

THE REDEMPTIVE HEART OF GOD (III)

KEY TEXT

Job 33:19-24 (NJKV) – 19 “*Man* is also chastened with pain
on his ^kbed,
And with strong *pain* in many of his bones,
20 So that his life abhors ^mbread,
And his soul ^ssucculent food.
21 His flesh wastes away from sight,
And his bones stick out *which once* were not seen.
22 Yes, his soul draws near the Pit,
And his life to the executioners.
23 “If there is a messenger for him,
A mediator, one among a thousand,
To show man His uprightness,
24 Then He is gracious to him, and says,
‘Deliver him from going down to the Pit;
I have found ^sa ransom’;

We are living in a digital age where we can get information instantly; purchase from Shopee instantly; book our concert tickets instantly; buy our air-tickets instantly.

This “instantaneous” culture has bred a generation where people are impatient with God when He doesn’t deliver what He promises, namely His promise of redemption.

We are doing a 3-part series called "The Redemptive Heart of God".

For the past 2 Sundays, I have been sharing:

- **God's heart is redemptive in nature.**
- **God never quits on what He starts.**
- **He loves and saves to the uttermost no matter what the cost.**
- **We are called to be like Him, and hence our approach to life situations and to the problems we face must be redemptive as well.**
- **When something deviates from its original plan and design, and is recovered and restored, we call it redemption.**
- **It is important for us to understand the nature of God's redemptive acts -how He goes about His redemptive work**
 - His redemptive work is motivated by a constant, unyielding love that knows no limits
 - His redemptive work is supernatural but includes our cooperation like repentance, faith and patience
 - His redemptive work includes discipline [rough handling, broken bones and detours] and in some cases judgment, when necessary
 - His redemptive work not only restores us to our former state, but elevates us to a realm far greater than the beginning.

Unlike the digital technology, the redemptive acts of God are not instantaneous but it needs to go through a **PROCESS**. Therefore, in this third part of my sermon on THE REDEEMPTIVE HEART OF GOD, I would like to share on **THE ELEMENTS IN GOD'S REDEEMPTIVE PROCESS**.

The outline for Part III:

1. Explanation of our Key Text
2. The Key elements in God's redemptive process
3. The Ultimate Redemptive Sacrifice

(I) EXPLANATION OF THE KEY TEXT

In our Key Text, Elihu uses the concept of a **"ransom"** or **"redemption"** to describe a **PROCESS** where a person facing death is delivered from the pit (a place of darkness and decay) through **DIVINE INTERVENTION**.

The **"ransom"** is a figurative price paid to set the person free, highlighting the need for mercy and a mediator.

Remember in the Part 1 of my sermon, I shared that redemption always involves a **ransom or a sacrifice** to buy us back from Satan, our slave master; to buy us back from our sin and folly.

So, our Key text highlights God's compassion and provision for those in suffering. If a person has a messenger (potentially a wise person, a spiritual guide or even a spiritual messenger) who can show them God's way, then God is gracious to them,

saying, “Deliver him from going down the pit; I have found a ransom.”

Application: We are all like that sick man on his death bed; we had been chastened with a fatal disease called sin because of our fallen Adam and Eve. Left to ourselves, we were all emaciated in our soul and spirit, heading to the pit of hell, unless God sent a messenger, a mediator and a wise man to show us the way. And the good news is God declares to us today, “I HAVE FOUND A RANSOM – Jesus Christ My Son. He is my Messenger. He is your Mediator. He is your Wise Man to instruct you the way to Me. And Jesus took your place to be that emaciated, sin-sick man on the death bed called the CROSS, to pay for your sins so that He can redeem (buy us back)all of you from going down the pit.”

GOD THE FATHER FOUND THE RANSOM IN HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON.”

