

## **Aliens and Strangers-Part Five: "Redeemed Strangers"**

**1 Peter 1: 17-25**

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**Text: (NIV) 17 Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear. 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 forefathers, 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. 21 Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God. 22 Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart. 23 For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. 24 For, "All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, 25 but the word of the Lord stands forever." And this is the word that was preached to you.**

Peter wrote these words as a reminder to the church: **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 forefathers..."** Interesting as always. They were "redeemed" [Grk. lou-troo] but not by silver or gold. Redeemed from what? And why use the word "redeemed" which was basically a synonym for "ransom?" Ransomed from what? Why did a price have to be paid for me and for you? To whom was it paid?

Think of it....you might receive a coupon in the mail that can be redeemed for ten dollars against your purchase of clothing or groceries. You'd exchange the coupon for the item being purchased. The holder of the item would release it to you in exchange for the coupon. But who was holding us and why did we need redemption? Why did a ransom need to be paid for us? Let us pray.

Some years back, a brother in the Lord gave me an authentic Roman coin. Apparently, two thousand years ago it was quite valuable. It would buy

things. But what is its value today? I checked. I'll tell you...in a little while!

It's really quite amazing to see how busy the political world has become more than a year before the election. In fact, it seems like hundreds of articles and proposals and papers come out each week from the various candidates. Indeed, because of the internet and the World Wide Web, perhaps a million articles are written and circulated each year. But how many of them will be remembered centuries later? How many of them will change the world the way the Declaration of Independence did or the Magna Carta...or the written Word of God ... the Bible? Very, very few if any. But consider this...I'll tell you a story...a true story about a single document that changed the world!

Four hundred and ninety four years ago tomorrow, on October 31<sup>st</sup>. 1517 a young German monk did something so daring that the world was shocked. His name, of course, was Martin Luther. At the time, he was in his twenties. He had started a career in law but a frightening experience had led him to a monastery. After a few years in the Church of Rome, he became more and more convinced that it, the church, needed to be reformed. While he recognized Godly men within the church, he was deeply offended by doctrines that taught sinners could be saved...could be redeemed...by silver or gold.

Luther did something that morning that was absolutely unthinkable and stunning. In his day, to contradict the teaching of the church was a sure way to be excommunicated...from a church that said your eternal soul would be at risk if you were thrown out. Luther's actions were every bit as dangerous as that Pastor in Iran who has been sentenced to death for leaving Islam to become a Christian. On one level, Luther's actions were really quite amazing. Surely many others in the church had the same concerns but Professor Luther left his classroom to shout them to the world.

On Reformation Sunday, we remember the spark that lit the fuse that changed the world and that ultimately clarified the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Luther had written out his several pages in Latin the language of scholarship. As a university professor, his goal was begin a discussion and debate with other theologians about the teachings of Rome. His documents were called "The Ninety Five Theses." And they quickly asserted that the Pope could not forgive sins and that indulgences had no effect upon salvation. An indulgence was a promise of forgiveness based upon a price paid to the church!

An agent of the Pope named John Tetzel had come to Germany offering indulgences for sale. He taught the peasants that they could pay a fee and receive a certificate redeeming a loved one or even themselves from Hell or Purgatory...a promise taught by Rome but with no support in Scripture. Tetzel's famous line was "Each time a coin in the coffer rings, a soul from Purgatory springs!" Instead of preaching the true Gospel whereby sinners can be redeemed thru the sacrifice of Jesus Christ upon the Cross, Tetzel was selling salvation for coins and deceiving the poor folks who trusted the church.

Luther declared that indulgences have absolutely no power to save anyone from anything. Rome was livid! His opposition and his powerful arguments eventually brought about the "Augsburg Confession" stating the views of the Lutheran Church that developed. But it was Luther's discovery of the key to salvation that was always there...right in front of him...that drove him to enter the fray. It was his reading of the Apostle Paul that fully converted Luther and gave him the new birth in Christ. Paul wrote:

**Romans 1:17 (NIV) <sup>17</sup> For in the Gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: "The righteous will live by faith."**

The true Gospel says that the law cannot save us because we cannot perfectly keep it. The true Gospel says being "good" and sinning less than our neighbour cannot save us because we can never be good enough. The true Gospel says we had to be redeemed, ransomed ...purchased back by the Son of God in order for our eternal souls to be saved. And that purchase certainly could not be made with coins! But only with the blood of Christ. Luther was also blessed to follow Peter's teaching that we were not redeemed with perishable things such as silver and gold.

Let's look more closely in this fifth part of our series. Today, we consider this truth: that we are not only aliens and strangers here on Earth but we are "**Redeemed** Aliens and Strangers!"

