

# The Church Part Four: The Redeemed from Slavery

Exodus 2:23-25; 15:13, 17; Luke 1:68-79; Romans 6:16-18

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Dear Congregation of Christ: Imagine, a few years back, your parents gave you a car on your high school graduation. Then one day, a stranger came to your house and claims that the car is his. To show that the car is yours, you get the pink slip, and whoa! It shows the man's name, and not yours. The car is a stolen car, but you're obviously not a thief. Still you have to give it back to its rightful owner.

This is an example given in *Reparations: A Christian Call for Repentance and Renewal*, a book authored by a current pastor and a former pastor of a "conservative" Presbyterian church. They advocate reparations for all American black people because of their ancestors' slavery under white people. In California, a reparations bill to pay up to \$1.2 million to all black residents without any proof of their ancestor's slavery is in the legislature. How massive is this outrageous bill? Multiplying \$1.2 million by 2 million black Californians amounts to \$2.4 trillion! California's 2023 budget of about \$300 billion is merely one-eighth of the proposed reparations. On a more massive scale, California's reparations would amount to over one-third of the federal budget for 2023! And what about black immigrants, whose ancestors might have been slaves in other nations? Would California also pay them reparations because *all* blacks should be repaid?

Consider an expansion of the above example of a car gifted to you. What if you inherited from your great-great-grandfather a 1925 Rolls-Royce Phantom I Coupe, but one day a man claims that your million-dollar vintage car was his great-great-grandfather's? Where is the stranger's 1920s pink slip with his ancestor's name on it? This ridiculous scenario is unfolding in the reparations proposals.

A biblical example that this woke book cites is Zacchaeus, a "chief IRS agent." After he believed in Christ, he repented of his sin of defrauding the people, and promised to give half of his ill-gotten wealth to the poor and give a four-fold restoration to those whom he had scammed. But these woke pastors wrote that Zacchaeus was part of the Roman IRS system, "a system designed to plunder the most vulnerable members of a society." But did Zacchaeus acknowledge his part in this evil tax system by quitting his profession? No, he did not. John the Baptizer and our Lord Jesus Christ showed compassion on tax collectors, but never commanded them to leave their often-hated work. They only commanded tax collectors to stop their fraud and extortion (Luke 3:13-14). Kevin DeYoung, a Presbyterian minister, pointed out these flaws in justifying reparations to all black people.

But why am I discussing this issue? Because slavery is related to our theme today in our sermon series on the church. The first in the series was about the Garden of Eden as God's temple and Adam and Eve as the first church. The second in the series was a study of Noah and his family as the church and the ark that saved the church as Christ. The third focused on the

life of Abraham, Sarah, and Lot as the church, as foreigners, strangers and pilgrims on the earth desiring to be citizens of a better country, the heavenly city.

Today, we come to Israel as God's people, the church in the wilderness (Acts 7:38). But before they were called out of Egypt, they were slaves in that nation, "the house of slavery" (Exo 20:1). Under severe tyranny, oppression and slavery, they cried out to God for redemption. So, in the words of Zechariah, the father of John the Baptizer, God "visited and redeemed" his enslaved people. And what does God command his redeemed people? To serve him without fear "in holiness and righteousness" before him.

Therefore, our theme this Lord's Day is, **The Church Part Four: The Redeemed from Slavery**, under three headings: first, **They Cried to God for Redemption from Slavery**; second, **God Visited and Redeemed His Enslaved People**; and third, **That the Redeemed Might Serve Him Without Fear**.

### **They Cried to God for Redemption from Slavery**

Four hundred years before Moses appeared, there was the Hebrew named Joseph, once a slave and a prisoner, but then, by God's providence, became Prime Minister of Egypt, appointed by the Pharaoh himself. After a few generations of Pharaohs, what Joseph the Hebrew did for Egypt during seven years of famine was all but forgotten, and the Egyptians made the Hebrew foreigners slaves. The oppression of the Hebrew slaves was so ruthless that "*the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God.*" This was just the beginning of the history of Israel's groaning and crying out to God.

We groan because of our misery (Job 23:2), persecution from our enemies (Psa 38:8; 79:11), physical sufferings (Job 24:12), death (Jer 31:15), and God's judgment (Amos 5:16). But the worst kind of groaning and lamentation is the knowledge of one's sin against God's law. The psalmist, for example, groans, "*For my life is spent with sorrow, and my years with sighing; my strength fails because of my iniquity*" (Psa 31:10). In his prayer of repentance, the psalmist groans, "*My bones wasted away through my groaning all day long*" (Psa 32:3). A synonym of groaning is "sighing," as when David mourned over his sin (Psa 38:9). Therefore, not only physical distress, but sin can also cause a sinner to groan or sigh.

