

## Redeemer

*Sermon Preached by the Rev. Robert A. Arbogast  
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### Scripture Reading

*Since you call on a Father who judges each person's work impartially, live out your time as foreigners here in reverent fear. For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.*

1 Peter 1:17-21

### Sermon

In the summer of 1963, Martin Luther King Jr. spoke from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, DC. Hundreds of thousands of people were there in front of him on the National Mall. And King gave the speech of a lifetime.

At first the speech was just okay. Something was missing. Then Mahalia Jackson, the great Gospel singer, gave a shout. She said, "Tell 'em about the dream, Martin." That is when King's speech became poetry. That is when his words became the vision of a prophet.

Sentence after sentence, phrase after phrase, King painted his vision, King told his dream. And it all leaned in a single direction, toward a single hope, toward a day when every man, woman, and child would sing an old Negro spiritual: "Free at last! Free at last! Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!"

**There is a word for that freedom.** And the word is "redemption." Redemption is when slaves are set free. Redemption is when prisoners are released. Redemption is when captives go home.

Redemption is the great theme of the Holy Bible. It's there from the beginning to the end. And no wonder. Redemption is the dream of all God's children. And redemption is the hope of the entire creation. That's right. In Romans 8, the Apostle tells us that creation itself is in bondage, that creation itself is waiting to be set free with all the children of God.

**King's speech was more than a dream.** It was a call to action. And action is important. It's up to us to work out our salvation—with the Spirit's power, of course. It's up to us to work in the same direction as our prayers.

On the night before his crucifixion, Jesus prays in the Garden of Gethsemane. He says, "Father, not my will, but your will be done." Now, that is not a passive prayer. Jesus is not saying, "Whatever has to happen to me, I'm okay with it." No; he is not committing himself to enduring the Father's will; he is committing himself to doing the Father's will, even if that means going to the cross.

In the same way, when we say the Lord's prayer, when we say, "Father, your will be done," we don't mean, "Let your will happen; we're okay with that." No; we mean, "Let us be doing your will." Action is important. Faith without action is not genuine faith.

**But redemption is not about our action.** Sure, we can take action in the name of redemption. We can take action for the sake of captives of all kinds. And we can make a difference. In Ohio, my church was part of a group that improved access to community health centers and helped kids stay in school.

But there is a deeper redemption that can never be the work of our own hands. There is a truer redemption that we can only open our hands to receive. That redemption is the work of Jesus Christ. He is our one and only Redeemer.

**Jesus sets prisoners free.** Some of you know that better than the rest of us. You know it firsthand. You may be in prison. You may be restricted every hour of every day. But because of Jesus, you know a freedom you never knew on the outside. Because of Jesus, you are more free now on the inside than you ever were before.

What I mean is, sin does not have the same power over you that it used to have. Sin is not your master, not any more. It still barks at you. It still tries to order you around. It still looks for every opportunity to trip you up. But sin cannot threaten you the way it used to. Because in Christ, you died to sin. Because in Christ, you are alive to righteousness.

So now you can say, "Get behind me, sin! In the name of Jesus, get behind me! I am not your slave. Not any more. Jesus set me free. And I am living a new life by the Spirit of God!" That is what you can say, and that is how you can live. Because Jesus is your Redeemer. Jesus is our Redeemer.

**Now I want to say a couple more things.** First, when you redeem something, you are reclaiming something that belongs to you. Whatever it is, it belongs to you. It wound up in someone else's hands. But it belongs to you. And you are doing what you have to do to get it back. That's what it means to redeem something.

Jesus is our Redeemer. And that means we belong to Jesus. We always have belonged to Jesus. We always will belong to Jesus.

Yes, we may have been in the hands of the devil. We may have been captives in Babylon. We may be in the grip of thousands and thousands of dollars of debt. We may be in prison. But we still belong to Jesus. And Jesus sets us free. He takes us back to himself.

Oh, we might still be in prison. And we might still have bills to pay. But in Jesus, we have a freedom that nothing can take away. We belong to Jesus, and nothing can change that.

**Here's something else.** Jesus paid a price to redeem us. And our freedom did not come cheap. So Jesus did not reach into his pocket and pull out a wad of cash or his platinum VISA card. No; as Peter says, we were not redeemed "with perishable things such as silver or gold." Not even close. We were redeemed "with the precious blood of Christ." In other words, Jesus redeemed us by paying the price of his own life.

"Jesus redeemed us by paying the price of his own life." Let that sink in. Because it's about the cross. It's about the agonizing, humiliating, shameful death that Jesus embraced. And I'm using that word on purpose. Because Jesus did not just endure the cross; he embraced it. He embraced it for our sakes! He suffered it all for our sakes! Let that sink in.

**Now, you might wonder who Jesus paid that price to.** Some old traditions suggest that Jesus paid off Satan as the way to purchase our freedom. And the freedom we're talking

about is our freedom from what Peter calls “the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors.” So what we are talking about is our freedom from sin and death.

So, did Jesus gain that freedom for us by paying off Satan? Well, to be honest, I don’t think that question is relevant. Not at all. The Bible talks about our redemption in many passages and in many ways. And the point is always this: that God, that Jesus, pays a price to reclaim his people because we belong to him. The point is that Jesus paid, not who got paid.

I think it trivializes our redemption to picture it as some kind of transaction, as some kind of deal. When it comes to our redemption, all the attention belongs on Jesus our Redeemer. When it comes to our redemption, all the attention belongs on the price he paid to reclaim us as his own.

And the result of what Jesus did? There’s only one way to put it: *Free at last! Free at last!*  
*Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!*

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Glory and thanks be to God:  
Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

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