

Those things which are precious #4

The friends who had gathered for celebration at the quaint English estate were having such a good time. Men and women were conversing about sports, politics, common interests. Children were running around, playing various informal games. Everyone was enjoying the grandeur of the beautiful beach setting.

But suddenly, the peaceful setting turned into a tragic nightmare. One of the children who was swimming in the ocean had strayed out into deep water and was now struggling to stay afloat. The other children who noticed his predicament were screaming out for help. The adults who were enjoying their conversation on the beach had quickly turned their attention to the plight of the struggling child, but they seemed to be frozen in time- that is all except for one man. He was the gardener, the gardener for the estate. Without hesitation, he sprinted for the water. In strong, short strokes, he soon was by the side of the struggling child. In a moment, he had the child secured under his strong arm and was towing him back to the shore, safe and sound.

The gardener and the gasping lad were met on shore by the boy's father. "What can I ever do to repay you for this act of kindness? Just name it, anything- and I will give it to you." The boy's father offered the hero gardener. Thinking silently for a moment, the gardener replied, "You need do nothing for me, for I have everything that I need. But I do have one request. My wife and I have dreamed of our son going to college. But it is impossible for him to go to school on my salary." "You need say no more, the grateful father interrupted. Your son will go to college. I will guarantee it."

Now quite often, promises made in such an emotional state are quickly forgotten. But happily this one was not. For this gardener's son was sent to college by his grateful patron. And he did very well in college. So well that the patron sent him to further training in medical school upon his graduation from college. The gardener's son's name was Alexander Fleming. Dr. Alexander Fleming has given much to mankind- not only by being a fine doctor, but also by helping in the discovery and development of penicillin, an invention that has saved countless human lives.

Dr. Fleming also contributed in an indirect way to the history of freedom in our world. For when Winston Churchill was gravely ill one time stricken with pneumonia, it was Dr. Alexander Fleming who was called to give assistance to the prime minister. It was through Dr. Fleming's care and with the aid of the penicillin that Fleming had developed that Winston Churchill was restored back to health to lead England as Prime Minister through the struggles of W.W.2.

Later, Winston Churchill would say these words of tribute about Dr. Alexander Fleming. "Rarely has one man owed his life twice to the same person." Twice? to the same person? That's right. For the boy whom that gardener pulled out of the ocean's undertow was Winston Churchill himself. It was Churchill's parents who honored their word in sending the gardener's son to college and medical school. The gardener's son, Alexander Fleming, then

went on to aid in the development of penicillin and returned to help save the life of Winston Churchill a second time - this time from pneumonia.

It certainly is a remarkable irony of history that as great a man as Winston Churchill would be saved twice from death by the same family. A family who served as humble servants of the estate. But this is only a picture of a far greater story of redemption that is given to us in the Holy Scriptures. This is a greater story because the second deliverance did not come as a response to kind generosity as in the case of Fleming who owed his medical training to the generosity of the Churchill family. No, in the Biblical story of redemption, God first created a race of human beings in His own image and likeness bestowing upon them unprecedented powers and authority. Every single human being was God's by virtue of his very existence on this planet. But then this human race rebelled against God's rule over his universe. We became hostile towards God, enemies of God. Yet, God's love was so great that He chose to deliver this human race a second time. God did so at the cost of that which was most precious to him. The Bible tells us that God demonstrated his love for us in that while we were still his enemies he sent his one and only son to provide the price necessary to redeem the human race. So we have been purchased twice- once by the creative act of God and again by the redemptive act of God.

We have begun a series looking at those things in life that should be most precious to us. We first saw that our soul is a most precious possession to us. In fact, the Bible tells us that our soul is more valuable to us than the entire world. Jesus said, "What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?" Mark 8:36, 37. We then looked at the invitation that God has given to us to have an intimate, personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, the second person of the triune godhead. The Apostle Paul admitted that he considered everything else in his life to be like rubbish compared to his goal of knowing the Lord Jesus Christ in a personal and intimate way. Last week we looked at the precious nature of the inspired Word of God, this Bible that King David considered to be more valuable than all the riches of his gold reserve. Now, this morning, we want to turn our attention to the precious blood of Jesus Christ that purchased the redemption necessary so that our souls could be freed from their bondage to sin.

Listen to these words from the Apostle Peter found in 1 Peter 1:18-21:

<sup>18</sup> 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, <sup>19</sup> but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. <sup>20</sup> He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. <sup>21</sup> Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God.

In this passage, Peter uses 2 comparisons to demonstrate the precious nature of Christ's blood that was shed upon the cross of Calvary to provide for our redemption. The first is a negative comparison; the second is a positive one. The first shows what Christ's blood is not like, the second shows what it is like. Let's look at these 2

comparisons this morning as we prepare our hearts to celebrate the Lord's Table.

1. Peter begins by saying that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed in verse 18.

Now we must remember something of the cultural setting to see why Peter would make such a statement as this.

