

On the Cross: Redemption

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[0 : 00] What do you see when you look at the cross?! I was handed a book of poems a few weeks ago by a church member here, a beautiful book of poems.

And as I opened it there on the very first page of the very first line of the very first poem, it asked that question, what do you see when you look at the cross?

We're going to spend these next four Sunday mornings looking at the cross. Four Sunday mornings just thinking about, looking at, reminding ourselves often, and deepening our understanding of what Christ did on the cross.

So, as Mark 15 was read for us earlier, and the crucified Christ was portrayed before you, what did you see? What did you see?

Or if I can put it another way, what does the Bible tell us to see? What does the Bible explain to us is happening there as Jesus hung on the cross at Calvary?

[1 : 21] What is the meaning of his death? Why is it we sing so much as Christians about the cross? Why is it we speak so much about Jesus dying?

Think about it. Most songs that we listen to today on the radio or on Spotify charts or whatever it is, they focus on life, not death. But as Christians, we sing about death, especially about Christ's death.

Most books, most biographies about people focus on their life with maybe just a paragraph or a page or two about their death. But no, pick up the four Gospels, and we see the writers anticipating Jesus' death and spending so much time speaking about his death.

What happened there on the cross? Well, in order to look at that, to answer that over these next four weeks, we're going to try just to give kind of one word each Sunday morning, or one phrase which tries to capture the work of Christ on the cross to help us grow and deepen our understanding, and above all, our love and worship of Christ and all he did.

Now, over these next four Sundays, we can't say and won't be able to say everything there is to say about Christ's work on the cross, but we pray that God, by his Spirit, will help us to grow in our understanding of what the Lord Jesus did.

[2 : 46] And so this morning, from Galatians 3, we're going to see that on the cross, Galatians 3, verse 13, Christ redeemed us. He redeemed us. On the cross, Christ won our redemption.

And so before looking at that, we need to just ask, well, what does redemption mean? Well, to redeem something is a marketplace term, isn't it? We still kind of use it today.

You might get a voucher for a meal or for a restaurant or for a coffee or something like that, and it says redeemable for up to a year or redeemable for up to a certain amount, 50 pounds, whatever it is.

Take this voucher, and in return you get something, you redeem something. In Paul's world, in Galatia, it was usually and most commonly used of slaves.

You could gain freedom for a slave in exchange for payment. You would pay a price, and the slave was no longer held. They were free. They were redeemed. And so we're going to think about Christ's work of redemption here in three parts.

[3 : 53] What we're redeemed from, how it is that Christ redeemed us, and what it is we gain from our redemption, what we're redeemed for. And so firstly then, what are we redeemed from?

What happened on the cross as we look at Christ on the cross? Firstly then, Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law. Verse 13 there, Paul writes, Now, of course, that raises a question.

How is it we came to be under the curse of the law in the first place, right? Because we might rightly ask, well, isn't the law good?

Isn't God's law, God's word that he gave to his people, good? Well, yes, you're right. The law that God gave to his people is good.

It's good. It's holy. It's perfect. Because it reflects God's character. Laws reflect the lawgiver. Laws made by a government over a nation will reflect what that government believes to be right and wrong.

[5 : 03] What it wants people to do. Laws made at home by parents, by mom and dad, are going to reflect what's important to them. Maybe it's, say, laws or a rule laid down.

You must make your bed every morning. But maybe in some households it's less concern about that, but it's you must eat your vegetables. But whatever the rules of the household are, they're going to reflect something of the parents' values, of their character, of what they want.

Well, when God gave his law to his people in Sinai and Exodus, there in Exodus 20, God gave a good, perfect, holy law. And so the problem is not with the law.

God's law is perfect. So if the problem isn't with the law, how then is it that the law becomes a curse to us?

Answer? Answer? Well, because it is demanded for the whole law to be kept perfectly. And we cannot do it. Look down with me at verse 10.

[6 : 09] What does Paul say there? He says, Do you see that little, small word there?

Three letters. Oh, so simple. Oh, so short. But oh, so carry so much. We are to abide and live by all things. All things. And do it. And so to break one part of God's law puts us under the curse of the whole law.

We were at an athletics event yesterday at the Sports Village. And as we were looking at the athletics event, and as we were thinking about the rules and everything that would happen in the race, what do you need to clock a time at the end?

And for your name to go up on the score with a time and not to have disqualified, what do you need? You need to keep all the rules perfectly. No false start. No toe in the lane of the person next to you if it's a running race.

No tripping into someone else and putting them out of the race. Making sure you get over the line fully at the end. Right? All of these things, all of these things need to be lined up. Or you're disqualified.

