

OUR REDEMPTION EPHESIANS 1:7-10

Let's read our text - verses 7-10 - then we'll study it line by line... "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth - in Him."

John Clouse was a defense attorney who lived in Evansville, Indiana, but Mr. Clouse got around. In fact, for a time his name appeared in the Guinness Book of World Records as "The World's Most Traveled Man."

I spoke to him one day on the telephone.

At the time he'd spent half-a-million dollars traveling to 308 of the Earth's 309 nations and territories.

Imagine, all the stamps in Mr. Clouse's passport. He once told a reporter that the friendliest people live in Scotland, and that Argentina has the best steaks.

When I spoke to John Clouse he was waiting for a war to subside so he could get permission to travel to a small island in the Indian Ocean called, "Diego Garcia."

Based on his determination, I assume he made it...

But there's one more location I hope John Clouse experienced. If he was a Christian he lived "in Christ."

If you're not "in Christ" - it doesn't matter where else you go - you've missed life's most vital destination.

Realize, as *a new creation in Christ* my life bumps up against another realm. Physically, I can travel the globe and see some amazing scenery - but spiritually, *in Christ*, I perceive God's *presence, power, and peace*.

"In Him" the awareness of God and His blessings are just as real - as heartfelt - as the fog in London, or the humidity in Atlanta, or the heat in Phoenix, or the rain in Seattle. "In Christ" is the land of grace and glory.

Globetrotters like John Clouse get around by car, or by bus, or by air - but we live "in Christ" by faith.

This is what the book of Ephesians is all about. It depicts the lay of the land for those who are "in Christ."

This phrase "in Christ" - or one of its derivatives - occurs 13 times in the first 14 verses of Chapter 1.

Notice the bookends of today's verses... Verse 7 starts "*In Him,*" while verse 10 ends "*In Him.*" And in between it's a travel itinerary. Ephesians lists *who we are* and *what we have* in Jesus! It helps us to see ourselves as God sees us - as blessed "in Christ."

We're told in 1:3, "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ..."

In Him we're rich spiritually. *In Him* we're somebody.

And it's not because of anything we've *done* or *can do*. It comes with the turf. It's ours *in Christ by faith*.

We begin this morning in verse 7, "In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins."

The ancient world was stalked by the guilt of sin.

The Greeks believed when a person sinned the goddess *Nemesis* hunted them down and delivered them to be punished. Today, whatever it is that we fear will bring us down, we speak of as "our nemesis."

In one of his plays, Shakespeare puts into the mouth of his character, these words, "My conscience hath a thousand tongues, and every tongue brings in a different tale, and every tale condemns me for a villain." All men sin - and even if they deny it publicly - deep down inside their conscience knows it's true.

Sin is our problem and punishment is our plight!

Even in our modern world where folks deny that sin exists, or excuse it away, or cover it up, or laugh it off...

When it gets real quiet - maybe late at night - and we can't help but listen to our conscience we know we're wrong. The honest person is still stalked by their sin.

A guilty conscience is a terrible nemesis. It eats at our tranquility. It nips at an otherwise comfortable life.

But how life changes when our sins are forgiven!

When we stop denying and start confessing, God forgives us of our sin. He literally "carries it all away."

And notice it's "*the forgiveness of sins*" - plural.

That means **all** our sin - evil committed in the past, rebellious attitudes I'm harboring right now, even future missteps and foibles. If you're "*in Him*" God goes ahead and forgives all your sin on behalf of Jesus.

In the OT a ritual took place on one of the holy days, the Day of Atonement. It illustrated the extent of God's forgiveness. The High Priest would lay his hands on a goat. It was called "*the scapegoat.*" It's where we get our modern expression "*for someone to blame.*"

The priest laid his hands on the scapegoat, and confessed his sins and the sins of the nation - and then he sent the goat off into wilderness to never return.

The rabbis said men were stationed along a line 13 miles long to make sure the goat passed from person to person until it finally reached the end of the line.

At that point, it was released to die in a sea of sand.

And once the goat was gone for good - word ricocheted back to camp, from person to person, all along that line. Now their sin was gone forever.

It had been forgiven and now it was forgotten.

Their sin had disappeared,- never to be heard from again. The people's load had been lifted. Their sorrow was replaced with joy - and their guilt with relief.

It reminds me of the migrant worker picking cotton. He was toting a huge bail of cotton over his shoulder.

One of his fellow workers asked him, *“How do you know you’ve been forgiven?”* Without turning around, the man just dropped the load from off his shoulder.

