

Being Redeemed

Luke 7:44-48

14 January 2018

Everton Hills

Well, today is my second last Sunday as a pastor here at Prince of Peace. And I want to begin with a question.

If I were to ask you for one word as to what being a follower of Jesus means to you, what would that word be?

Stuck? You might like to use one of these words to stimulate your thinking!

Refreshing; Moral; Faithful; Relationship; Saved; Free; Dutiful; Honest; Painful; Fun; Godly; Spiritual

I guess that there are so many words that we could use. And the word that you might have chosen may well and truly reflect either how you see yourself, how you see God, or how you might see God's expectations of you.

This morning, I want to reflect on one word, that, over the past year or two has spoken particularly to me. Over the last year or two, I have come to increasingly realise, that I am broken person. I am not overly moral. I am not overly dutiful. There are times that I am far less honest than I should be – to you, to God, to myself. And there are times that I am neither godly or spiritual. And if you were to judge me by who I am inside, with all my shame, my pain, my struggles, my doubts, you would have to conclude that I am not worthy of being called a follower of Jesus. Especially when Jesus talks about taking your cross and following him, or about denying him, and so forth. In fact, there are times that I feel more like the Peter standing around the campfires on the night of the betrayal saying “Surely I don't know the man”, than the Peter who Jesus called ‘The Rock’.

Don't get me wrong. I have no doubt that Jesus is real, that he is the son of God, that his life and death and resurrection have had a significant impact on my life. In fact, I live every day with the powerful awareness that for a long time, I thought I needed to do things in order to belong, and be valued, and be significant – to God, to others, to my wife, to myself – and that shaped so much of how I thought and who I was becoming... then one day, God helped me to see, with such clarity, that I am loved, just as I am, and I need to do, in fact, can do thing to change that... And I am inspired when I hear stories of people who are so strong in faith that they to be able to move mountains. The fact is, there are times that the faith that I have wouldn't even create a puff of wind.

If God's holiness saw me, I would deserve nothing but condemnation. If holiness was the measure of me be a follower of Jesus that entitled me to speak to you any given Sunday, I would never be able to speak.

Because if God demands perfection, I am far from it... and I always will be.

And you are too!

Sometimes I, and perhaps you, get caught up in the trap of thinking that if we try just a little bit harder, if we look just a little bit nicer, if we smell a little bit better, God will at least see me as

someone who is at least making an effort, trying to partner with him... and he will have to love me, or accept me at least a little bit.

But notice what Paul says in Romans 3... **“for all have sinned, all fall short of the glory of God” Romans 3:23...** And if I think that I can at least contribute something, hear Paul’s words about our internal battles... **“Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me” Romans 7:21.**

Do you follow? The fact is I am not enough, and I never will be. And neither are you! And that can so easily lead us into a downward spiritual spiral.

Which leads me to the word that I want to share with you today, about what it means to be a follower of Jesus... And that is the word **Redeemed!**

Redeemed. Not saved. Redeemed.

What do you think of when you hear the word Redeemed, or the word Redemption?

In the sporting world, someone might redeem themselves, by doing something phenomenal and turn the game back around into their teams favour. The onus is on them. On what they have done...

In the financial world, one might redeem a security – in other words, get back what we put in. But that still becomes a once off finite transaction. Once the security is redeemed, I can easily lose it.

Generally speaking, when we talk about redemption, we talk about doing something that restores a situation back to the way it was. Sort of like pressing the reset button on a computer.

And I want you to know, that resetting the button on a computer, or redeeming your financial security, or winning a game of football, is still such a short term, lifeless reality.

In the spiritual world, and in real life, things can’t be so easily redeemed. When we do something wrong, when something bad happens to us, as story people, (we are people who make sense of our world through story) when we remember those moments of our brokenness and failures, they can powerfully shape our lives. Sometimes those memories haunt us. Sometimes they shame us. Sometimes they hold us back and stop us from living life and living it to the full. Sometimes they cause us to feel so unworthy that we think we can’t go on.

Today I want you to understand, that the heart of the Christian message, the heart of the Gospel, is not about morality or perfection or sanctification (that is, making us holy), or even about being saved (and I know that that sounds controversial, so please hear me out). The heart of the Gospel message is about redemption. It is about redeeming the fraud within. It is about taking our brokenness, the things that bring shame, grief, despair... and transforming them into something beautiful.

And note this.

To transform doesn’t mean to deny.

To be a redeemed follower of Jesus does not mean that I ignore what has happened in my past.

To be a redeemed follower of Jesus does not mean that I will never have struggles in the present.

To be a redeemed follower of Jesus is to allow the reality of God's redemption of my past, transform my present and help me see my future.

When the woman caught in adultery was dragged before Jesus to be stoned, Jesus simply said to her accusers, "whoever is without sin, throw the first stone" – and one by one they dropped their stones and walked away. And Jesus looked at that woman and said to her, **"Where are your accusers? Didn't even one of them condemn you?" "No, Lord," she said. And Jesus said, "Neither do I. Go and sin no more."** (John 8:10-11, NLT)

What Jesus does here, is redeem her situation. Jesus is the action. She is simply the receiver of his redemption. He takes what is broken and transforms it into something beautiful.

When Jesus redeems us, he creates **Kintsugi Christians**. I know that is not a real term, but bear with me.

The Japanese art of Kintsugi is the art of repairing broken pottery with lacquer, dusted or mixed with gold. And when repaired, it doesn't deny the flaws, the breaks, the hurts. It illuminates them. It beautifies them. It redeems them. They become something special and priceless to be shared.

And this is the point. God does not want us to ignore our brokenness. God does not want us to pretend that everything is perfect. But he what he does want to do, is take our brokenness and our shame, and transform us through it. And I am going to be talking more about that next week, when I share the theme Living Redeemed!

ut for now, know this. It is when I know from what I am redeemed that I am able to show great love for others. That is why tradition suggests that the woman who anointed Jesus' feet with oil in Luke 7, is the same woman who was caught in adultery.

"Then he turned to the woman and said to Simon, "Look at this woman kneeling here. When I entered your home, you didn't offer me water to wash the dust from my feet, but she has washed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You didn't greet me with a kiss, but from the time I first came in, she has not stopped kissing my feet. You neglected the courtesy of olive oil to anoint my head, but she has anointed my feet with rare perfume.

"I tell you, her sins—and they are many—have been forgiven, so she has shown me much love. But a person who is forgiven little shows only little love." Then Jesus said to the woman, "Your sins are forgiven." (Luke 7:44-48, NLT)

God redeems us through Jesus. And he redeems our situation. There is not one thing that you have done that he cannot redeem. That doesn't necessarily diminish the pain and the shame. Not straight away. But redemption is the process of transforming the pain and the shame. It takes what was and transforms it into something that can be good, so that we can live redemptively.

So in conclusion, know this...

Redemption is ours, not because we deserve it, not because we have earned it. Redemption is ours only because of what Jesus has done on the cross.

But most importantly, the work of redemption is God's action of taking something that is evil or bad or disheartening or shaming and transforms it by grace and the Gospel.

To be redeemed by Jesus is to know that my baptism is God's promise to me, that I am now one with Jesus – and that cannot be taken away.

And to be redeemed is to know that when I receive that amazing gift of grace, called Holy Communion, of Jesus' body and blood, in with and under the form of the bread and the wine, when I do that, God's redemptive love washes over me. It unburdens me. It takes away my need to hide my sin. It enables me to be honest with myself... be real to myself and be real with God... and it begins the work of transforming me to live in honest freedom!