[7 : 27] Break one of them. False start over the line, not crossing the line. And you forfeit the whole law. You forfeit the whole thing, disqualified. Cursed be everyone who does not abide all things written in the book of the law and do them.

And so the Bible is very clear, isn't it? All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. We are all under the curse of the law. Now, if you're not convinced here this morning, you're a lawbreaker.

Well, there may be some diagnosis type questions. We can ask ourselves diagnostic questions. Have we ever lied? Have any of us ever withheld a bit of the truth about a situation just to paint someone else in a different light?

Have we ever loved someone anything more than God? Have we ever dishonored our parents? Have we ever dishonored our bosses at work?

Have you ever been angry with someone when you had no right to be? Have you ever been unloving or unkind to your brother or sister or your neighbor or your friend at school or a colleague at work?

[8 : 38] Have you always treated others how you want to be treated? Have you ever been proud? Well, I think we've done all of those things. Have we not lied? Been prideful, been unkind to all those around us?

And above all, none of us have loved the Lord our God with all our heart, all our soul, all our minds, and all our strength. G.K. Chesterton, one writer from the 20th century, says that the doctrine of sin is perhaps the easiest to prove, right?

And that's true. It is the easiest thing to prove all around us. And in our own lives, we see a broken world full of sin. The world, and above all, most importantly, the Bible, is very clear.

We are sinners, and we are worse than we think. And so that's how the law has been a curse for us. We cannot keep all of it. We cannot keep all of it.

Now, if you're here this morning and you're not yet a Christian, you may think, wow, Sunday morning, this sounds pretty heavy stuff. And it is. There's bad news, and there's more to come.

[9 : 45] But keep on with me here, for there is such glorious good news. And I hope if you're here this morning and you're not yet a Christian, you're starting to ask yourself the question, well, if the Bible says we've sinned, we've wronged God, there's a curse of the law upon us, how then do we get right with God?

Right? That's the question that I hope is coming to our minds. How is it that if there's a law that we can't keep all of it, that we will get on the right side of God, the lawgiver, and be back under the blessing of the law?

Well, that's the question being debated in part here in Galatia in this letter. And there are some saying we can get back on the right side of God by works of the law.

It is by more law-keeping, rule-keeping that we'll get kind of on the right side of the law and not be under its curse. But Paul's argument in this book, this letter of Galatians, is that that doesn't work. It doesn't work. And I think we all know that to be true. Think about it. If I'm driving home from church this morning and I get pulled over to the side of the road by a police officer and he says, Sorry, you were doing a 40 and a 30.

[10 : 59] Can I say to that police officer, but hang on a minute, I've never killed anyone, so surely that's okay. Or if somebody robs a bank, can they get off because, well, they never extorted someone at gunpoint at some other time.

Or if I stole a car, can I say, well, actually, it's okay because I promised to pay my taxes in the future. Right? No, no.

Those are silly things. Of course not, right? Past, present, or future law-keeping isn't going to get rid of the charge. You were caught speeding, robbing a bank, whatever it is.

You broke the law. You are under the curse and weight and punishment of that law. And so it is with us and God. No amount of law-keeping will make us right with God.

That's what causes Paul in verse 1 of our passage to say, Oh, foolish Galatians, what a start it was. He admonishes them for abandoning the gospel and turning to one that says we're justified by works of the law.

[12 : 00] That is by Jewish law-keeping. He says emphatically in Galatians 2.16, That does not work. No one will be justified, will be put right with God by works of the law.

To rely on law-keeping for your religious life and being right with God is to be under a curse. And that's not just true then in Galatia, but it's true now.

So, dear friends, if we're here this morning and we think just because we kept the Sabbath as a child, it will make us right with God.

It doesn't. Saying I came from the right religious family or heritage, that doesn't make us right with God either.

Saying I've always been a member of a certain denomination. That doesn't make us right with God either. Just being here in church this morning doesn't make us right with God either.

[12 : 59] Religious law-keeping. Is that the thing? No. Think of that voucher right there at the start and you want to take it to redeem it. If we want to use a voucher that says works of the law and give it to God that we can be redeemed, freed from the curse, God will say no.

No. And he'll give it right back. We are still under a curse. And so we need to pause and ask ourselves, all of us this morning, am I relying on religious law-keeping to make me right with God? Is that my hope? Oh, but I did. Oh, but look what I achieved. Oh, look what family I belong to. Is that your hope? If it is, then Paul says that is no hope at all.

We're under the curse of the law. We cannot keep all of it. Now, we may not like this morning all this talk of curses. You might say, Ben, for Sunday morning, you've used to talk of curses more than we've heard in a while.