The people of Israel groaned from their very beginnings in Egypt, to the Judges, down through the Babylonian exile. In exile, Nehemiah groaned, wept and mourned in prayer before the LORD after he learned of the "great trouble and shame" of his people back in Canaan (Neh 1:3, 4). He knew the LORD had promised to Isaiah that after 70 years, Israel will be restored from their exile (Is 40:1-2). And Nehemiah knew the 70-year exile was about to end during his days.

Our Lord Jesus Christ said in one of his Beatitudes, "*Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted*" (Matt 5:4). Does this mean that one who mourns over the death of a loved one is blessed? No, multitudes of non-Christians mourn over their loved ones, so they are not blessed by God. Others mourn for other reasons: criminals mourn that they are in prison; husbands mourn that they were caught with other women; corrupt politicians mourn that they lost an election. These are not blessed either.

Rather, Jesus is teaching about mourning over one's sins. How can a person who mourn over his sin be blessed? This seems contradictory. But Paul says in 2 Corinthians 7:9–10, *"I rejoice, not because you were grieved, but because you were grieved into repenting . . . For godly grief produces a repentance that leads to salvation without regret."* Therefore, James also exhorts us to mourn over our sins, *"Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom"* (Jas 4:9). This means that God blesses those of you who mourn over your sins, your brothers' and sisters' sins, your families' and friends' sins, and national sins such as abortion, LGBTQ, rebellious youth, government corruption, greed and blatant racism, and over-taxation like Zacchaeus' sin. God blesses those of you who mourn over the unbelief and rejection of Christianity and the condescending reception of paganism in, our nation.

And what does the sin-mourner receive? He receives comfort from God. God forgives your sins and cleanses you of your sinfulness. He gives you the Holy Spirit, so you may resist the temptations of the devil. This is why Heidelberg Catechism Q&A 1 and 2 says that our Savior Jesus Christ has delivered us from our great sin and misery and from the devil's tyranny and slavery through the Holy Spirit. Our Lord himself says that all unbelievers are slaves of their father the devil (John 8:44). Paul affirms that unbelievers are slaves of sin (Rom 6:17, 20). Therefore, the Bible clearly teaches that an unbeliever does not have "free will," because he only does what his master, Satan, commands him to do. Does a slave have free will? Of course not, since he only does what his master commands him to do. He has no freedom to do what he wants to do.

The church then and now is God's chosen people who live on this earth, but she groans under the weight of a sinful, godless world and culture, and desiring to live in an eternal, better country.

### **God Visited and Redeemed His Enslaved People**

For the Hebrews under Moses' leadership, this eternal, better country is the Promised Land of Canaan. It would be a long wilderness trek full of hunger and thirst, dangers from the elements, wild beasts, and hostile peoples. But first, they groaned under the tyranny of the Egyptians. Their groaning and cries went up to God in heaven, *"and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob."* So, although they were an unfaithful and disobedient people, God would never break all his covenant promises to their forefathers.

So after hearing their groaning and cries, God "visited and redeemed" them. He saw and knew their hard slavery, so he sent his servant Moses, former prince of Egypt, to redeem them from their slavery. This was how God "visited and redeemed" his enslaved people. You might be wondering what God's visitation means, since we use it to mean visiting family and friends at home to see them and to enjoy their company, or even at the hospital to give them comfort. But the Hebrew word used here is the verb form of the Greek word *episkopos*, which in English is "bishop," as in Episcopalian. And this word actually means "to give attention to, look at, take care, see to it" (BAGD, 2000, 379). This means that God paid specially close attention to the tragic plight of his people under slavery.

So we see God's eternal plan unfold in the history of Israel, his chosen nation, beginning with his appointment of Moses as his people's redeemer from slavery. When Moses and Aaron performed God's wonders, *"the people believed . . . that the LORD had visited the people of Israel and that*

*he had seen their affliction, [and] they bowed their heads and worshiped*” (Exo 4:31). Through Moses, God visited and redeemed his enslaved people from the Red Sea, to Mount Sinai, through 40 years of wilderness wanderings, and in the conquest and settlement of the Promised Land of Canaan. But through the days of the judges, kings, and prophets, the people repeatedly committed heinous sins against God’s laws, incurring God’s judgment each time. Finally, after many centuries, God’s patience ran out, sending the Assyrians and Babylonians to destroy Israel and the temple. Again, as in Egypt, they became exiles and slaves.

And again, God was faithful to his covenant promises to their forefathers, revealing to the prophet Jeremiah, *“When seventy years are completed for Babylon, I will visit you, and I will fulfill to you my promise and bring you back to this place”* (Jer 29:10). But even after they were restored from their slavery back to the Promised Land, a whole new series of tyrannical kings ruled over them: the Greeks, the Seleucids, and then the Romans. So when we come to the New Testament, the Jews still groaned and longed for the Consolation of Israel to come.

