

41-10-04-Ransom from Death

Lent, Cross, atonement, price, liberation, slavery, redemption

Mark 10:42-45

Christ's death purchased our rescue from the prison house of death.

INTRODUCTION: (Text read as the Scripture reading)

—[An **Internet search** for “*Slave Market paintings*” fills your computer screen with nudity. Artists from the 1800s often used nude models to paint cultural or historical situations where nakedness was a reality.] The ancient *slave market offers a realistic illustration* of the *ransom aspect* of Christ's work on the Cross.

Sin stripped us naked of spiritual life, but *Christ in compassion paid our redemption price* to make us His own. [**Mark 10:42-45**, Jesus called them together and said, “You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.”]

—[**This text** follows an incident where James and John express *ambition* to be given *prominent positions in Christ's kingdom*.] Christ answers them with His own example: “*The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*” (title) **HOM.idea**. This “ransom” idea was the focus in Gospel preaching for the first 1000 years of the church. So...

I. What Is this Ancient ‘Ransom Theory of the Atonement?’

- A. [Canadian writer, **Alma Barkman**, sums it up in a few lines: “*Hostages in the hands of an evil captor yearn for freedom. At the appointed hour, a loving father leaves the ransom: a bundle wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.*”] The *Advent* and *Lenten seasons* both use *purple*, for heart-preparation—*Christmas* and *Good Friday* are connected by the shadow of the Cross on the manger bed. *Jesus was born to die*.
- B. The early church fathers saw *Christ's death* as a ransom [**Grk**, *lutron*: “release”], buying the *release* of sinners from the *captivity* of death.
 1. As this idea matured in time, it depicted *Jesus paying sin's death penalty* as a *tactical maneuver* for invading Satan's dominion to conquer and spoil it—**Heb 2:14-15**, Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death.
 2. This explains why Jesus said in **Rev 1:18**, I am the Living One; I was

dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades. (The *ransom* theory was like a *Passover plot* where God legitimately invaded hell, grabbed Satan's deadly power, and busted open "the gates of hell" to liberate us from sin and death.)

TRANS: Did God *deceive* the deceiver? No! Satan deceived himself. He knew Jesus predicted His resurrection. But he thought that killing the Messiah would stop God's Kingdom and will from being "*done on earth as it is in heaven*." But Satan didn't see what God was up to by taking on *human nature*. Satan's *mistake* became our *victory* in Christ. [John of Damascus wrote, "*God the Word was made man for this reason, that the very nature which had sinned, fallen, and become corrupt should conquer the tyrant who had deceived it.*"] But this *theory of the atonement* begs a question...

II. Was the Ransom Paid as a Penalty or as a Redemption Price?

- A. A 1000 years later, the *Ransom Theory* was overshadowed by the *Judicial Theory*, which argues that, *since man sinned, then man must be punished to pay the price of satisfying God's justice*.
 1. Here's the logic: Sinners can't save themselves from sin's *death penalty* of sin, but God's innocent Son, who became man, can take our place, so that God's wrath falls on Jesus instead of us.
 2. This theory paints a harsh picture of God in some minds: "*If God is love, why is He so wrathful? Why doesn't he just forgive the sinner and forget the penalty? After all, that's what He tells us to do?*" (These questions are not unreasonable!)
- B. Both theories have biblical support, but I think the judicial penalty must find its significance within this idea ransom from death.
 1. God built creation to run on principles and values from His own character: #1-the light of truth and #2-the service of love. (Man, in God's image, was to govern creation by those same values.)
 2. By leaving truth for the *darkness of self-serving*, we led creation into chaos and ourselves into the prison house of death. (The *darkness of self-seeking and self-serving* is Satan's territory. By *trespassing* on it, we became both his *victims* and his *slaves*.)
 3. God wants us alive—free from sin's built-in death penalty—but that *spiritual life* is out-of-reach, without the penalty removed. So God cancelled sin's death penalty by legitimately paying it, thereby invading death's prison house to liberate its captives: *us!*

TRANS: Christ's death purchased our rescue from the prison house of death. [In the 1700s, Anne Steele wrote a hymn: "*Enslaved by Sin and Bound in Chains*": Enslaved by sin and bound in chains, / Beneath its dreadful tyrant sway, / And doomed to everlasting pains, / We wretched, guilty captives lay. // Nor gold nor gems could buy our peace, / Nor all the world's collected store / Suffice to purchase our release; / A thousand worlds were all too poor. // Jesus, the Lord, the mighty God, / An all sufficient ransom paid. / O matchless price! His precious blood / For vile, rebellious traitors shed.] Jesus gave his life as a ransom both to pay sin's debt of death and to release us from death's power. But was His *ransom* just for the afterlife, for our resurrection, for our heavenly bliss?

III. What Does This Ransom Do For Us Today?

- A. God told Adam and Eve not to eat the forbidden fruit, because it would *kill* them—not just later physically, but at once spiritually—Eph 2:1. As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins (When God tells us what to do or what not to do, He is showing us how to stay alive spiritually. To *obey* is *life*; to *disobey* is *death*.)
- B. *Spiritual death* is a life of captivity where the master of sin, Satan, holds us captive, like *naked slaves* in the marketplace, *poor* and *spiritually stripped*—owning *nothing* to buy our own *freedom*.
- C. But Christ *ransoms* us from sin's slavery, wraps us up in His own righteousness, and calls us to 'take up our cross and follow him' in the service of God—v.45, *The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many*. (We are no longer slaves to 'sin and death' or to 'the world, the flesh or the devil,' Paul say in 1 Cor 6:20, you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.)

CONCLUSION:

—**Christ's death ransomed us from the prison house of death**— 1 Pet 1:18-19 (ESV), knowing that you were ransomed from the futile ways inherited from your forefathers, not with perishable things such as silver or gold, but with the precious blood of Christ, like that of a lamb without blemish or spot. That's not just for the *afterlife*, but for *this present life!* We live out our freedom by following our Liberator and serving in His Kingdom.

—We'll explore other aspects of Christ's work on Cross, but as we move on from this one, I want to read the last stanza of my poem, "**CHRISTUS VICTOR**": Christ Triumphant! *Christus Victor!* / Captives freed by hell's disruption / Soar like eagles taking wing! / Ransomed by the Liberator, / Slaves to sin and death's corruption / Gain new life in Christ the King!