A curse, really? Really? We've broken God's law and we're under a curse. Well, yes, really. 313 is clear. We're under a curse. But instinctively, I also think we know that that's right when we've broken a law.

[14 : 11] What kind of parent doesn't have standards and rules at home that says, Do you know what? If you do this, there are consequences. Steal from your brother or sister and it's the step over here or it's up to your room for a timeout.

What kind of employer or what kind of state doesn't have consequences when laws are broken where somebody might hurt or endanger someone else? Right? A really poor one.

No, we need laws. We need there to be consequences for law-breaking. We know we want there to be justice. But we just don't really want it to apply to us.

But the Bible is clear. It does. We are all lawbreakers under the curse of the law. Before God and left to ourselves, to our religious law-keeping, if we rely on works of the law, we stand condemned. But there is good news. There is great news. There is glorious news. What is God's answer? It is there. On the cross, Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law we were under by becoming a curse.

[15:17] By becoming a curse for us. Verse 13. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. As it is written, cursed is everyone who hanged on a tree.

Our sin is so great. The curse over us, one we cannot rescue ourselves from. The only way of redemption is Christ himself becoming a curse for us upon the cross.

For cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree. And right here we get to the heart of Christianity. The heart of the gospel.

The scandal of the cross. The scandal of the cross is that on the cross, the perfect, sinless, spotless Lamb of God. The one we read of earlier who was made truly human except without sin.

The Lord Jesus Christ became a curse. That we might go free from the curse. That is what's happening on the cross to win our redemption.

[16:23] Christ became a curse for us. There were so many passages in Scripture this morning I wanted to read. We could have just spent the morning glorying in what Christ did for us.

Isaiah 53. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. Yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions.

He was bruised for our iniquities. Upon him was the chastisement that made us whole. By his stripes, by his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray.

We have turned everyone to his own way. And the Lord on the cross laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Think of that God forsakenness we sung of in Psalm 22. Christ under the curse of God's wrath on the cross. My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? That we might go free.

[17:26] And never have to say those words ourselves. So what does it mean to be under the curse of God? For Christ to be under the curse of God on the cross. Here's how Kevin DeYoung illustrates it.

A pastor from America. This is how he illustrates it. He says, at the end of a worship service, I normally stand and raise my hands and I give a benediction, a good word.

It's a blessing on the people. The most common one is the priestly blessing from number six. Here's how it goes. The Lord bless you and keep you. The Lord make his face shine upon you and be gracious to you.

The Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace. That is the description of blessing in the Old Testament. To be cursed is to have just the opposite of this benediction.

The Lord curse you and forsake you. The Lord make his face to frown upon you and be angry with you. The Lord turn his back upon you and give you his wrath.

[18:25] That is our God. That is Christ on the cross. Suffering the wrath of God in becoming a curse that we might go free from the curse of the law.

So dear friends, this morning, we are to remember and know and see that there is no Christianity without Jesus becoming a curse on the cross. There is no redemption without Jesus becoming sin on the cross.

There is no freedom from the curse of the law without Jesus becoming a curse on the cross. So friends, let me ask you that very first question from that poem. What do you see?

What do you see when you look at the cross? If you do not see Christ hanging there becoming a curse for us, then you are not seeing what the Bible tells us to see.

On the cross, God made him who knew no sin to be sin that we might become the righteousness of God. Paul writes that elsewhere in 2 Corinthians.

[19:24] And perhaps we would think if that wasn't in the Bible, we might struggle to believe it, to say it. But there it is. Jesus was made to be sin, to be a curse, that the wrath of God was spent, that we might go free.

Now, dear friends, know that Jesus was no victim. God the Father, no bully. God is not pouring out cheap frustrations on Jesus. No, Jesus freely lays down his life for his people.

No, this is the plan from all eternity among the triune God, sealed in the covenant of redemption, that the Father would send the Son to die on the cross, to become a curse, to save a sinful people because of the everlasting love with which he loved us.

Again, Kevin DeYoung says this, everyone knows the cross is about the love of God, but it is no cheap, sentimental, look at how special we are kind of love.

It is a costly, deep, rich, free, wrath-sustaining, burden-bearing, grace-saturated, in my place condemned, he stood kind of love.

[20 : 38] What do you see when you look at the cross? The love of God, of he who was spotless, sinless, pure, the eternal Son of God, becoming a curse that we might go free.

And so, friends, how do we lay hold of it? How do we lay hold of what Christ has done? We know we cannot do it by works. We cannot do it by works of the law. So how do we lay hold of this redemption?

