

## “Setting Us Free”

I Peter 1:17-21

Most of you probably aren't familiar with Ranger Joe's. It's a company that sells military and law enforcement gear. I got on their email and catalogue list and I generally just like to browse to see what they have. Several months ago as I was scanning through the catalogue my eyes fell on an advertisement that made me stop to ponder the message. I don't even remember what it was selling. Picture a WWII scene with paratroopers filling the sky. The message was powerful, captivating, and gripping. The catalogue was an unusual place to find a message fitting of our Easter celebration.

Here's the message as it appeared in the catalogue. After you hear it you'll understand the correlation to Easter. “There is something reassuring about a man who will willingly descend from the heavens solely for the purpose of setting others free.”

Let that roll around in your noodle and think about Christ who willingly left the splendor of heaven to do exactly that – descend for the purpose of setting others free. He said He came to seek and save.

Those of you who are Dottie Rambo fans may be thinking about this song she wrote.

## If That Isn't Love

He left the splendor of heaven  
Knowing His destiny  
Was the lonely hill of Golgotha  
There to lay down His life for me

*If that isn't Love*

*The ocean is dry*

*There's no stars in the sky*

*And the sparrow can't fly*

*If that isn't Love*

*Then heaven's a myth*

*There's no feeling like this*

*If that isn't love*

Even in death He remembered  
The thief hanging by His side  
He spoke with love and compassion  
Then He took him to paradise

*Chorus*

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Let me rephrase that quote from Ranger's Joes. “There is something reassuring about Jesus who willingly descended from heaven solely for the purpose of setting us free.”

His sacrifice was necessary. His death was necessary. Let's recap what we know from Scripture about the events surrounding what we call Easter.

We are quite familiar with the account of the arrest, trials, beatings, crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus.

His arrest came at the hand or kiss of one of His followers. We know all about Judas Iscariot's conspiring with the Religious leaders who had a seething hatred for Jesus and wanted to kill Him.

We know about the six trials of Jesus that bounced him back and forth from the religious leaders to Pilate and King Herod that went throughout the night and early morning. Try as they may no one could find anything wrong with Him, yet they pressed on until the death penalty was issued.

We know about the brutal beatings, the scourging and the crown of thorns that pressed down into the flesh of His head.

We know about the mocking by the soldiers and then by the crowds as He hung on the cross and then by the two other criminals who hung beside Him, how they taunted and ridiculed Him. Their mistreatment of Jesus is mine as well.

We know about the physical and mental pain and suffering from the trauma of being nailed to the cross undergoing one of the most gruesome forms of punishment and death ever invented. The Romans were experts at inflicting maximum pain for the longest period possible. They liked to see their victims suffer greatly longing for death but unable to hasten its coming.

We know about His death in just six hours' time.

We know about His burial in a borrowed tomb and the request of the religious rulers to have it sealed with guards posted by it to ensure the body wasn't stolen by any of Jesus' followers.

And praise the Lord we know about the miraculous resurrection on the first day of the week early in the morning and that He was physically seen by a number of witnesses.

Of the major world religions only Christianity claims an empty tomb. He didn't faint and then awaken by the coolness of the tomb, He wasn't hallucinating, His body wasn't stolen, and the women didn't go to the wrong tomb as some claim.

Josh McDowell was once asked by a student why he couldn't refute Christianity. He responded to the student "For a very simple reason: I am not able to explain away an event in history – the resurrection of Jesus."

The resurrection of Jesus and Christianity are inseparably bound together. If the resurrection could somehow be disproved, then the foundation of Christianity quickly crumbles away. Our faith stands or falls on the resurrection.

The historical, human body of Jesus Christ died, was buried, and physically rose again. We don't have time to go into the body of evidence for the proof of the resurrection, but take it by faith that the Word of God is true. Believe it happened just as

Scripture says it did. The proof is not only in the text, there is historical evidence that is undeniable.

Apologist Norm Geisler states "If Christ did not rise in the same physical body that was placed in the tomb, then the resurrection loses its value as an evidential proof of His claim to be God. The resurrection cannot verify Jesus' claim to be God unless He was resurrected in the body in which He was crucified. That body was a literal, physical body. Unless Jesus rose in a material body, there is no way to verify His resurrection. It loses its historically persuasive value."

The fact of His resurrection is irrefutable. The evidence is undeniable. It is not from ignorance about His resurrection that people reject both the evidence and Him as Savior. It is because they willfully choose to reject it.

Josh McDowell says the resurrection is either "the most wicked, vicious, heartless hoaxes ever foisted upon the minds of men, OR it is the most fantastic fact in history."

I'm going with the latter.

