Restoration in Christ

Text: Ephesians 1:7-10

Rev. David Waldron

**Scriptures:** Hosea 3:1-3; Leviticus 16:6-10; Ephesians 1:1-10

**Songs Chosen:** [SttL] 145, 176, 103b, 200, 238, Grace (CityAlight)

Series: Ephesians (Sermon #4)

Occasion: Public professions of faith

Theme: As he pours forth praise to God, the Apostle Paul expands on the ways in which God’s adopted children have been blessed in His Beloved Son, identifying redemption and forgiveness in Christ and the revelation of the ‘mystery’ of salvation in which God has planned to restore all of Creation to full unity in Christ

Proposition: Praise God for His plan to bring everything together in Christ.

**Introduction**

“Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall, Humpty Dumpty had a great fall.
All the king’s horses and all the king’s men
Couldn’t put Humpty together again”.

I guess Humpty Dumpty remained broken in pieces. Have you ever had the experience of dropping a glass or bowl onto the hard surface of a kitchen floor and watching it shatter into pieces? Perhaps if there are only a handful of large fragments and the vessel is particularly valuable, we may attempt a repair with super-glue, but if there are a myriad of tiny shards (a ‘shard’ is a piece of broken ceramic, metal, glass or rock, typically having sharp edges) then we get out the dustpan and brush and consign the mess to the rubbish bin. Why? Because there is no realistic possibility of repairing what has been broken to its previous state of whole-ness.

When our first ancestors Adam and Eve rebelled against God, all of God’s good creation became fragmented, and so it is today. You know this is true because you have experienced it or seen it yourself in many different ways, for example: sickness, disease, starvation, depression, decay and death. Natural catastrophes: earthquakes, bush fires, floods and tornadoes. Violence, wars, conflicts, sexual abuse, exploitation and enslavement. Division, strife, separation, divorce, relational conflict and unhappy homes. This is the bad news – which is not really ‘news’ to any of us. We all know that this world is broken and that it has been so for a long time.

The good news, the ‘gospel’ is a true message of hope both for the present and the future. The gospel is the good news of God’s plan in which He purposed to unite all things together in Christ Jesus His Son. This is the Great Plan of God’s restoration of all things in Christ. He has purposed to put the tiny broken fragments of this fractured world back together again. Let’s hear the gospel now as we look at our text from Ephesians 1:7-10 under three headings:

1. The rich grace of redemption
2. The rich grace of forgiveness
3. The rich grace of being united
4. **The rich grace of redemption**

‘Redemption’ is a key word in the vocabulary of the Bible, one which is therefore frequently found on the lips of Christians as they sing and speak of the gospel. However, sometimes we can use words without being really clear about what they mean. So, let’s firstly carefully define ‘redemption’.

To redeem something or somebody is to buy it or them back in order to regain possession for example:

1. The debt represented by a mortgage is redeemed when the loan is fully paid off.
2. An item which has been traded at a pawnbroker (someone who offers secured loans to people with items of personal property used as collateral) can be redeemed with a cash payment.
3. A person who has been kidnapped, may be redeemed if a ransom payment is made to the captors in order to secure the prisoner’s release.

We have a graphic illustration of the redemption of a person in the Old Testament when the prophet Hosea is called by God to recover his unfaithful destitute wife from slavery. He writes: “*So I bought her for fifteen shekels of silver and a homer and a lethech of barley. And I said to her, "You must dwell as mine for many days. You shall not play the whore, or belong to another man; so will I also be to you*." (Hosea 3:2-3). Hosea’s wife did not deserve her freedom, her husband’s love, or the honour of being part of his household. She belonged in the ‘rubbish bin’ but Hosea rescued her. In this, God was revealing His glorious grace towards His unfaithful people Israel. They did not merit any favour from their God, yet He would remain faithful to His promise to set His love on a people of His choosing, setting them free and bringing them into His household.

Later in history, God’s rich grace of redemption would be seen clearly in the person, life and death of Christ, the Beloved Son of God, in whom believers are blessed. The word ‘redemption’ is used by the Apostle Paul in writing to the Ephesian believers in verse 7 of our text: “*In him we have redemption through his blood*”. The Greek word corresponding to ‘redemption’ means ‘to set free, to deliver, to release’. ‘Blood’ here is used as a metaphor for the death of Christ as a substitute in the place of others for whom He paid the required price to release them from the debt which they had/have built up through their rebellion against God.