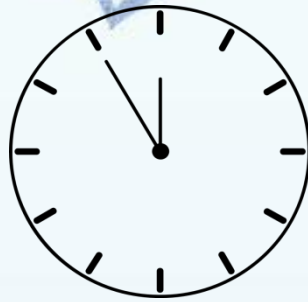
Questions: How many of you are literally or figuratively in a pit today? Jesus, our Redeemer is able to “deliver you from going down to the Pit...so that your flesh shall be young like a child’s; you shall return to the days of your youth; you shall pray to God and He will delight in you; You shall see His face with joy, For He restores to man His righteousness....He will redeem your soul from going down to the Pit, and your life shall see the light.” (Job 33:24-28)

(II) THE KEY ELEMENTS IN GOD’S REDEPTIVE PROCESS

God's redemptive acts is a **process**. It is not immediate. There is a process to follow if you want to see the redemptive acts of God in your life.

There are four elements in this redemptive process of God.

1 – TIME



God unfolds His redemptive work in the **FULLNESS OF TIME**.

God was and is always at work. But we see the specifics of His redemptive work take place in the **fullness of time**, what the Bible refers to as the **Kairos** (in Greek) time.

Great Plan of Salvation

Galatians 4:4,5 (NKJV) - 4 But when the fullness of the time (*kairos*) had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, 5 to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.

In the great plan of salvation, 4000 years went by before God sent His Son to carry out His redemptive provision. But all along, God was at work, preparing a people, a place and the proper time. The Lord Jesus gave Himself as a ransom and this was testified (announced, made known) in **due time** (1 Timothy 2:5,6).

Eternal Purpose

Ephesians 1:9,10 (NKJV) - 9 having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, 10 that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times (*kairos*) He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him.

Kairos is Greek word for “set, proper, opportune time or season. Time when things are ripe.”

E.g. – I remember buying a basket of mangoes for my member who married an American. They had been away from Iloilo City for quite a while. So, as a welcome gesture when they returned to Iloilo City from States after a long time, I gifted them a basket of mangoes. They would only stay in Iloilo City for a day and leave for Boracay the following day. That night, my member texted me, “Pastor Lily, the mangoes you gave are so sour!” I was very embarrassed. The couple then brought the basket of mangoes with them to Boracay. They were in Boracay for 3 days. And half way through their stay there, they ate my mangoes again. This time, she texted me, “Oh! Pastor Lily! Your mangoes are SO SWEET!”

What happened? The basket mangoes went through *Kairos* – a process involving longer time to ripen.

We see “*Kairos*” even in God's redemptive work in the lives of individuals, or groups or people - He works at the opportune

time. In the life of Job (**James 5:7-11**), in the life of Joseph (**Psalm 105:19**). God works according to times and seasons (**Ecclesiastes 3:11**).

Therefore, when it seems like nothing is happening, God is still at work. **The God who works in the light also works in the shadows.** His sovereign power and redeeming care are not always clear but we ought not think that He is absent, distant, inactive or uncaring. God never forsakes His own, and He never fails to deliver what He has promised. The assumption that we can't see evident of His presence or care does not mean he is not present and at work.

E.g. The Book of Esther

One of the reasons the book of Esther is in the Bible is to teach us this lesson. Esther is one book of the Bible that does not mention God's name at all. This has troubled many people but it shouldn't be because there are evidences of God's power, presence and care for his people throughout this little Old Testament book. God **works in the shadows** to cause Esther to **rise to prominence in order to preserve His people**. In so doing, God gives hope to the world, because out of those people the Savior would come and ultimately make new again everything broken by sin. Without Esther, the Jewish people would have been destroyed, and there would have been no birth of the Messiah in Bethlehem, no righteous life of Jesus, no substitutionary death, no victorious resurrection and no ascension to the Father to intercede for his own. The world would have been trapped in sin and doomed with no hope.

The amazing outcome of the story of Esther cannot and should not be attributed to human initiative, wisdom and ingenuity alone. Behind everything, God is controlling circumstances, working in people's hearts, and determining outcomes. We should be thankful for Mordecai and Esther, but God is the ultimate hero of this portion of Scripture. His **PROVIDENTIAL CARE** guarantees that His people and His work of redemption will have an eternal and glorious future.

Application: You may not always see God's hand, but you can rest assured that your Lord never ceases working for your good and His glory. Remember that the God who is active in the light is just as active in the shadows. Even though His name might not appear to be plastered all over your story, He is with you, in you and for you – and that is the reason to **rest in His care and trust in His redemptive power.**

The Day of Visitation

In God's redemptive work leading people to salvation we see the Scripture talk about their **"day of visitation"** (1 Peter 2:12). Similarly, for a woman in the church at Thyatira, the Lord said, **"I gave her time to repent of her sexual immorality, and she did not repent"** (Revelation 2:21). So also, for a city (the city of Jerusalem) the Lord Jesus wept over it because the people failed to recognize their **"time of visitation"** (Luke 19:41-44).