He asked, *“How do I know I’ve dropped the bail?”*

When a person is forgiven the load gets lighter, the guilt is gone, peace pervades were turmoil tormented.

There once was a company in Grand Rapids, Michigan that published a notice of the office bulletin board, *“To err is human. To forgive is company policy!”*

Well, God is in the business of forgiveness. For those who are in Christ forgiveness is company policy!

I love Psalm 103:12, *“As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us.”* God didn’t say, *“north to south”* - for that would limit His forgiveness - you can go north to a point and then you’re going south. But east to west is forever.

Micah 7:19 speaks to God, *“You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.”* One commentator said, *“Then God posted a “no fishing” sign just to be sure.”*

Here’s a soothing quote, *“God pardons like a mother, He kisses the offense into everlasting forgiveness.”*

And Paul tells us God is able to forgive us because He has **redeemed us through the blood of His Son.**

There were six million slaves in the Roman empire at the time of Paul. Most Romans treated their slaves like pieces of furniture to be swapped and sold. When a slave *wore out* he or she was usually *thrown out*.

But there were a few benevolent citizens who would buy slaves, to give them their freedom. The word Paul uses in verse 7, “*redemption*” means “to liberate by paying a ransom.” And this is what Jesus did for us!

He paid the price that was on your head - in order to set us free! He’s given us a new lease on life!

Mark 10:45 tells us, “For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many...” Remember what Jesus told the soldiers who came to arrest Him, John 18:8, “If you seek Me, let these go their way.” Even in that moment, Jesus was arrested so His followers would be set free!

One man wrote, “Jesus blew everything apart, and when I saw where the pieces landed I knew I was free.” “*In Him we have redemption*” - to be redeemed means more than forgiveness - it means freedom from sin, and guilt, and Law, and the pressure to stack up.

AJ Gordon was a famous pastor. One day he saw a little boy walking down the street with a cage of birds. He asked him where he’d gotten his feathered friends.

The boy answered, “I trapped them out in the field.” Gordon asked him what he planned to do with them.

The boy said rather nonchalant, “I’ll play with them, then kill them, and then give them to my cat to eat.”

Dr. Gordon asked the boy how much money would he take for his birds... "Mister, you don't want these birds. They're just field birds. They don't sing so good." Gordon asked the kid if he'd take \$2 for the lot.

The little boy was happy to take the \$2. He stuffed the money in his pocket and went away whistling.

AJ Gordon took the birds to his church, opened the cage, and set them all free. The next Sunday he stood in the pulpit, holding up the empty cage, and told the story, "That little boy said that the birds couldn't sing so well, but when I released them from that cage they went singing away in the blue, and it seems that they were singing, *"Redeemed, redeemed, redeemed!"*

I'll bet you we have a few field birds here this morning. You're trapped in a cage of despair. You're in bondage to sin. Satan has been playing with you - and when he's done, he'll feed you to the the alley cats.

Author Alexander MacClaren describes your plight, "Some of you are your own tyrants. The worse part of you has gotten the upper hand. Mutineers that ought to have been down under the hatches, and shackled, have taken possession of the deck and clapped the captain and his officers... They are driving the ship - that is, you - on to the rocks, as hard as they can."

This is why you need a swashbuckling Savior.

One who knows no fear, and dares to draw His sword on the Devil and his henchmen. A Savior who can liberate your vessel - from *pirates of perversion*, and *rebels of rage*, and *mutineers called pride*.

I've got just the Savior - *His name is Jesus!*

Paul says, He redeemed us *“through His blood.”*

God is omnipotent, or all-powerful. He said *“Let there be light...”* and the universe began to glow. He spun the stars into their orbits, and worked miracles by His hands. But He didn't redeem us through **His power**.

God is omniscience. He knows all secrets. He's all-knowing. But He didn't redeem us with **His wisdom**.

God is rich. He owns the cattle on a thousand hills. Gold is so plentiful in heaven, it's used as asphalt. But as wealthy as He is, God didn't redeem us with **riches**.

Rather than *His power*, or *His wisdom*, or *His riches* God used the one commodity more *powerful than power*, and *wiser than wisdom*, and *richer than riches*.

He redeemed us through the blood of Jesus!

There's a hymn we use to sing, *“Would you be free from the burden of sin? Would you o'er evil a victory win? There's wonder-working power in the blood.”*

The blood speaks of the sacrifice, and love, and humility, and empathy in the heart of our Lord Jesus.