Why would the price of our redemption from sin be the precious blood of Christ the sinless lamb? Why would the perfect Son of Man and Son of God have to be crucified and have the weight of his flock's sins spilled down upon him from Heaven? Simply stated...were we/are we so very sinful that nothing else would do to redeem us? When a soldier throws himself upon a live grenade and saves the other five guys in his squad...does he have to die to do it? Is the grenade that powerful? Is my sin so great and is your sin so immense that it would take the spotless lamb being put to death to pay for it?

I think that most people in the world have no idea how deeply they are corrupted by sin. We in the church should grasp this truth. And think with me please...is this why ... this lack of clarity about sin ... is this why the world disregards the offer of Christ .... because the world has no real sense of how bad sin is? Could this be why the Gospel seems to be nonsense to most people because they do not "get" why Jesus had to be crucified? And do you and I realize how totally and deeply we are stained right down into our souls with sin? Let's be truthful. We do not think that we are personally all that sinful!

Let's consider sin more carefully. There's an old joke among preachers that says if you don't have a sermon ready, you can always talk about sin. Or the guy who went home and told his wife "The Pastor spoke about sin today." She replies "Really? What did he say?" "He said he's against it!" But actually, for a group of people who have built an organization...the church...that is based on sin and redemption from sin...precious little is actually said about sin! Could it be that we undervalue the need for the Christ to bleed and be crucified because we undervalue the extent...of our sin?

A few years ago, we developed a slight leak in our kitchen ceiling right under the upstairs bathroom. Right under where the tub and shower are. So, we called our friend Jeff who can fix anything in a house and he came over and looked at it. We agreed that the leak was behind the wall of the shower and since the bathroom was thirty years old, it would be best to pull away the tile, fix the leak and update the tub and shower. Should have been a thousand dollar project. But, it became an eight thousand dollar project. Why? Because although the bathroom actually looked quite good, when the guys pulled away the tiles the entire wall was rotted! The flooring joists all the way across the room looked like they were about to fall thru from being soaked over the years. The whole bathroom was water-logged and rotted and mouldy and a wreck requiring the room to be virtually gutted from top to bottom! The decay was far, far worse than we ever imagined and a hundred times worse than it looked!

That is a picture of sin upon our souls. It is far worse than it looks! Behind the exterior walls of ourselves there is mould and rot in the form of vanity and ego and pride and unforgiveness! But Jesus does not need to pull down the old tiles and the walls. He can see right thru them!

When we become Christians, the Lord Jesus Christ absorbs our sins onto himself and frees us from their penalty. But most of us have no idea just how much sin was there and remains there. We are not called sinners

because we sin; we sin because we are sinners! Sin is falling short of God's requirements! It literally means "to miss the mark!" Sin is so very natural to us that we do not even recognize it much of the time. Even the most benign and righteous things we do are tainted by our sinfulness. We men can turn our heads and our thoughts lustfully to a woman without ever deciding to do so. It happens as naturally as squinting the eyes when a bright light comes on in the darkness. Our sisters in the Lord can fall into envy or evil before they know they are doing it. Sin and self-promotion and self-gratification are as natural and inevitable as getting sleepy. Sin is deeply ingrained into our natures. We probably never do anything from completely unselfish motives.

We saw last week that God said "Be Holy because I am holy." Then we noted that true Holiness is not at all natural for us. We were blessed to remind ourselves that the Holiness of Christ is credited to us when we come to him for salvation. We are like the debaucious man in "Pride and Prejudice" who owed so much money that he was about to be put in debtor's prison. Until Mr. Darcy paid his fines so he could marry. Only later did the family gain any idea of how great those fines were! If God were to show us how naturally we sin and completely instinctual sin is to us...we would be nauseated. If God were to show us how great was our sin that Jesus paid for, we would be speechless! Little wonder he insists that we forgive others as we've been forgiven. How quickly we justify our actions and rationalize our behaviors and excuse our selfishness! That is why it could only be paid for by Jesus!

Three words all beginning with the letter "P." Sin is actually **PROMISCUOUS** in our lives. And I do not use the word promiscuous referring to sexual indiscipline. That word really comes from the Latin and means "indiscriminate mixing" of activities. A promiscuous life in the area of sexuality would be a life constantly mixing into each day an insatiable hunger for passionate satisfaction. Giving into passionate drives at all costs. That is the sense in which sin is promiscuous...causing us to mix in whatever it takes to exalt ourselves and promote ourselves and love ourselves above all else. A way of life that is driven by sin reaching and grabbing whatever will satisfy...a life of lust after self-gratification...not only sexually but in every area. But the shed blood of Jesus Christ breaks us free from the **PROMISCUITY** of sin always driving us.