This redemption, or ransoming with the precious blood of Christ is revealed in multiple places in Scripture (e.g. 1 Peter 1:18-19). It is the ‘blood of Jesus’ which ‘*cleanses us from sin*’ (1 John 1:7). In this church, we express the glorious grace of redemption when we say the words of the Heidelberg Catechism Lord’s Day1 together: “*I am not my own, but belong body and soul in life and in death to my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ. He has fully paid for all my sins with his precious blood and has set me free from the tyranny of the devil*”.

Today we witnessed two public professions of faith, both men confirmed that they: “humble themselves before God and repent of their sins” and that they “joyfully trust in and love Jesus Christ, the Son of God, as their Lord and Saviour” (profession of faith vow#2).

Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed all who turn in repentance and faith to Him with every spiritual blessing including the gift of redemption. Redemption puts a person ‘back together again’ in their relationship with God. This is the very essence of true life. They are no longer separated from Him, but instead become part of His family. God restores to them what was lost when the existence of their ancestors Adam and Eve was fragmented by their rebellion.

Friend, where to you stand today before God? Redeemed by the blood of Christ, or rejected by God because your still owe a debt to God because of your rebellion that only your death can pay (Rom 6:23)? To be redeemed by Christ is to be forgiven by God, which brings us to our 2nd point:

1. **The rich grace of forgiveness**

What does forgiveness mean? It’s a word which is commonly spoken, especially amongst Christians, but, like ‘redemption’ may not be so well understood. Paul wrote in verse 7 “*the forgiveness of our trespasses”.* ‘Trespasses” are sinful acts which break God’s law. The Greek word translated as ‘forgiveness’ literally means ‘an action which causes separation’. It conveys the idea of letting go, of sending away or putting apart.

We read of this ‘letting go’ in Leviticus with the goat chosen by lot “for Azazel” being sent away into the wilderness. Nobody is very sure what ‘Azazel’ means; suggestions include:

* A place of ‘cutting off’, perhaps in a deep valley where there was no possibility of the goat returning. The idea here would then be that the sins of the people, once removed, would never return.
* A place where the life of the goat was ‘cut off’ – perhaps by being pushed over a rocky precipice outside Jerusalem; again, the idea being that the sins once removed, would be gone forever.
* The name of a demon that lived in the wilderness. The idea here would be then that the sins of the people were being sent back to their evil ‘author’.

Much ‘ink has been spilt’ by scholars on the meaning of ‘for Azazel’ without bringing much clarity. However, what is very clear is that this goat was sent away symbolically carrying the sins of the people of Israel, whilst another goat was slaughtered as a sacrifice for the people’s sins. The symbolic transfer of the ‘transgressions’ of the people to both goats by Aaron laying his hands on their heads (Lev 16:21) graphically pictures the way in which God forgives sins in Christ.

The first goat who is slaughtered as a ‘sin offering’ points forward to the death of Christ on a cross at Calvary, when God “*made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God*” (2 Cor 5:21). The second goat points forward both the separation of Christ from His Heavenly Father at Calvary when He cried out “*My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?*" (Matt 27:46) and to the forgiveness of sin in Christ whereby, in the words of Psalm 103 (11-12) “*so great is the steadfast love {of God} toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us*”.

The glorious grace of God’s forgiveness of trespasses brings the redeemed, forgiven sinner into great favour with God, not based upon anything they have or do, say or think, but entirely upon the merit of Christ alone. The redeemed, forgiven sinner is a person who has been adopted into the family of God, represented here on this earth by the church. Today these brothers who have publicly professed their faith have both become members of this local church and they have vowed that they desire to use the gifts the Holy Spirit has given them to build up the body of Christ (profession of faith form vow#6).

One of these gifts is the ability to completely forgive others, as they have been forgiven by God in Christ. The Bible puts it this way in Col 3:13: Bear “*with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgive each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive*”. The church of the Lord Jesus Christ is to be characterized by the forgiveness extended and received by her members.

