

Good morning everyone, my name is Mark and I'm one of the pastors here at North Shore Alliance Church. This morning I'm going to continue in our preaching series entitled, *The Wonder of the Cross*. Each week we have been looking at a New Testament word that sheds light on what Jesus accomplished when He died on the cross.

The first week we focussed on the word **reconciliation**. At times the Bible describes sin as *rebellion*, *infidelity*, or *disloyalty*—these are relational terms. The sin of Adam and Eve, and the rest of humanity broke relationship with God. God has acted in Christ, through the cross, to reconcile sinful human beings to Himself.

Last week we focussed on the word **justification**. There is no one who is right before God, not even one; all of us have broken God's law, all of us are guilty and without defence. But at the cross, Jesus took our sin, our guilt, our law breaking, upon Himself, and in return our guilt was removed, and we have been forgiven, welcomed, and embraced by God.

This week we are going to look at a third word that showcases the wonder of the cross, namely **redemption**. In the ancient world, "*redemption*" was primarily an economic word. To *redeem* was to buy back something that had been sold—think pawn shop; to exchange something that was yours for something that belonged to another; or, to pay a price to set someone free.

The word "*redemption*" implies that something, or someone, has been lost, sold, or imprisoned, and that this something (or someone) needs to be found, bought, or released. In the ancient world, redemption was a powerful, and costly, word—it still is today.

So far in our series we have talked about sin in two primary ways: (a) First, as breaking relationship with God, and (b) Second, as breaking God's law. This morning I'm going to highlight a third—*sin is also described as enslaving power or force*.

At this time let me encourage you to take your Bible, paper or electronic, and turn with me to Genesis 4:7. A few weeks ago, we looked at Genesis 3 which describes Adam and Eve's rebellion. We're told that the moment they rebelled against God, "*their eyes were opened*;" they became aware they had broken relationship and their first instinct was to hide.

By the time we get to Genesis 4, time has passed—Adam and Eve have two children, Cain and Abel. In the course of time, Cain and Abel brought an offering to God; God looked with favour upon Abel's offering, but Cain's offering didn't receive the same approval. Cain was angry with God and his brother, and his anger began to consume him.

In Genesis 4:7, God warned Cain about the destructive power of sin. "*If you do what is right, will you not be accepted? But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must rule over it.*" Here sin is personified as a wild animal, or demon, crouching outside the door waiting for an unsuspecting victim.

illus: In 1999, a science fiction movie called *The Matrix* was released. In this movie, while the human race has been enslaved by alien creatures, humanity at large remains unaware because they have been plugged into a computer-generated virtual reality, known as *The Matrix*. You wake up each morning, get dressed, go to school, or

work; you play sports, listen to music, but none of it is real—it's all computer generated.

One of the main characters, Morpheus, describes the matrix in the following way: “The matrix is everywhere, it is all around us...It is the world that has been pulled over your eyes to blind you from the truth...that *you are a slave...born into bondage, born into a prison that you cannot smell or taste or touch; a prison for your mind.*”

The Bible often speaks of sin as though it has a life or a power of its own. Cornelius Plantinga Jr. writes that sin lures and then enslaves; he also describes sin as a parasite—it feeds on, and ultimately destroys, the host to which it is attached.¹ In John 8:34-35, Jesus once said, “*Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.*”

illus: What make sin so dangerous is how subtly it grows and takes root in our lives. Years ago now, I can remember sitting in a living room with a couple from the church I was pastoring. I had known this couple for years, had talked with them many times before, and in my mind, this meeting was something of an intervention. The wife had been wounded by someone in the church, not intentionally, not maliciously, but wounded all the same. And she had made the choice to hold on to this wound, rehearsing it over and over again, both privately and publicly.

What she could not see was that this wound had come to define her life; unknowingly, she had become captive to bitterness, anger, and hatred—she was bent on vengeance. Over a series of months I talked with her about this wound and the way forward. But that day I spoke

about forgiveness, about the need for her to let go of vengeance. I pleaded with her saying, “*There is a freedom that God has in store for you.*” My words didn't even register.