God said *“the wages of sin is death.”* From the beginning, there was a price to pay. Thus the *spotless blood* of Jesus became redemption's *purchased price*.

In the RSV Hebrews 9:22 reads, *“Without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness of sins.”*

For years, Joe Kerkofsky was known as America's blood donor champion. The American Association of Blood Banks honored the 62 year-old at a ceremony.

Kerkofsky had lost an arm when he was six. He was rejected three times for military service in World War II.

But Joe found a way to make a contribution. Since then he's donated 31 gallons of his own blood. The human body holds 10-12 pints. Thus, Joe has donated more than 20 times the amount of his own blood.

Joe comments, "Giving blood makes you feel like you're contributing life itself. There's no more precious a gift than life. Money can't buy the joy of giving blood to help someone who needs it." This expresses Jesus' motivation. In shedding His blood He gave us His life.

Most of us have experienced some form of rejection. We were abandoned by a parent - or left by a spouse - or betrayed by a friend - or even ignored by a child.

We've been made to feel as if we're of little value.

I've mentioned this before, but today's fatherless generation is particularly prone to feelings of rejection.

They try to escape or cover up their hurt with drugs, or sex, or cutting, or alcohol, or even suicide.

One young woman remembers the day her dad walked out of her life. He left her mom for a younger woman. She says, "I was alone, scared, confused... I hated everyone... I lost trust in everyone... I haven't heard from my dad in over four years. I used to sit next to the phone for a call; now I've lost all hope." Lots of young women today are still waiting on a call from dad.

We all long to know we're of value. We're loved.

Take a class in basic Economics, and you'll learn **the law of supply and demand**. The principle says the value of a product is determined NOT by the cost of its production, or even the intrinsic worth of its components - but by the price people are willing to pay.

Recently, a 1911 Ty Cobb baseball card was valued at \$273,000. I'll bet the cumulative cost of the cardboard, and the ink, and even the fee for the artist who did the painting - cost just a few dollars *at most*.

The value of the card has nothing to do with the card itself, but someone is willing to pay top dollar for it.

There's not a large **supply** of 1911 Ty Cobb cards, and apparently there's great **demand** - thus, it's *the law of supply and demand* that drives up its price tag.

And **the spiritual law of supply and demand** determines your value. When it comes to you - there's not a big supply - God only made one. You're unique.

You're also in great demand. God loves you, chose you, adopted you, wants you, accepted you, and pays to redeem you with the priceless blood of His Son.

Stop measuring your value based on your intrinsic worth, or your good deeds, or what others think of you.

What's your market value? What God has paid for your redemption makes you of infinite worth and value!

I love the story of the Gingerbread Man. The moment the grandma pulled him out of the oven, he jumped off the cookie sheet, and taunted her, "**Run, Run, as fast as you can, nobody can catch the Gingerbread Man.**"

Through the streets she chased him. The Gingerbread Man finally hid in the window of the local bakery. But the grandma saw him and snatched him.

That's when the baker shouted, "That'll be 10 cents." She had to buy the Gingerbread Man she'd made.

But she never balked at the cost. She gave the baker his price, and took her Gingerbread Man. And as she walked home, she told the Gingerbread Man, "First I made you, then I bought you, now you're really mine!"

And that's what God says about you!

He fashioned you in your mother's womb. Yet the moment you came out of the oven you rebelled, and started to run from Him. He's had to chase you down, even purchase you. God made you and now He's bought you - you're really His. He must really want you!

And according to verse 7, you've been redeemed and forgiven "according to the riches of His grace..."

"According to" means "in proportion to the riches of His grace." God's forgiveness toward me is *not* in proportion to *my goodness* - but "*His grace.*"

My righteousness and worth and good works are in short supply, but God has an infinite reservoir of grace.

And it's out of "*His grace*" that you and I are forgiven.

If I go to the bank, and announce I'm here to pay off my house loan, the banker will ask, "Show us the funds." They know I don't have that amount of money.

But if Arthur Blank walked in and offered to pay my note, they wouldn't flinch. Arthur has ample resources.

Realize, your redemption and forgiveness was purchased not from your meager righteousness and good works, but from the deep pockets of God's grace.

"The measure of His gift is His immeasurable grace."

Note verse 8. Paul says of God's grace *"which He made to abound toward us in all wisdom and prudence..."* God makes His grace to *"abound"* to us!

The word *"abound"* means *"to flow over the brink, to flow beyond its limits, to overflow, to superabound."*

In other words, God has gone overboard! He's *"lavished"* His grace upon us! He's made a spectacle of His generosity. It's okay to get carried away with God's grace - to relish God's grace - to go a little overboard with grace - for that's what God has done Himself!

