sinner, He would have come and lived and suffered and bled and died just for me. And if you had been the only sinner, Christ would have come and lived and suffered and bled and died just for you.

THE PURPOSE OF REDEMPTION

“For God so loved... that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life”.

The whole purpose of redemption is to restore to man the image of God and grant him eternal life. The stark reality is that not all will be saved. The vast majority will be lost. Jesus Himself said, *“For many are called, but few are chosen”*; and *“wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it”* (Matthew 22:14; 7:13). We ourselves make the final choice about whether or not to accept the priceless gift God offers. While many see the attractions in Christ’s life, they do not value these above all things. They are not willing to sell all to buy the field, or the pearl of great price. They do not make a decided choice to serve God, and will finally be lost.

Revelation 20 graphically portrays the climax of the great controversy at the close of the millennium

when the lost are resurrected to receive their just sentence. Verse 8 says, “*whose number is as the sand of the sea.*”

God’s will is for all to be saved. He is not willing that any should perish. But He cannot and will not force salvation on anyone. The choice is ours to make. It is our decision, our free choice. God’s love pleads with us to accept His free offer. His Spirit urges us to accept so great a salvation. Christ’s heart bleeds for us. And the greatest hurt to God is when we reject His offer.

In John 3:16, God promises that every individual who believes in Christ and accepts His sacrifice will receive life everlasting. The gift must be accepted and appropriated by those for whom it is intended.

“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God” (Ephesians 2:8). We are not asked to try to win

salvation by some effort on our part but to accept it as a gracious gift from God, and then in gratitude obey His law (John 14:15). God does not ask us to sleep on a bed of nails; He does not call on us to eat glass or fire; He would not have us sit quietly in a trance as a way of salvation. No! We need not torture ourselves to win God's favour. We are not saved by anything we do for God; rather, we are saved by what He has done for us. Salvation is God's gift to us. We can do nothing to earn it, but we may have it for the taking. It comes without money and without price. It is a free gift.

There are no limits to the love of God for humans. "Whoever believes." "*Whoever*" shows that all are included. There are none to whom God refuses the benefits of saving grace. There is only one condition: "believe in Him".

God's offer of salvation is so simple and so broad that all can understand and receive it. God does not call upon us arbitrarily to do some action of which

we are incapable. A disabled person might not be able to visit the sick or perform deeds of mercy, but he or she can believe. A blind man might be unable to read the Bible and do many other things, but he also can believe. A deaf woman cannot hear, but she can believe. Even a dying person can believe. Salvation has been placed within the reach of all: young and old, uneducated and learned, rich and poor, high and low. All may have it freely, if they truly believe.

“Ho! Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price” (Isaiah 55:1). A teacher in Glasgow was trying to explain this verse to a class of children. He read the words, *“Come, all you who are thirsty...”* “The beautiful invitation of this verse seemed so difficult to explain to the young people that the teacher silently prayed for God’s help. Almost immediately, another verse of Scripture flashed into his mind: *“a little child shall*

lead them” (Isaiah 11:6). The thought occurred to him that this verse meant one of the children could explain the Bible in a way that the others could understand.

The teacher asked the children to listen carefully while he re-read the text. Then they were to tell him what they thought the prophet meant by inviting people to “*buy without money*”. When the verse was repeated, a six-year old responded, “Please, sir, have it charged”.

And that is it. Our sins become charged to Jesus if we believe on Him.

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16) Thus, there in that one verse of the Bible is to be found the wonderful story of redemption.

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Pastor Gary Kent is Speaker for **The Incredible Journey** ministry. He has produced and presented numerous documentaries on subjects including the Bible, Bible prophecy, world events and natural health. His passion is to share the good news of Jesus' imminent return.

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