God gives people time, while He is at work drawing them. He visits them at opportune times and in different ways drawing

them to Himself. We must learn to recognize what God is doing and flow with that.

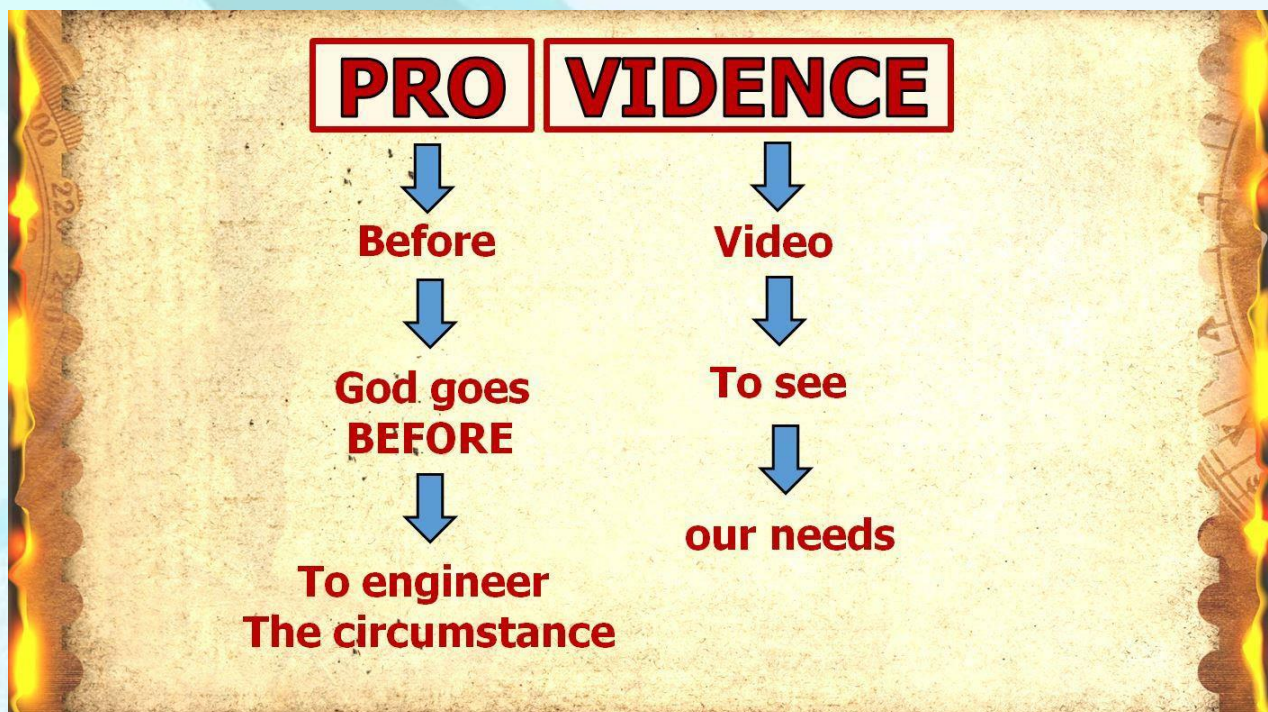
As Christians, we must understand the concept of **PROVIDENCE**.

What is providence?

Providence is the hand of God in the glove of history.

“Providence” means **“pro”** which is **“before”**. The word **“vidence”** is from the word **“video”** which means **“to see”**.

When God in His Providence sees our needs, beforehand **even before** we see it, **He already engineers circumstances** to meet those needs.



1 Timothy 6:15 reminds us that God is the ruler overall and brings everything to pass in His perfect timing. We read, **“...which He will bring about in His own time – He who is the blessed and only Sovereign [the absolute Ruler], the king of those who reign as kings and Lord of those who rule as lords.”**

God's sovereignty means that He is the absolute ruler, controller, and sustainer of His creation. He is the One who has the final say. Nothing, absolutely nothing, sits outside of God's sovereignty. There are no events over which He does not rule. There are no situations that happen which He does not either create or allow.