Psalm 130:7, *"Hope in the LORD; for with the LORD there is mercy, and with Him is abundant redemption."* We should celebrate - revel in - rejoice in God's grace!

Once a man died and appeared at the gate in heaven. He was stopped by the angel Gabriel.

Ole Gabe told him, *"Here's how this works. You need a 100 points to get in. You tell me the good deeds you've done and I'll assign the points accordingly."*

The man said, *"I was married to the same woman for 50 years and never cheated - not even in my mind."*

Gabriel said, *"That's great. You get three points."* The man complained, *"Three points. That's not many..."*

Gabriel asked again, “What else to you have?” He said, “*Well, I went to church each week and always tithed my money.*” Gabriel said, “That’s worth 1 point.”

He was upset, “*Wow, you’re being pretty stingy.*”

Gabe said again, “Alright, what else have you done?” The man said, “*I built several homeless shelters and fed thousands of folks each holiday.*” Gabe answered, “Okay, that’s worth 2 points. You’ve got a total of 5.”

The man was exasperated. He said, “*At this rate the only way I’m getting into heaven is by the grace of God.*” And with that, Gabriel said, “Come on in!”

Paul goes on to tell us in verse 9, “*having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself...*”

The biblical word translated “*mystery*” is not what you usually think of when you use the term. When we think of a mystery we assume an Agatha Christy novel... a search for a smoking gun... or a phenomena that can't be explained - a puzzle that can't be solved.

But that’s not the biblical understanding of “*mystery.*”

A biblical “*mystery*” is a truth that would've never been grasped by man alone. It comes by *revelation* NOT *investigation*. It’s been made known by God.

A “*mystery*” is a **sacred secret**. It may be a truth that’s easily understood, but we would’ve never known it, had God in “*His good pleasure*” not made it clear.

Paul took it as a great honor that God had made him privy to His secrets! That made Paul part of God's inner circle. You don't tell just anybody your secrets.

You share a secret with a confidant - someone you trust. And this is how God feels about us! In His plan of redemption He's shared with us His secrets! That which was hidden in times past is made known to us.

I like the Greek term translated "*mystery*." It comes from a root word that means "to wink." This is what you do when you whisper a secret, *you wink*. You let the other guy that you're both in on something special.

You're together. And this is what God does. He winks at us. He's let us in on an amazing, life-changing, eternity-altering secret. **Grace abounds in Christ!**

God has shared with us His secret. But there's a difference between *our secrets* and *God's secrets*...

With my secrets you're suppose to keep them secret.

But God's secrets should be shouted from the rooftop. They're for *sharing* not *keeping*! Our job is *to sing of His grace* in a world *in need of His grace*.

Notice God chose to *lavish on us His blessings* and *reveal to us His secrets* by "*His (own) good pleasure*."

We didn't strong-arm Him with our goodness and force Him to reward us because of our blessedness.

His secrets aren't leaks from heavenly staffers that can't keep their mouth shut. *God didn't decide on grace, because some loose lipped angel let the cat out of the bag*. Not hardly! That's not how it occurred...

Paul is clear, this Gospel of Grace was premeditated, predetermined by God. It was planned in His holy heart. Your redemption is His resolve and creation and ambition. Notice verse 8, God *“purposed in Himself!”*

Redemption isn't even the result of God's foreknowledge. He didn't just look down the corridors of history to spot those who would one day trust in Him. He didn't choose us in advance based on our future decisions. *Paul says there's more to it than that!*

God *“purposed in Himself!”* The plan for your redemption originated in God. *It was born in His heart.*

Our redemption is not God's reaction to anything *I am* or *I'll do*. God purposed in Himself to save us.

So why do we live as if we're beneficiaries of God's reluctance? That He's accepted us begrudgingly?

That's simply not true! *God really wants you!* Your reconciliation to God has been His eternal purpose!

Ronald Hatch writes, *“We forget, Christianity is God in search of lost men, not men in search of a lost God.”*

Of course, we immediately want to know, how does this all square with our need for faith? *I have no idea.*

As we said last week, this too is a mystery. **God chooses** and **the choice is ours** - both are taught in Scripture. But before we try to satisfy our logic and figure it all out,

why not let the Word stand on its own and enjoy this amazing truth... that God desires us!

He's "purposed in Himself" to lavish grace on us.

And now in verse 10 Paul further defines this mystery that He purposed in Himself, "that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth - in Him."