Some people ask: Is forgiveness easy? No. It is letting go of an injustice which someone has inflicted upon you. Once you’ve forgiven someone does the hurt go away? No, often not. There is a need to continue to consciously put away the memory of the hurt and this godly effort may be painful. However, as we practice extending glorious grace to others as we have received glorious grace from God in Christ, the process becomes less painful over time as we experience more and more grace and peace from the Lord.

The alternative is to harbour ‘*a root of bitterness*’ which ‘*springs up and causes trouble*’ (Heb 12:15) ultimately causing great distress to the person who refuses to forgive. I have sadly seen too many bitter people in churches who do not forgive others and whose resentments, bitterness and ongoing anger cause them and the body of Christ great harm. Distressingly, they do not experience the glorious grace of restoration in their lives, but instead they suffer the pain of continued fragmentation. These things ought not to be! Why? because this is contrary to God’s great purpose in Christ which is to bring restoration, healing and wholeness to His entire Creation. This brings us to our 3rd point.

**3. The rich grace of being united**

God hasn’t kept His Great Plan for putting this world ‘back together again’ a secret. He progressively revealed what He was going to do through the Old Testament with many ‘types and shadows’ pointing forward to the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ when God, in the person of His Son, took on flesh to become a human being whilst not ceasing to be God.

By means of what God reveals in Scripture for those who have ears to hear His Word, he provides ‘*all wisdom and insight making known to us the mystery of his will*’. Here in verse 9, Paul uses the word ‘mystery’; meaning something that was once hidden, but has now been revealed. If you want to know how God is restoring this world, then you need to know the ‘mystery’ of Bible.

The message of the Scriptures is that God is ‘gathering up’ this fragmented universe into a coherent whole under the headship/authority of Christ. Paul expresses God’s plan in this way in verse 10; “*to unite all things in him, things in heaven and things on earth”.* This plan will only be completed when God makes all things new and re-creates this earth as a perfect dwelling place for Himself and for all His redeemed children (Rev 21:1-5).

So where do we see evidence of this restoration today? Right here in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ! Paul will write in chapter two of the breaking down of the ‘dividing wall of hostility’ between Jews and Gentiles through the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross. Christ enables a new humanity to exist on this earth now. People like the two men who publicly professed their faith today; who the Bible describes as being ‘new creations in Christ’ (2 Cor 5:17).

Is the church then a perfect place? No, not yet! She is still a ‘work in progress’, a spotty, wrinkly, blemished bride (Eph 5:27) who Christ cleanses with ‘the washing of water with the word’ (Eph 5:26).

Being a part of God’s great restoration project is not a ‘walk in the park’. We work out our salvation in ‘fear and trembling’ (Phil 2:12). Following Jesus does require hard labour on our part, however this is not our work to be redeemed, or our effort to be forgiven – this is Christ’s work entirely. As Paul will write to the Ephesians in chapter 2 (8-10): *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them”.*

The two men who professed their faith publicly today acknowledged the hard work ahead of them when they vowed to ‘*forsake the world, put to death their old nature and to lead a godly life*’ (profession of faith vow#4). They also recognised their need to be shepherded, and guided along the way as they are progressively restored to become more and more like Christ. They vowed to ‘*honour the office bearers of the church and if they go astray to submit to their admonition and discipline*’ (profession of faith vow#5). Brothers, you are part of the Great Restoration project of God in which He is bringing everything together under the authority of Christ, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. He is in the process of ‘defragmenting’ you both. The Bible describes you as being ‘living stones’ being built up into a spiritual house (1 Peter 2:5).

Brothers and Sisters in the Lord, blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places (Eph 1:3). So, let me ask you as we close: Are you like the fictitious nursery rhyme character Humpty Dumpty who could not be put back together again? Or are you a redeemed, forgiven sinner who is united to God in Christ and part of the new creation which He is in the process of restoring? There are only two ways ahead for every man, woman and child: continued brokenness apart from God or wholeness in Christ. Which way do you want to go?

Jesus said, "*I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me*” (John 14:6). Come to Christ in repentance and faith and be restored in Him!

AMEN