Sin is incalculably **POWERFUL** in our lives! It can come upon us at any time and we can fall into its grasp. That is why the Lord Jesus Christ taught his disciples to pray "Deliver us from evil and do not let us be led into temptation!" Over the years I've known a dozen men and women who were flying right and living in the fear of God and careful for their

souls...Christians...who fell into sin. Stealing, cheating, adultery, you name it. And again and again I've heard them say "I had no idea that I could fall so quickly if I was so tempted!" That opportunity or that woman or that man or that gain was suddenly available and the willingness to resist was so suddenly diminished! Like that automobile ad awhile back where the woman looks at the car and says "I must have it!" Because sin, the Bible says, is a pleasure for a season [Hebrews 11:25]! But the shed blood of Jesus Christ breaks us free from the **POWER** of sin.

Ultimately, sin is **PUNITIVE** in our lives! Sin not only promises us eternal separation from God but punishes us while we live here and now. Sowing and reaping in life are no more evident in any area than when we sin. Sin hurts us not God! The alcoholic ruins his health. The cheater ruins his reputation. The thief goes to jail. And ultimately sin, if left unaddressed will separate us from God forever. The Lord Jesus Christ said almost in a moment of exasperation to his critics one day:

**John 8:24 (NIV) "I told you that you would die in your sins; if you do not believe that I am [the one I claim to be], you will indeed die in your sins."**

Sin is punitive in our lives. The shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ delivers us from the **PUNITIVE** result of our sin. In short, if we ever wonder if Jesus the sinless Christ really had to be sacrificed for our sins we need to pause and remember that our sins come from our being sinners by nature and it is our sinful natures that need salvation. It's not just that Jesus paid for a few hundred sins in my lifetime; Jesus paid for my sin nature and the price was far higher than I ever imagined! Thus, Peter wrote:

**17 Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear. 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 forefathers, 19 but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.**

At this point, let's go back to Peter's key thought. He is speaking as if we all agree on the terrible sinfulness of sin itself. And he makes several tremendous points.

**FIRST: WE SHOULD LIVE AS STRANGERS HERE IN REVERENT FEAR!**

**17 Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear.**

This was actually a very practical statement. The ancient Jews knew that while they lived among foreigners or even in foreign lands, they had to be very careful not to take on their wicked ways. The strangers should be afraid of becoming a naturalized citizen in a world of sin! And count on it! We will pick up the behaviors of those around us!

Last week we spoke of holiness. If I spend my time with enough unholy people I will pick up their language and their values sooner or later. It is almost impossible not to be corrupted and ruined! But I was purchased by the blood of Christ and it would be wicked to defile my redeemed self by falling into terrible sin! I must live in "reverent fear!"

**SECOND: WE SHOULD LIVE AS THOSE WHO WERE REDEEMED FROM AN EMPTY WAY OF LIFE!**

**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 forefathers...**

I've always loved this verse although its precise application is a different from how Peter meant it. Peter is saying that the life you were given from unsaved parents was frankly worthless! It may have been a life trying to keep some set of laws or rules but it could not save you for eternity! It may have been a life teaching you to work hard and make a good living and that is nice but if you do not have eternal life...it was and is an empty life! Most people are living very empty ways of life! They were given empty and meaningless lives and Peter is reminding the Christians that they were redeemed from those empty lives!

Some years back, I was at an event with many, many millionaires present. It was a social gathering and I could sense absolutely no one else there besides Donna who loved the Lord. [There really may have been such people but they were not apparent to me.] But they were people who "had" everything. Watching them, I was not jealous. I was not angry. I was sad. Because this verse kept coming to mind:

**Mark 8:35-37 (NIV) <sup>35</sup> For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it.**

**<sup>36</sup> What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? <sup>37</sup> Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?**

A life without Christ...is an empty life indeed!

**THIRD AND FINALLY: WE SHOULD LIVE AS THOSE WHO HAVE BEEN BORN AGAIN...REDEEMED STRANGERS AND ALIENS ON PLANET EARTH!**

**23 For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable,**

Isn't that amazing! Jesus not only redeemed us and paid for our ransom but he gave us his Holy Spirit and we cannot perish! Let us be clear. Peter is saying not only have we been ransomed from sin but we've been ransomed from death and we will live forever! A person kidnapped who is set free by a ransom might be kidnapped again. But the Christian set free from the promiscuous and punitive and powerful onslaught of sin in his or her life is safe forever!

As I said earlier, some years back, a brother in the Lord gave me an authentic Roman coin. And yes, I learned from the internet that two millennia ago, it was quite valuable back then. Today, it is worthless but interesting as an artefact. Luther's point 494 years ago was that coinage cannot buy the redemption of a human soul because coinage will lose its value! Only the invaluable and eternal blood of Christ can purchase our redemption!

Let us pray.