That day something became clear to me—it wasn't simply that *she* was holding on to bitterness, bitterness was holding her hostage. She had been imprisoned in a web of hatred. As our conversation came to a close I returned to the theme of forgiveness and freedom; I asked her point blank, “*Don't you want to be free?*” Her response was immediate, “*I don't want to be free...I want to be vindicated!*”

Sin is crouching at our door, it seeks to enslave and to rule over us. In Romans 7:18-20, Paul speaks about the internal, enslaving, power of sin in the following way, “*I have the desire to do what is good but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me.*”

In a Western culture that has rejected the notion of universal “right and wrong,” how does one talk about sin? The word “redemption” can help us, I think. People all around us may not understand their need for forgiveness, but many who do not know Christ are crying out for freedom. Freedom from addiction, from past wounds, from abuse, from fear, from the enslaving expectations of self, or others.

In turning away from God, all of us are held captive to sin's enslaving power, but the good news is that at the cross, God, in Christ, has broken the power of sin—He paid the price for our ransom; we have been forgiven and set free.

¹ Cornelius Plantinga Jr., *Not The Way It's Supposed To Be: A Breviary Of Sin*, 87, 89.

Movie Clip (*Valjean's Ransom*): At this time I want to direct your attention to the screen; there's a scene from the movie *Les Miserables* that captures this concept of redemption and ransom. We're about to see the scene in which the main character, Jean Valjean—a former prisoner—is caught red-handed. A bishop took him in the for night when no one else would, but old habits die hard—in the middle of the night Valjean knocked the bishop unconscious, stole his valuables, and made his escape. Watch and see what happens.

“Jean Valjean, my brother, you no longer belong to evil. With this silver I've bought your soul, I've ransomed you from fear and hatred and now I give you back to God.”

1 Peter 1:18-21, “**18** 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, **19** but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. **20** He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake.”

Colossians 1:13-14 says, “**13** For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, **14** in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”

When we put our faith in Christ, our guilt is removed (justification), we are restored to friendship with God (reconciliation), and sin's enslaving power is broken (redemption). If we have been united to Christ, sin no longer has a claim on us, sin is no longer our master—we have been set free! Come on church, can I get an amen?

This is the wonder of the cross: we are saved from sin's enslaving power and we are saved for freedom—freedom to live for God and others, freedom from the compulsions that drive us.

At this point in my sermon I want to move from theology to praxis. All good theology should lead to praxis, that is, the truth the Bible proclaims is always intended to be a lived truth, a truth we experience in our lives. The theology of redemption prompts a question of praxis—*if the death of Jesus has broken sin's enslaving power, why do so many Christians remain captive?*

Let's pause for a moment and administer an internal self-assessment. Do you feel bound, captive, or enslaved in some part of your life? Do you have a secret, or public, addiction? Is there something you can't break free from?

Do you feel bound to past events, or past woundedness? Is there any bitterness or unforgiveness that seems to have a hold on you? Do you ever feel yourself tossed back and forth by your worries, fears, or insecurities? *If Christ's death has set us free, why don't we feel and act more free?*

I want to begin by unmasking current cultural assumptions that I believe fuel captivity. At present, freedom is primarily defined as the absence of restraint; “*we are truly free if, and when, we are free to do whatever we want*”. The belief is that by maximizing individual freedom, people will be fulfilled and satisfied.

A second cultural assumption is that our desires provide the path to fulfillment. The idea being pressed upon us is that we do damage to our self by denying our desires. The sad truth is that blindly obeying

our desires rarely leads to satisfaction but frequently leads to loss, or captivity.

From a biblical perspective, sin is personified as a cruel and oppressive Task-Master, a Tyrant on destroying us. But sin's claim to us, sin's power over us, has been broken and the claim to our life now belongs to a new Master, Jesus Christ, the Lord of Love. Colossians 1:13-14 speaks of our rescue, and Colossians 3 talks about how to live in the freedom that Jesus has provided. Let's take a closer look.

“Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.”

We have been united to Christ and our life is now utterly bound up with His. The old way of living—captive to sin, enslaved to our desires—is over. And so, *we set our hearts on things above*, that is, we pursue the things that Jesus is pursuing.

The implicit command in vs. 2 is *Look Up!* Remember who you are, remember who He is, and where we now dwell—we have one foot in the heavenly realms, and so, our footprint here on the earth cannot look the same as it did before. Don't let your mind, your desires, your ambitions, and plans be overtaken again by earth-bound things.

The point being made in vs. 3 is that we have been united to Christ, and in a mysterious way, we have been included in His death and

resurrection. And so we have died to an old way of seeing, thinking, desiring, and living—we are no longer our own, we've been bought with a price.²

If vs. 1-4 are focused on theology, vs. 5-14 deal with praxis. To help the Colossians live in freedom, Paul uses an accessible, everyday analogy: changing one's clothes. His essential point is that a new life calls for a new wardrobe—because we are now 'in Christ' there are certain things to be 'taken off' and other things that need to be 'put on'. Vs. 5-9 deal with what needs to be taken off (and thrown out), while vs. 12-14 deal with the new wardrobe that God has picked out for us.

