

CW6: Ransoms you - Romans 6.5-11

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Today my title is, "Christ who ransoms you." But what do I mean by this? In fact, what does Jesus mean when He says of Himself in Mark 10.45, "*The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve and to give His life as a ransom for many.*" The word "ransom" makes it sound as if we are being held against our will until someone coughs up enough money to buy our freedom. Surely that can't be the case, can it?

Maybe the alternative and more common translation of the word for ransom might help - redemption. If you are a Christian and used to Bible words, you may find yourself on more familiar ground here, knowing how Colossians 1.14-15 tells us God the Father has, "*rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and transferred us into the Kingdom of His dear Son, who redeemed us and forgave our sins.*"

The problem with the word "redeem" though is that these days redeeming tends to be about supermarket vouchers or fixing situations. But to Jews like Paul the author of Romans and Colossians, or Mark, this word meant far more. It meant liberation from enemies, release from slavery and freedom under God's care.

Before the coming of Christ, Jews looked back to the great story of their history - the Exodus from Egypt - as the moment God ransomed or redeemed them. It was a place of slavery, of unjust demands and cruel beatings, where their baby boys were even thrown into the Nile. So God promised in Exodus 6.6: "*I will redeem you with a powerful arm and great acts of judgement*" - like the plagues, the Red Sea parting.

God reveals His purpose in the very next verse: "*I will claim you as my own people and I will be your God.*" They were to go from serving Pharaoh unjustly in Egypt to serving God justly in freedom. This was His reward for ransoming or "redeeming" them. He did not do it with money but by powerfully intervening in history, in order to give them hope and a future. He did it to bring them under His reign of loving care.

Today then as we look at Romans, we are going to see that in Christ God has done the same for us. He intervened powerfully in history to give you a hope and a future, and bring you under His loving care. If you are not a Christian today, this freedom is ready and waiting you. But if you are, the responsibility to live in that freedom is also yours. So let's look a little more closely now at Romans 6.

Slavery?

In v6 Paul says that through Christ we are “*no longer slaves to sin,*” which implies that without Christ we are. He goes on in v14, shortly after our reading, to declare that, “*Sin is no longer your master,*” if you are a Christian. The word He uses for “master” is basically the same as the one for “Lord” in “Lord Jesus Christ”. Christians have Jesus as Lord; everyone else has sin.

It is not far different from what we looked at a couple of weeks ago, where we read at the very end of Ch5 of how “*sin ruled over all people and brought them to death*”. So again, it is not surprising that in v9 Paul talks about death no longer “having power” or “being master/lord”, because again the same is true for us without Jesus. Sin and death are the order of the day. They’re our masters; we’re slaves to their ways.

A little like it was then for Paul’s Jewish ancestors, the Hebrews, in Egypt, sin is like Pharaoh ruling over us, making us do what we don’t want to do, drowning our hopes and keeping us from God. You may not have even considered that sin is holding you against your will, until you get to realising you can’t escape your past or break some habit that keeps ruining your life. You need a redeemer strong enough to free you.

But sin is bigger than that. It’s not just about wrong things you and I do. It’s about belonging to a world where sin reigns. You suffer it as much as you commit it, just like the people in Egypt suffered the brutality of Pharaoh’s regime. And so God, just as before, did not sit idly by. Regime change was the order of the day - with boots on the ground, prepared to engage the enemy on his own turf. God became human.

Christ Jesus entered the world to identify with you and me. He didn’t just try a little taster of human life, but lived it all from start to finish - birth to death. And here is the extraordinary implication when Paul says in v9, “*Death no longer has any power over him*”: that Jesus chose to submit to the regime of sin and death. He lived the perfect sinless life we never could, but humbled Himself even to horrific death on the cross.

The fact that when it comes to death you will follow suit, just like everyone else, is the sign that sin reigns in your life and in this world - whether you accept it or not. You are a slave under a brutal regime. Yet the fact that in Christ God entered our world and *died* is the sign that He cares about your life and He cares about your death. He knows what it will feel like. But He also knows that He can free you from its power.

Freedom?