On this Easter Sunday I would like for us to consider the one who descended to offer us salvation through His death, burial, and resurrection. What is it about His sacrifice that sets us free. Turn in your Bibles to I Peter 1:17-21.

We know a lot about the Easter account. My prayer is that from this passage we will see not only why it was necessary for Christ to die, but also what His resurrection means to those who believe in Him. There are nine truths about the sacrifice Christ made on the cross for us in this text.

We begin with verse 18 and will end with verse 17 as our response to this One who is our sacrifice.

## I. THE PURPOSE FOR OUR SACRIFICE

We find out the purpose of our sacrifice from verse 18. We read that it was to “redeem” us. It is here that we understand why Christ went to the cross.

The word “redeem” means to release on receipt of a ransom, to set free by paying a price. As it applies to Christ as Redeemer, it means that He came to pay the price for sin that we could not pay.

The Greeks used it as a technical term for paying money to buy back a prisoner of war. But Paul uses it in reference to the practice established in the Old Testament. It began back in Exodus 12:1-13.

It is in this passage that we see both the purpose and the price of redemption or the cost to be redeemed.

If the Israelites wanted to have the angel of death pass over their home so he wouldn't take the life of any first born in the home, they had to select a one year old lamb, take its life and then smear the shed blood on the doorposts and the lintel. The price of redeeming the first born was the life of the lamb who became the substitute for the first born in the home.

We have been freed from something bad through the payment of a penalty.

Again, in the Greek world, a person could buy a slave and then pay the price for that slave's freedom. Or the slave could save up enough money and buy his own freedom.

But our debt of sin is too great for us to buy or redeem with anything we may have. Christ's sacrifice on the cross where He shed His blood was the price paid to free us from slavery to sin. His blood bought us.

Ephesians 1:7 “In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins...”

Revelation 5:9 “Worthy is the lamb that was slain.”

The purpose of our sacrifice was to purchase us from the slave market of sin in order to set us free.

But from what are we redeemed? Why did Christ have to die on the cross? We find that answered in two separate verses both of which are in chapter 1.

Look back at verse 14 for the first two where we see two things we were redeemed from, why Christ died on the cross.

The first thing is He redeemed us from evil desires. That speaks of former driving passions, usually something that is evil.

Genesis 6:5

Jeremiah 3:17

James 1:14-15

The Bible tells us that the heart is desperately wicked who can know it or understand it? Christ died to buy us back from that wicked way of life. But it wasn't that way in the beginning. Adam and Eve were created perfect, but then they disobeyed God and passed on the sin nature to us. That sin nature results in a strong desire to sin.

As we toured the Holocaust museum which also includes exhibits of mass genocide in Rwanda and Cambodia, we left with a burning question: how can people do this to one another? The answer is our evil desires. Christ came to redeem us from them.

The second thing I see in verse 14 is that Christ redeemed us from spiritual ignorance. This refers to the absence of spiritual understanding.

Ephesians 4:17-18

I Timothy 1:13

This past Wednesday we heard about an outreach strategy to reach Muslims in Spain through offering legal counsel. They have a couple lawyers who will work with immigrants to help them navigate living in a new land. Most don't know the language and therefore don't understand the laws. Without this legal advice most would live in ignorance to the law.

Out of spiritual ignorance people will pursue evil

desires. Christ came to redeem us from spiritual ignorance.

Now look at verse 18. We see two more things that we are redeemed from.

He redeemed us from a futile way of life. It's a word that means vain, useless, or worthless.

Some people pursue getting as much as they can in this life. They follow the bumper sticker that says "He who has the most toys wins." They believe that by having it all they don't need Christ. Jesus once asked a rhetorical question. What does it profit a man if He gains the whole world and yet forfeits or loses his own soul? (Matthew 16:26)

One day Paul and Barnabas were preaching in Derbe and Lystra. They healed a man and right away the crowds thought they were gods and started to worship them. Paul told them to stop and turn from their futile way of life. (Acts 14:15)

It's not wrong to pursue your dreams (unless they are illegal or immoral), but if we pursue our dreams to the neglect of Christ, it's just chasing the wind.

Verse 18 tells us one more thing that He redeemed us from. The traditions we inherited from our fathers. In this case it is referring to religious traditions.

Matthew 15:7-9

Matthew 23:1-4

We can pass on religious traditions that have no spiritual benefit.

Songkran is by far the biggest holiday of the year in Thailand. With the hot season in full swing temperatures can soar above 100 degrees. It's a time when almost everyone returns to their hometown and the entire country is turned into a giant water fight. People sit on the side of the road with water guns, hoses or buckets of water to douse those passing by, while others pile, armed with

water, into the back of pickup trucks and take the fun wherever they want.