Paul begins with this imposing word "*dispensation.*"

Yet a "dispensation" is just another word for a step-by-step plan - a biblical blueprint - a divine schematic.

God's redemption occurs in pre-planned stages...

In one sense, **we were redeemed** - purchased and set free by the blood of Jesus on Calvary's cross.

In another sense, **we are being redeemed** - we'll talk next week about how the Spirit seals us in Christ.

And in a third sense **we will be redeemed** - Jesus has promised to return, and in that day we'll receive our perfect bodies and rule over a perfect world. *And when will this occur?* Paul answers, in "*the fullness of the times.*" In other words, **right on time.** God has a precise plan, and all will be redeemed on His cue.

What matters is God's motive. Why this plan of redemption. What is His ultimately aim for mankind?

Here Paul tell us that "(God) might gather together in one all things in Christ..."

There it is again, "*in Christ.*" Everything you see happening in the world today. All

the cosmic tumblers are clicking, and all the puzzle pieces are coming together for one climatic purpose...

The crescendo of the ages is about to occur...

For centuries secular minds have searched for a common thread running through history. They've tried to pinpoint a plot - a purpose at work in the universe.

Many historians have looked in the wrong places, and been frustrated. Here's a few of their comments...

“There is no secret and no plan in history to be discovered...” Another man writes, “I can see only one emergency following another, as wave follows wave...”

Here's another, “The universe is indifferent. Who created it?” And finally, “Why are we here on this puny mud-heap spinning in infinite space? I have not the slightest idea...” History makes no sense apart from the plan of God. Never forget **history** is “**His Story.**”

And God kept **His Story** a “*mystery.*” This is why man on his own can never discover God's master plan. It can never be deduced by merely examining events.

For ages, God kept His purpose hidden behind the scenes. *But it was to Paul that He finally revealed it...*

And here he tells us that the silver thread running through the centuries is one simple truth. Everything is rolling toward an ultimate climax... and that is this, **God is gathering all things together in Christ.**

History will reach a grand and glorious crescendo when all the redeemed of all the ages unite in Him!

When Jesus was a baby His identity was concealed to all but a few. Yet an old man, Simeon, knew the secret. In Luke 2:34 he spoke, “Behold, this Child is destined for the fall and rising of many in Israel...”

And this remains true today. Jesus is the hinge on which your future swings! He’s THE critical character on the stage of human history. He’s the pivotal point.

CH Spurgeon put it, “Christ is the great central fact in the world's history. To Him everything looks forward or backward. All the lines of history converge upon Him. All the great purposes of God culminate in Him.”

And this is why I adore Him - why I speak His name with reverence. This is why my world revolves around this man named Jesus - and my life is at His disposal.

Sin has torn this ragged world to shreds. Just look at how fragmented and divided we are. America - in fact, the world - has never been as splintered as it is today.

There’s strife and impasse at every turn.

Look at the world today... it’s such a troubled place...

Here in America we’re in the midst of a government shutdown, on the verge of bankruptcy. The richest nation on Earth is having problems paying its debts...

The terrorist nation of Iran continues to develop nuclear weapons... An armed madman rules in North Korea... Terrorism threaten us at home and abroad...

I ran across a quote from a British preacher in 1954. He was writing on the heels of the second World War...

“I do not know whether another world-war is coming or not; but whether it be war or no war, as Christians we are in this plan of God. No bomb can be invented, no

bacteria can be cultivated and used, no chemicals or gases can be brought into use, that can ever make the slightest difference to these things. That is God's plan as revealed in Scripture, and God's plan will be carried out; and if you are in Christ you are involved.

We are destined to be elevated and restored to what man was meant to be. Let's spend less time reading the newspapers and more time reading the Bible."

I believe that's also excellent advice in 2013!

Is there any hope for peace and harmony? There is!

But it won't result from some human achievement or negotiation. And no man will be able to speed it up or slow it down. It'll happen in *"the fullness of God's time."*

And it will be accomplished *"in Christ."*

In the short run, no one can predict the future. Of the coming particulars *who can know?* But there's one truth we can count on with absolute certainty - in God's sweet timing, in the end, **Christ will be THE all in all!**

God's purpose will not fail! Here's the secret the world has yet to see, but it's revealed to us... God will bring all things in heaven and earth together in Christ!

Wink if you know it's true... your future, and my future, and everyone's future will culminate in Christ.

You'll rise or fall based on your relationship with Jesus. Now let's get busy *letting the cat out of the bag!*