It is only by faith. That's Paul's argument, really, right through this part of the letter, but we see it there in verse 11. No one is justified before God by the law.

Why? Why? The righteous shall live by faith. By faith. Like Abraham, our great forefather, we are to live by faith.

It is only by faith which unites us to Christ can he stand in our place and become a curse for us. So what do you see when you look at the cross?

[21 : 39] By faith do you look at and see your Savior, the one who became a curse that you might go free. If you do, both this day and evermore, praise God that he would love you so much to send his only begotten Son to live and die that he might redeem us from the curse of the law.

And do you know that it is that great redemption that we are going to sing about today, but also for all eternity? We see that in Revelation 5, don't we?

That great picture of heaven, angels and cherubim, 10,000 times 10,000, and all the elders and all the living creatures singing what? Praise and worthy is the Lamb who was slain.

This is our anthem and our song for all eternity. Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive glory and honor, power. But if you're here this morning and you don't know the Lord Jesus, come to him, trust him.

It's the only way to be free from the curse of the law. The poem that I quoted at the start from our church member who wrote it also goes on to say this.

[23 : 01] Upon looking at the cross, it says, my friend, if you see nothing, nothing at all, I'm praying for you to answer his call.

And so if you're here this morning and don't know the Lord Jesus and you look at the cross and you think, well, maybe it's just a sad ending to a man's life who died a little too soon, maybe it's just kind of a tragedy. If you look and see, I see nothing, then lay hold of Christ.

Come to him. Don't trust your works. Don't trust your law keeping. Don't trust your good intentions. Don't trust your religious heritage. Today, come to the one who hung on the tree, for it is only through him that we can receive a right standing before God.

And that brings us to our last point. On the cross, Christ redeemed us from the curse by becoming a curse, that great exchange. Lastly, that we might receive a right standing with God.

Verse 14, Paul writes, so that in Christ Jesus, in him, the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles so that we might receive the promised spirit through faith.

[24 : 09] And so what is the blessing of Abraham? Abraham, it is a righteousness before God. And in Jesus, that righteousness, that blessing comes now to both Jew and Gentile.

It is here for everyone, for everyone. None too far gone, none too lost. No, the offer of salvation goes out to all, Jew and Gentile, everyone here.

And we have in him a right standing before God. Imagine some slave market in Galatia. A slave is redeemed from slavery. He's bought back, no longer bound to his old master, but now free.

But I want you to imagine now in Galatia somewhere, that former slave market now taken to the palace of the king. The palace of the king or the governor over the land.

A ring put on his finger. And he sat down at the finest table of wine and food and feasting and banqueting. And a new name is given to him and it is the name of the king.

[25 : 12] And now he learns that he is to be a son of the king. And all that the king has is his. And all that the king owns is his. Not just free from slavery, but now adopted son of the king.

All the blessings the king has are his blessings. That is what God has done for us in Christ Jesus. He has redeemed us.

He has become a curse that we might go free, that verse 14, we might get all the blessings of God. He's redeemed us and taken us into his courts, to his palace, and said, you now belong to my family.

I now name you Christian. The Lord Jesus says, I call you brother. And all the heavens and all the earth are going to be yours to inherit and to live in for all eternity when the Lord Jesus comes to make all things new.

Maybe it sounds too good to be true. Well, it's not. It is the good news of the gospel that the Lord Jesus has taken us up from the pit. He set our feet upon a rock.

[26 : 20] And it all has happened because he became a curse for us. It's the exchange of the cross. Christ became a curse that we might get the blessing of God, all by his grace.

So if you have trusted Jesus, you are right with God now. No condemnation now, I dread. Jesus and all in him is mine.

You have life in all its fullness and no one can take it from you. You will never be under the curse of the law again because you have taken hold of Christ by faith and he is your salvation.

And so let me leave all of us really just with one application from all this. And that is to rehearse the gospel to yourself every day.

Every day. look to the cross and to the empty tomb. We are so prone, are we not, to pride, to self-justification, to justification by law-keeping, to relying on works of the law, that that is our default.

[27 : 32] So dear friends, dear brothers and sisters, keep looking to the cross. Keep looking to the cross. Cling to the cross, to the Christ of the cross who became a curse that you might receive the righteousness of God and all the blessings of salvation.

Or let me put it another way in words that we're just about to sing each and every day. Behold the wondrous mystery, Christ the Lord upon the tree, in the stead of ruined sinners, hangs the Lamb in victory.

See the price of our redemption. See the Father's plan unfold, bringing many sons to glory, grace unmeasured, love untold.

Let's pray before we sing.