While this is certainly exciting, and a time everyone looks forward to each year, Songkran is also the strongest spiritual holiday celebrated. Most Thais visit Buddhist temples and monks every morning during the New Year in order to make merit. The water that is poured over the heads of the idols and elderly symbolizes the washing away of sin and bad luck. Sacred white strings are used for blessings and protection. Dark yellow bracelets are worn for defense of evil and sickness. Vain traditions.

The Jews also had religious traditions that they passed on. A sacrificial system that was to point them to Christ became a tradition that blinded them to their true meaning.

The purpose of His sacrifice was to redeem us. The next thing to consider is the permanency of our sacrifice. Notice out text in verse 18.

## II. THE PERMANENCY OF OUR SACRIFICE

"It was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed."

We think of silver or gold as metals that last. Yet even while they are of high value, the writer here says they will perish.

Think of the value of a life, even the life of an animal. Year after year an animal sacrifice was required but the value of the sacrifice didn't meet what God required for forgiveness of sin. It was meant only as a picture of what God demanded until the permanent sacrifice could be made.

Hebrews 9:11-15

We needed a sacrifice that was permanent that would give us lasting forgiveness. Christ did it once for all by His own blood. The writer of Hebrews states earlier that if nothing had been

wrong with the first covenant then a second one was unnecessary. Because the first one was only temporary a permanent one was needed. Christ's sacrifice was once for all. It was permanent.

But not any sacrifice would do. It had to be a sacrifice without blemish. Peter then speaks about the purity of our sacrifice.

### III. THE PURITY OF OUR SACRIFICE

Verse 19 says that Christ is a Lamb without blemish or defect. In other words, He is perfect.

We find in the law the requirement for a perfect sacrifice.

Leviticus 22:21-22 "...it must be without defect or blemish to be acceptable. Do not offer to the Lord the blind, the injured or the maimed, or anything with warts or festering or running sores. Do not place any of these on the altar as an offering made to the Lord by fire."

So if an animal sacrifice was insufficient even though it was without blemish where could we find one a permanent one? We couldn't, but God could. He gave His Son who was perfect.

I Peter 3:18 "Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God."

Hebrews 4:15 says that even though Christ was tempted just as we are, He remained sinless. If Christ would have sinned even once He would have been an inadequate and unacceptable sacrifice. Our sacrifice needed to be pure.

So why did our sacrifice need to be pure? Our sacrifice needed to be pure to become the payment for our sin. So Peter then speaks about the payment by our sacrifice.

### IV. THE PAYMENT BY OUR SACRIFICE

Peter already told us that perishable things like silver or gold couldn't redeem us, couldn't pay for

the debt of our sin. So if something that valuable couldn't pay for our debt what could? Peter says it was with the "precious blood of Christ" that redeemed us, that paid for our freedom, that bought us from the slave market of sin.

Scientists estimate that our body is made up of approximately 60% water.

Scientists also estimate for an average sized person, our bodies contain about 1 ½ gallons of blood.

Medically speaking, we couldn't live without blood. Its value to the human body is tremendous. It transports food and oxygen to the other parts of the body. It carries disease fighting cells to attack foreign properties. It can help regulate body temperature by carrying away unwanted heat from other body parts. And so much more.

How valuable is your blood? Scripture says that life is in the blood. The blood of a pure, permanent sacrifice was required by God to pay for the debt of our sin. Christ couldn't just prick His finger and call it good. He couldn't just go to the local Red Cross and donate a pint – He had to give up His life. That is why Peter calls the sacrifice of His life giving blood precious.

### V. THE PRECIOUSNESS OF OUR SACRIFICE

The hymnist understood the value of Christ's blood when he wrote and we sing

Oh precious is the flow that makes me white as snow

No other fount I know, nothing but the blood of Jesus.

There is nothing else of equal or greater value.

There is nothing else that would pay for our sin.

Paul understood the value of this blood when he wrote to the Corinthians that we should honor God with our bodies since we were both with a price and are the temple of God. (I Corinthians 6:18-20)

Now when Peter speaks of the blood of Christ being precious, he not only refers to its value. It is also something that is held in highest honor, something

that is esteemed. In Revelation 5:9 John spoke of the vast number of angels he saw standing around the throne of Christ saying “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain.” They were saying that honor and glory and power is due to Him because He gave His blood to pay for our debt of sin. Because His blood is precious we should praise Him for shedding it.

But all this had to be planned, and plan God did.

## VI. THE PLANNING FOR OUR SACRIFICE

II Corinthians 5:17 “He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us...”

In verse 20 we read that “He (Christ) was *chosen* before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.”