The concept of redemption was a very familiar concept in the Roman world. In Peter's world, there were comparatively few truly free people, for in order to be truly free, you had to be a Roman citizen. Most of the area of the Roman Empire including most of Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, had been acquired by conquest. As a result of these conquests, many slaves had been uprooted from their homelands. The conquered peoples who remained in their native lands although granted much more freedom were still not regarded as equals with the Roman citizens. It has been estimated by historians that at its peak of power only 10% of the population of the Roman Empire were actually Roman citizens. Now there were 2 ways to become a Roman citizen. A person could be born into a family where the parents were citizens- then he would automatically become a Roman citizen. Or a person could save enough money to purchase Roman citizenship. We find these 2 classes of people illustrated in a scene from the Apostle Paul's life recorded in Acts 22:25-29. Paul had been arrested and the Roman commander was about to give the order to have him beaten. The Bible records:

"As they stretched him out to flog him, Paul said to the centurion standing there, 'Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen who hasn't even been found guilty?' When the centurion heard this, he went to the commander and reported it. 'What are you going to do?' he asked. 'This man is a Roman citizen.' The commander went to Paul and asked, 'Tell me, are you a Roman citizen?' 'Yes I am', he answered. Then the commander said, 'I had to pay a big price for my citizenship'. 'But I was born a citizen', Paul replied. Those who were about to question him withdrew immediately. The commander himself was alarmed when he realized that he had put Paul, a Roman citizen, in chains."

The Roman Centurion who was in charge of at least 100 soldiers never even thought that Paul could be a Roman citizen. The Centurion was very likely not a citizen himself. So when he found out, he was so alarmed that he took Paul to his commander. Now the commander revealed that he had purchased his citizenship at great price and sacrifice. But Paul was born of parents who were citizens. The Roman commander so respected that citizenship that he did not have Paul beaten before giving him a trial as he would have if Paul would have been a non-citizen like the other 90% of the population.

When a person, like this Roman Commander, spent a good portion of his life saving money to purchase his citizenship, that money given to buy this special freedom was called a ransom. This was something that was highly treasured in the Roman empire. People dreamed of becoming a citizen, but few were ever in a position where they

could actually get the money necessary for their redemption. If a slave or a person who was not necessarily owned by another person but was a non-citizen suddenly were to receive a large quantity of gold, the very first thing that he would have done would be to buy citizenship. For with Roman citizenship, so many other avenues in life were immediately opened up to him.

Now Peter says that our spiritual redemption was not purchased with silver or gold. Silver or gold might be very valuable, even able to purchase a treasured possession like Roman citizenship. But silver or gold could never be given as a ransom to redeem a soul. And Peter gives the reason in the verse- silver and gold are perishable. Perishable things, as valuable as they might be, can only purchase other perishable things. Enough money could buy Roman citizenship because that citizenship was perishable- it ended with physical death. But no amount of money could ever buy heavenly citizenship because that citizenship is eternal- it just starts with physical death.

2. But let's move on now to look at the 2nd comparison that Peter makes in demonstrating the precious nature of Christ's blood. It is not like silver or gold, but it is like a lamb without blemish or defect.

READ 1 Peter 1:18,19

<sup>18</sup> 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, <sup>19</sup> but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.

There are many ways in which a lamb could never fully picture the sacrifice of Jesus Christ- that is the reason for the author of the Hebrews writing that Christ's atoning death was superior to the blood of bulls and goats. But there were some ways in which the lamb did convey the sacrifice Jesus Christ made for us. That is the reason for John the Baptist introducing Jesus Christ as the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.

How did the sacrificial lamb picture the precious blood of Christ? There were many aspects that Peter could have chosen, but he gives 2 to us in this passage:

a. As the lamb was carefully chosen from out of the flock, so Jesus Christ was chosen for his redemptive task by God the father. "He was chosen before the creation of the world." 1:20

\*the fact of God's choice indicates a freedom, a voluntary decision on his part. Christ was not forced to be a sacrifice, he chose to be one

\*the fact of God's choice indicates a plan, a plan formed before the creation of the world, Peter says. Christ's sacrificial death was not a last minute, panic-stricken effort as many have advocated saying that when things turned against him, Jesus just did what he could to salvage something out of a disastrous situation. Not at all. God's sacrifice was a carefully laid out plan. Before God created the world, he already knew that humans would sin against him, and he already had a plan for our redemption.

b. And the lamb was a picture of Jesus Christ in the fact that no moral impurities could be found in it. "a

lamb without blemish or defect."

\*In the Old Testament, the lamb was to be chosen on the basis of its apparent physical perfection. Any deformity whatsoever would disqualify the lamb from sacrificial privilege. The outward, physical defects of the lamb, of course, pictured the human sinfulness in a moral sense.

\*the lamb didn't deserve to die. It was the best lamb, most perfect. But the lamb died as a substitute so that the one who had sinned wouldn't have to die. So Jesus Christ didn't deserve to die; He was the only man who had ever lived who never sinned. We deserve to be punished by God, but not him. Yet like the Old Testament lamb, Jesus Christ died in our place.

Yes, of all that is valuable to us in this life- that which is most precious to us must include the precious blood of Jesus Christ. The ransom that was paid for our redemption. Christ's blood is far more valuable than silver or gold or anything else that will pass away with time.