Jesus once said, if you want to rob a strong man, you'll need to tie him up before you can walk off with his possessions. If you were a slave in the ancient world, you were counted as a possession. If you were lucky enough you might save enough money to buy yourself out of slavery. But what kind of master would let all his slaves go even if they could pay?

Pharaoh didn't want his army of slave labour to up and leave. For Moses to lead the people out of Egypt, Pharaoh the strong needed to be overcome though no fewer than 11 plagues (national disasters) and the death of his own son. The irony is, it took the death of God's Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, to break the power of sin and death. He beat these despotic slave-driving dictators of ours at their own game.

V10 puts it like this (RD). And v9 like this (RD). Many people witnessed Jesus' death. But how do we know what Paul says is right? Because (v9) Christ was raised from the dead. The cross is vitally important, but it is only one side of the coin. Without the resurrection, without Jesus being alive never to die again, we are still in slavery to sin. But if he is alive, everything has changed. Paul's whole argument is built on this.

Did you see that news story a week or so ago about how some Turkish fishermen had pulled the body of a refugee toddler from the sea, and were shocked to discover he was still alive? Isn't God good? Here is this little boy, not much different from our Finlay, on the point of death being brought back to life. But let's get one thing clear when it comes to Jesus: He wasn't brought back to life; He was raised from death.

Christ really died. He had to. There is no hope for us unless He fully experienced exactly what we all will do. But He was not revived back to His old life, like Lazarus in John 11 or the young girl in Mark 5. The life He was raised into is the eternal everlasting life which He also promises to us. So when Christ died, he died to sin and death and their power over Him - once and for all. He is untouchable; alive, yes - but not like us.

Yet the extraordinary invitation to us in this passage is to become like Christ [READ v5]. More literally it talks of "*the likeness of His death and resurrection*", because this is how sin loses its power and control over our lives (v6 - "*We are no longer slaves to sin*"). If you are a Christian, if you have put your faith in the cross and resurrection of Christ, then Paul says quite categorically that you have [READ v7]. Brilliant, huh?

Institutionalised?

But you might say, “Sure, if you say so. But I’m still going to sin. I’m still going to die. What’s the point?”

The point is, that all this is more than just words - or at least it should be. Let me show you something. We read in v8 [...]. Would you say that you know you will live with Christ? Then do you also know you have died with Him - because the two go hand-in-hand?!

This isn’t easy to get our heads around, but Paul tells the Christians in Rome he is writing to, [READ v11]. If you say you are a Christian, is this how you think of yourself? I know what it is like. I’m no different. If I can be so defeatist that I feel more dead to God and alive to sin than the other way around, would you be prepared to admit the same? Yet we should not think of ourselves this way, because it’s not how God does.

In the film *The Shawshank Redemption* the characters talk about becoming what they call “institutionalised” - the idea that after serving a life sentence in prison, you simply don’t know how to live on the outside any more. Shawshank’s prison bars are safe, normal, even comforting; out there it is all new, unknown, risky. An elderly former inmate even writes to his friends how he wants to commit a crime - just to get sent back.

Are you institutionalised when it comes to slavery to sin - too used to it either to conceive of what it might be like on the outside; too used to living with sin to believe that Christ has paid the price to set free you from its power? God declares that in Christ you are no longer a slave to sin, on account of your faith in His cross and resurrection. Choose today who or what is going to be your master from now on: sin or Christ.

That word “dead” in v11 is the word for a dead body, a corpse in Greek. I don’t know if you’ve noticed but they are pretty unresponsive. They haven’t joined in with the hymns at any of the funerals I’ve ever been to. I could have banged on the coffin, shouted pretty loud, but I don’t think it would make much difference. That is how dead to sin you are. You aren’t its slave anymore. You are free. Don’t go back to Shawshank.

So you are free to say not to sin, but you are also free to say yes to God. That phrase “alive to God” in v11 is put as “living for the glory of God” in v10. If you read on from v11, you’ll find being free isn’t just avoiding the wrong but actively pursuing the right - living in contrast to our old selves and slavery to sin. You give, not steal. You love, not hate. You build, not wreck. By doing so, you display your life and freedom in Christ.