Then an angel announced to Zechariah the priest that God has answered his prayers to bear a son—John the Baptizer—even when his wife Elizabeth was barren (Luke 1:13). This son will not be the usual son born of Jewish parents, as he would be the forerunner of the Messiah. Zechariah burst into a song known today as the “Benedictus,” saying, *“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people”* (Luke 1:68). In his song, he praised the Lord God for fulfilling the prophets by raising the Son of David to save his people from their enemies, and for remembering his covenant promises to their forefathers (Luke 1:69-73).

The Lord has visited his people and saw and heard their longing for the Messiah to come and comfort them. Not only did he see their sufferings under the cruel Roman rulers, but he also saw their sin and misery. So God promised to send them a Redeemer from all their sins, his only-begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, *“the sunrise [who] shall visit us from on high”* (Lk 1:78). What follows this divine visitation by our Lord for the forgiveness of those who mourn because of their sins?

### **That the Redeemed Might Serve Him Without Fear**

Divine “visitation” is the word used in our texts for forgiveness of sins and salvation granted by God to his chosen people, the church. Another word used in our texts is “redemption.” When you get your receipt from CVS, Raley’s, Walmart, and other stores, do you get a little piece of paper with the list of goods you bought? No, you get a tape that’s as long as your arm, full of coupons that you will never redeem. All these papers just go to the landfill. Not good for saving the planet.

But our Lord paid for our ransom with his own life. We were slaves of sin, just as the Israelites in Egypt were slaves. Slaves were bought and sold all throughout the ancient world, the medieval world, and all the way to the 19th century. We have seen movies of 19th century Russian society where “serfs,” who were called “bondmaids” and “bondmen,” were bought and sold and auctioned off. They were treated as “things,” not as human beings, and can only be freed with a certificate called “manumission.” Therefore, “redemption” means buying something back, or removal of a financial obligation with a payment. The Apostle Paul explains what God has done for us through

Christ's death. One who has been redeemed by the Lord is a "bondservant of Christ," but at the same time a "freedman," freed from slavery to sin and Satan. Then he says, "*You were bought with a price*" (1 Cor 7:22-23).

Zechariah's song gives the answer, "*that we, being delivered from the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all our days*" (Luke 1:74-75). From the earliest days of creation, God's enemies have been the enemies of his people whose desire is to serve and worship him. Abel was killed by his brother Cain. Noah served and worshiped God in the midst of a wicked world. Abraham's nephew Lot was attacked by the wicked people of Sodom. The Israelites had no rest from hostile nations around them. Zechariah praised God that the coming Redeemer would deliver God's people from their enemies so they might worship the Lord without fear.

But even with the "freedom of religion" in our nation, there is no assurance that we will not be harassed or even persecuted by God's enemies. In our "free" nation, churches who are vocal in their stand against abortion, have been picketed and even burned. Churchgoers have been harassed. Even Supreme Court justices have been harassed, picketed, and threatened with violence, even by some wicked politicians.

Just a few days ago, country singer Jason Aldean released a music video, "Try That in a Small Town," that says in part, "Sucker punch somebody on a sidewalk / Carjack an old lady at a red light / Pull a gun on the owner of a liquor store / Cuss out a cop, spit in his face." He is describing the BLM and Antifa riots in 2020. The woke leftist reaction was cancellation and outrage over Aldean's "racism" and "gun violence." No, if there was ever racism, it's the BLM's violence. Of the tens of thousands of rioters and looters and arsonists, how many were arrested? A handful, and they were released quickly, bailed out by wicked politicians. Who were arrested? Mostly, the victims were the ones arrested. Aldean's song does not have any hint of racism, nor is he promoting gun violence; he is promoting lawful self-defense against violent criminals. Has there ever been a hip-hop or rap song detailing rape, murder and other violent acts that was cancelled? I doubt it. This shameless hypocrisy of the woke culture never ends. I don't know if Aldean is a Christian, but this is how far gone our nation has come in blatant, godless, anti-Christian wickedness.

**D**ear friends: In the midst of this anti-Christian culture, we must not cower in fear no matter how the culture is against us. God pays special attention to us. He preserves our faith. He sees us, and he knows each one of his beloved people. And vengeance belongs to him. Without fear, we are able to serve him in "holiness and righteousness."

God's visitation and redemption of his people has this purpose. God's purpose when he visited and redeemed the Hebrews from Egypt was for them to worship him on his mountain. In the same way, we whom he redeemed from sin's slavery, his church, are commanded, "*put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness*" (Eph 4:24; 1 Pet 2:24). As James says, "*So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead*" (Jas 2:17). Good works are the fruits of our redemption from sin. And we are also commanded to be witnesses for Christ through our good works and words so that unbelievers will also believe and glorify God on the "*day of visitation*"—Judgment Day—when our Lord returns from heaven (1 Pet 2:12).