We understand that to mean that before man walked the earth, before animals roamed the grassy meadows or birds took to the open sky flying on the winds or fish swam in the ocean currents or vegetation filled the landscape with breathtaking views and aromas, before stars dotted the night sky or planets circled the sun, before the waters were separated above and below, before light existed, even before the foundation of the creation God had a plan. Man’s sin did not take God off guard. He was not surprised by. He didn’t become anxious about it. He already had a plan to send His Son Jesus Christ to be the sacrifice for the sins of the world. From before the beginning of time He had a plan, a perfect plan that would pay for the debt incurred because of sin. It was a plan that required the death of His Son through the shedding of His blood. He couldn’t die by drowning or by having some heavy object fall on Him crushing Him to death. He couldn’t ingest poison or even die by disease or die naturally from old age. He had to shed His blood as a sacrifice. His precious blood was required.

It was for our sake He sacrificed Himself. We

needed it. We needed Him. Through His sacrifice there is power.

## VII. THE POWER THROUGH OUR SACRIFICE

Verse 21 – “Through Him you believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and glorified Him...”

Several truths ring from this verse. There was power to raise Him. His resurrection means that His sacrifice was accepted by God. If His sacrifice was unacceptable to God He would still be in the grave and there would be no evidence He rose from the dead or has the power to forgive us of our sins.

So we join again singing with the hymnist a wonderful song of the power in the blood of Christ. Through a series of rhetorical questions the answer is always the same – There’s power in the blood. Would you be free from your burden of sin? There’s power in the blood, power in the blood; Would you o’er evil a victory win? There’s wonderful power in the blood.

Would you be free from your passion and pride? There’s power in the blood, power in the blood; Come for a cleansing to Calvary’s tide; There’s wonderful power in the blood.

Would you be whiter, much whiter than snow? There’s power in the blood, power in the blood; Sin stains are lost in its life giving flow. There’s wonderful power in the blood. *There is power, power, wonder working power In the blood of the Lamb;*  
*There is power, power, wonder working power In the precious blood of the Lamb.*

The question another hymnist asks that is important for each of us to answer is this  
Have you been to Jesus for the cleansing power?  
Are you washed in the blood of the lamb?  
Are you fully trusting in His grace this hour?  
Are you washed in the blood of the Lamb?

One proof of God's acceptance of our sacrifice is that He was raised from the dead.

The second proof of God's acceptance is that our sacrifice was glorified. He returned to heaven to be seated next to the Father.

Hebrews 1:3 "Who, being the brightness of His glory, and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high."

The power in His sacrifice provided us a way to be made right with God. He purified us from our sin. That power comes with a promise.

#### VIII. THE PROMISE FROM OUR SACRIFICE

If there was power to raise Christ from the dead, there is power to raise us from the dead. We see in the end of verse 21 that our "faith and hope are in God." "Because He lives we too shall live."

Verses like John 3:16 assure us of eternal life because we believe in Christ who shed His blood for us.

I John 1:7 "the blood of Jesus, His Son, purifies us from all sin." By our faith in Christ we are made right with God and seen by Him as holy.

He purifies every sin, for anyone who trusts in Christ as Savior.

I Peter 2:24 "He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness, by His wounds we have been healed."

We have been given the promise of eternal life. But the promise isn't just for something future. The promise is also for today and it comes through the pursuit of our sacrifice. It's found in verse 17.

#### IX. THE PURSUIT OF OUR SACRIFICE

If Christ did all that for us, we should diligently and dutifully and desirously pursue Him. Our response should be a pursuit of godly living.

Once again I return to the rich theology of the hymnist Francis Havergall who compels us to consider our response to Jesus' sacrifice.

I gave My life for thee, My precious blood I shed,  
That thou might ransom me, and raised up from the dead

I gave, I gave My life for thee, what hast thou given for Me?

I gave, I gave My life for thee, what hast thou given for Me?

I suffered much for thee, more than thy tongue can tell,

Of bitterest agony, to rescue thee from hell.

I've borne, I've borne it all for thee, what hast thou borne for Me?

I've borne, I've borne it all for thee, what hast thou borne for Me?

And I have brought to thee, down from My home above,

Salvation full and free, My pardon and My love;  
I bring, I bring rich gifts to thee, what hast thou brought to Me?

I bring, I bring rich gifts to thee, what hast thou brought to Me?

Walvoord and Zuck write "Holy living is motivated by a God-fearing faith which does not take lightly what was purchased at so great a cost."

The sacrifice of Christ is a call to be serious about living a holy life before God. The precious blood of Christ bids us to consider His great sacrifice that was made on our behalf and so live godly in Christ Jesus. This Easter how are you responding to His gift?