Vs. 5, 8, and 9 outline a number of attitudes and practices that belong to an old way of living. Paul seems to be saying that because Jesus' death broke the power of sin, we can put sinful attitudes and practices to death. In Christ, and by the Spirit, we have the power to choose who we will serve.

In my own experience there is a thin line in every human heart between “*I can't*” and “*I won't*”. Though we have been united to Christ, and as it were, have one foot in the heavenly realms, we are still very much of this earth. Our old nature persists, and temptations still abound; how do we remain true to Christ?

Augustine once prayed, “*Lord, command what you will and will what you command.*” He recognized how weak, frail, and fickle his heart could be—one moment devoted to God, but another wandering away.

² 1 Corinthians 6:19-20.

We are not only saved by grace, we live by grace moment by moment. Only Christ can live the Christian life, and we must ask Him to live His life through us. We call out to God in prayer, and we learn to depend upon the Holy Spirit, to empower our will that we might choose Christ—and His way—in the face of temptation.

In verses 12-14, we see the reason for shedding an old way of life. To use Paul's analogy, we shed the old, tattered, clothes, because they no longer suit our new life; God has a brand new wardrobe waiting for us. Listen to how Eugene Peterson translates this verses,

“So, chosen by God for this new life of love, dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you: compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline. Be even-tempered, content with second place, quick to forgive an offence. Forgive as quickly and completely as [Jesus] forgave you. And regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It's your basic, all-purpose garment. Never be without it.”

New clothes for a new people—clothes that reflect the life and love of the One who justifies (He removes our guilt), reconciles (He restores us to relationship with God), and redeems (He breaks sin's enslaving power and sets us free) us.

Conclusion: As I conclude this morning, I want to ask: *Do you want to be free?* Freedom is both a gift and a choice—God, in Christ, through the cross, has set us free from the enslaving power of sin. But if we would walk in the freedom Christ provides, we must invite God to empower our will, and then rely on the strength the Spirit provides. *He is willing, are we?*

illus: Earlier this morning I told a story about a woman who had become captive to bitterness, anger, and hatred—her desire for vengeance brought ruin to her life and to the lives of those she loved.

I want to tell you another story about another woman; her name is Helen. Helen and her husband Lionel were a part of the church I served at in Calgary—I got to know them because they were serving on our prayer team. Helen is one of the loveliest, kindest, most gracious women I've ever met; she has a heart of love and compassion. It wasn't until many years later that I heard a part of her story.

Helen's mom was in her late 70's and living alone; her husband had passed away some years. The mom was in her own home, heard a strange sound, and wandered out of her bedroom to find the source—she was the victim of a home invasion. The thief had broken into her home, thinking it was empty, but upon seeing the mom panicked. He pulled out a gun, pointed, and then pulled the trigger—this poor, unsuspecting, woman died. What began as a robbery, ended in murder.

As you can imagine, for a time Helen was numbed by shock—these kind of things aren't very frequent in Canada. Her mom's killer was caught, arrested, and in the course of time brought to trial. Helen and Lionel insisted on going to the trial, but not for the reasons you might think. They didn't attend to ensure that justice was done, they went to extend forgiveness and that's exactly what Helen did.

Helene was granted permission to speak to the young man and she approached, his head hung in shame. Helen told him that she forgave him, that her and Lionel were praying for him, and they asked if they

could write to him and visit when they could. Over time they became like parents to this young man. How did they do what they did? It was their life in Christ that enabled them to make the choices they did—to put off anger, bitterness, vengeance, and to put on compassion, kindness, and forgiveness.

When I think about Helen and Lionel, these words from Colossians come to mind. *“Chosen by God for this new life of love, dress in the wardrobe God picked out for you: compassion, kindness, humility, quiet strength, discipline...Forgive as quickly and completely as [Jesus] forgave you. And regardless of what else you put on, wear love. It's your basic, all-purpose garment. Never be without it.”*

Christ died to set us free from sin's enslaving power—whatever you are captive to, whatever has a hold on you, can be broken as we turn to Him, and live in Him.

Prayer

Song of Response: Christ Is Risen

Worship

Benediction