Your boss does not have the last say.

Your spouse does not have the last say.

Your parent does not have the last say.

Your health does not have the last say.

Even you do not have the last say.

God created this world and all that is within it – and He rules over all. No detours can circumvent God's sovereign plan. He knows how to orchestrate all events, good and bad, to return to His original design and plan.

2-SACRIFICE

A second key element in God's redemptive process is **sacrifice**.

Great Plan of Salvation

Redemption is possible because of a **redemption price** that has been paid. The Lord Jesus gave Himself as a **ransom** or redemption price for all.

1 Timothy 2:5,6 (NKJV) - 5 For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time,

The sacrifice is given as an atonement for the wrong doing, or for the cancellation of the debt. The atonement then made redemption possible.

Old Testament Understanding

In the Old Testament, all types of ritual sacrifices (e.g. burnt offerings) are explained in terms of "**atonement**" (*kaphar*). The annual Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*), as described in detail in **Leviticus 16**, was pointing to Christ's redemptive work.



Spiritual sacrifices - such as **intercession and worship**, also serve as a ransom, a redemption price for deliverance, as in the Old Testament. The understanding that a ransom was needed as a redemption price (for deliverance) was even in the oldest book of the Bible, the book of Job

When Job was going through his troubles, he longed for an intercessor - a man who could stand before God on his behalf and intercede, mediate and bring him out.

Job 9:32,33 - 32 "For He is not a man, as I am, That I may answer Him, And that we should go to court together. 33 Nor is there any mediator between us, Who may lay his hand on us both.

Job 16:21 - Oh, that one might plead for a man with God, As a man pleads for his neighbor!

Moses interceded for God's people

Psalm 106:23 - Therefore He said that He would destroy them, Had not Moses His chosen one stood before Him in the breach, To turn away His wrath, lest He destroy them.

Delivering Christ's Provision

The Lord Jesus has already provided salvation (redemption) for all mankind. Yet, we are **His agents** to deliver what He has provided to people for them to personally experience His redemption. **As agents in His redemptive process, we must**

also be willing to sacrifice. This 'sacrifice' could be in terms of praying/interceding, in giving financially, going to difficult places, giving up comforts, etc.

Part of this process of delivering Christ's provision of salvation, is to offer up intercession on their behalf.

Christ's sacrifice on the Cross is also called as a **work of intercession (Isaiah 53:12).**

Spiritual sacrifices, such as intercession, is a key element in God's redemptive process. **He redeems because He finds a ransom, a sacrifice, an intercessor.** That is why you interceding for someone else is key to God's redemptive work in their lives.

This does not mean we are paying the price for their redemption. There is only one complete sacrifice, which is what Christ has already paid.

Instead, as agents in God's redemptive process we are doing our part, sacrificing, in order for people to experience and receive what has been provided for them **(Colossians 1:24,25).** They are saved, not because of our sacrifice, but only because of what Jesus did for them. We are only **co-laborers** with God in His redemptive process of reaching hurting people that He seeks to redeem. We unite with Christ's finished work of sacrifice by following in His footsteps.

E.g. No souls can be saved without the intercession of God's people. My dad and my two elder brothers went to hell in the early part of my mission work here. My eldest brother passed on one month after I arrived in Iloilo City. Three years later, my second brother passed on while I was 7 months pregnant with Joy. Then three years later, my dad passed on. I felt like a hypocrite losing all my loved ones to hell while preaching the gospel in the mission field to Filipinos who were not even related to me at all. All these took place in the late 1980s. In the early 1990s, I couldn't take all these eternal losses anymore and I couldn't take anymore condemnation from the devil. So, I pledged before God to enter into full fast with prayer for my own immediate family. I fasted a lot in the 1990s and early 2000s. The full fast would range from 14 days to 30 days. That was why I was very slim during those two decades. And God's redemption came through because I partnered with Jesus' sacrifice to pray for my family. In 2003, my third brother contracted lung cancer. I was injured very badly at that time in my foot and yet I dared to request from my boss to fly back to Singapore in order to witness to my third brother. I was limping all the way in Singapore, running all over the hospital, confronting those public doctors over the misdiagnosis of my third brother. All these years, after I left for the mission field, my third brother fell out with me because he couldn't forgive me for becoming a missionary. But I always held him in high regards because when my family split up with our bungalow house foreclosed by the bank, he was the first to take me into his new HDB flat. He gave me a room to stay and I stayed with him and his wife throughout

my junior college days. When I saw him this time, with one eye patch because the cancer had already metastasized to his brain, causing visual blindness in one eye, I gave him all the money the church in Singapore had given me because they heard about his condition. He broke down and cried. So, I ran to private and public hospital to arrange consultation with different doctors and oncology treatment for him. But all along I was concerned for his salvation. I brought my boss who is good in Hokkien to share the gospel to him, which she did. To cut the story short, he was supposed to visit me here in Iloilo for the first and the last time but he couldn't because his lung collapsed and he was sent to the hospital. God gave him a window for the Singapore church to send 2 pastors to share the gospel one more time to him. He accepted the Lord with tears in his eyes and thirty minutes later, he passed on. That was the first salvation breakthrough in the Ang family. Subsequently, in 2011, my mum also accepted the Lord on her death bed, with Joy and Ben beside her but not without first on her own volition, walking to church to attend the Easter Service. And then in 2021, my second sister accepted the Lord at the time when Ptr Toh Nee and I were stuck in Singapore for 20 months due to COVID. I cried a lot the first night when the hospital called me up to inform me of her 4th stage cancer. I pled with Jesus to save her soul, and He did. My second sister accepted Christ 1 week before I flew back to Iloilo. And I remembered how both of us cried in the car after I came down from my sister's flat to announce to Pastor Toh Nee about my sister's decision to be saved. It was tears of gratitude to Jesus for the miracle of salvation. The redemption

of God came after intense intercession. The sacrifice of intercession through fasting and prayer paid off. Praise the Lord.

Question: Who in your family do you want to see God redeeming from hell? Yoke with Christ's sacrifice – to intercede for their souls.

3 - FORGIVENESS

The next key element in God's redemptive process is **extending forgiveness.**

We must bring assurance of God's forgiveness into people's lives - this is letting them know that they have been washed, justified and sanctified in Christ **(1 Corinthians 6:11)** and God holds nothing against them.

At the same time, we must **release forgiveness to those who have wronged us.**

There is something powerful in the release of forgiveness.

Stephen released forgiveness to Saul, the man overseeing his stoning, and all the others. The next thing we see is Saul encountering Jesus!

If God has forgiven them, then we have no right to hold this against them.

The redemptive process of God includes receiving people into a community that see people as redeemed.

The man in the Corinthian Church who sinned in immorality, was to be received as a forgiven person, once he repented.

2 Corinthians 2:6-11 - 6 This punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man, 7 so that, on the contrary, you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. 8 Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him. 9 For to this end I also wrote, that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things. 10 Now whom you forgive anything, I also forgive. For if indeed I have forgiven anything, I have forgiven that one for your sakes in the presence of Christ, 11 lest Satan should take advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices

The book of Philemon is a wonderful story of a run-away slave name Onesimus. He has stolen from his master Philemon, in Colossae, who is a believer and one of Paul's fellow-workers. Onesimus runs away and ends up meeting Paul while in prison at Rome! There Paul leads him to the Lord, and then sends him back to Philemon with this letter. This is a beautiful story where Paul urges Philemon to forgive and receive Onesimus:

Philemon 1:12,16,17 - 12 I am sending him back. You therefore receive him, that is, my own heart, 16 no longer as a slave but more than a slave—a beloved brother, especially to

me but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord. 17 If then you count me as a partner, receive him as you would me.

If we are to be a community that wants to see the God in His redemptive acts, we must know **the power of forgiveness**.

Yet many of us are trapped in **UNFORGIVENESS, BITTERNESS, RESENTMENT, REGRET AND LANGUISHING OVER THE LOSS OF THE PAST**.

All of these things, and those other things similar to them, hinder us from experiencing the redemptive acts of God. They keep us trapped on detours for far too long. They short-circuit the redemptive process. They weigh heavy on us, causing our shoulders to slump and our smiles to turn downward.

Far too many people are failing to reach their destination because they are still feeling loaded down by the pain of the past. The weight of yesterday continues to weigh them down today, keeping them from moving freely into tomorrow.



Nothing, and I meaning nothing, will hinder the redemptive process of God like this thing called **unforgiveness**.

Unforgiveness includes holding on to past pain, past hurts, past grudges – the weightiness of regret, remorse and revenge.

Unforgiveness is that one thing above all else that will block God's redemptive acts in your life taking you from where you are to where God wants you to go.

When you hang on to the weight of yesterday, it will hinder the progress to tomorrow.

Unforgiveness is that critical area that must be addressed if you are going to reach your destiny.

If anyone had a right to be angry, bitter and hold a grudge, it was **Joseph**. But Joseph chose another path. Joseph chose another approach. He chose a different perspective – **a perspective that embraces the redemptive heart of God**.

He says, **“As for you, you meant evil against me, but Godmeant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today” (Gen 50:20).**

The word **“meant”** means **“to mean”**; even though what the person said or did created a negative reality, that was not their intention. They hadn't meant to cause harm.

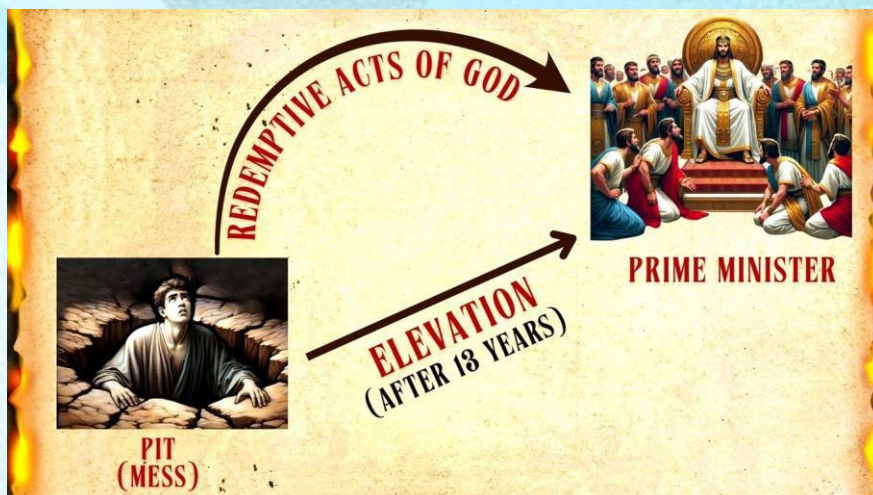
Joseph's brother meant anything but well. They meant to cause him harm. They meant to ruin his life. They meant to ruin his life. They meant to dethrone him from the position of importance he had come to believe he would one day hold. Actually, they meant evil.

But God

These two words are two powerful words. When you come across **"BUT GOD"** in Scripture, pay attention. What comes next will usually change the entire situation. Especially if **"meant"** is added after them.

BUT GOD MEANT...

Genesis 50:20 shows what God can do with something meant to harm you. **He can not only protect you in it, but He can also promote you because of it.** The exact thing Joseph's brothers had meant to cause him harm was the exact thing God used to promote him to his destiny. Remember my 4th point last week - **His redemptive work not only restores us to our former state, but elevates us to a realm far greater than the beginning.**



Why are we unforgiving?

Root cause # 1 - We are unforgiving because we fail to embrace the redemptive heart of God like Joseph did. We don't believe that God sovereignly can turn turns around ultimately.

Root cause # 2 - We are also unforgiving because of the **SIN OF FORGETFULNESS**. How so? We can all fail to remember the magnificence of the love and mercy that has been showered down on us – the magnificence of His redeeming love. We can all forget that we never could have earned or deserved the best things in our lives; they are only ours by means of grace. Here's the problem: **to the degree that you forget the grace that you have been given, to that same degree it is easier for you not to extend grace to others. To the extent that you forget how much you've been forgiven, to that same extent it is easier for you not to forgive the people in your life.** If you fail to carry around with you a heart of gratitude for the love you've been so freely given, it is easy for you not to love others as you should.

It is and always has been true that no one gives grace better than a person who is deeply persuaded that he needs it himself and that it has been graciously supplied by a God of tender mercy. **He gives what we never could have earned, why, then do we turn and refuse to give until others have measured up to whatever standard we hold them to?** The call to forgive immediately exposes our need for forgiveness. The call to give grace reveals how much we need grace. The call to

forgive is at the very same time a call to remember and to be thankful. When you remember how far you fall short, you are tenderhearted towards others who fall short, and you want for them the same grace that is your only hope. May God make us willing to give to others what we have been given. Forgive others so that the redemptive process can go through.

Questions: Could it be that you cannot forgive others because you fail to embrace the redemptive heart of God to people who meant to cause you harm? Are you failing to see that God meant to redeem that evil for your elevation? Or could it be you are committing sin of forgetfulness – you have forgotten how much you have been forgiven by God?

#4 - RESTORATION

The fourth key element we see in God's redemptive process is restoration.

Redemption in terms of salvation is instant; restoration is a life-long process.

Christian experience hangs in two spectrums – the **already and the not yet**. When we accept Christ, we **already** are forgiven. Salvation is instant redemption of our soul from hell with forgiveness already credited instantly to our account because of Christ' ransom on the cross. Positionally, we are all **already forgiven** in Christ's name. But experientially, the repair is not yet complete; not yet perfect. It is still ongoing. It is a life-long process. The repair is known as **sanctification** and

it is a life-long process. The goal of sanctification is to **restore you to God's original plan** for your life and this will not be perfected until you see Christ face to face.

Redemption is God choosing us; restoration is us continually choosing God.

You can't redeem yourself. You needed a redeemer. Other than receiving the redemption God offered you, you had very little to do with your redemption. He sacrificed. He forgave. He bought you back. **Restoration has a lot more to do with you and I reciprocating God for choosing us.** As you and I choose to follow God, as we choose to forsake all other lovers, more of our heart is restored.

It is a daily journey and a daily decision to not just allow God to be the Savior of your soul, but the **Lord** of your life.

Redemption isn't something to be earned; it's something to which you surrender.

Here is the tricky part of restoration. You have a role to play in your restoration. But restoration isn't about working harder. It is about **giving up more.** The temptation is to equate our religious activity with restoration. We assume we are to become more like Jesus because we go to church or join a community group or start giving financially. Those things are important but they don't equate to restoration.

Restoration is found as we stop trying to do things for God in order to earn his favor. Rather we do things for God **out of a**

surrendered heart to God. Just like God won't force Himself into our salvation, He won't force himself into our restoration. We have to surrender to Him first. Freedom is found as we surrender – as we give up the parts of our hearts we have kept from God.

Restoration itself is a process where God begins to take things back to their original state and elevates things to even higher levels.

We must believe God for restoration and cooperate with Him to bring this to pass in our lives.

(III) THE ULTIMATE REDEMPITIVE SACRIFICE

One of the most difficult processes for us to accept is **SACRIFICE AND FORGIVENESS.**

I would like to tell you a real story so that you can recapture the redemptive sacrifice of God and Jesus. Without our spiritual eyes being illumined to see the **ULTIMATE SACRIFICE OF JESUS**, we would not want to sacrifice for Jesus nor do we want to forgive others.

A story: *John Griffth, the Bridge Operator.*





John Griffith was in his early twenties. He was newly married and full of optimism. Along with his lovely wife, he had been blessed with a beautiful baby. He was living the American dream. But then came 1929—the Great Stock Market Crash—the shattering of the American economy that devastated John’s dreams. The winds that howled through Oklahoma were strangely symbolic of the gale force that was sweeping away his hopes and his dreams. And so, brokenhearted, John packed up his few possessions, and with his wife and his little son, headed East in an old Ford Model A. They made their way to the edge of the mighty Mississippi River and found a job tending one of the great railroad bridges there.

Day after day, John would sit in the control room and direct the enormous gears of the immense bridge over the mighty river. He would look out wistfully as bulky barges and splendid ships glided gracefully under his elevated bridge. Each day, he looked on sadly as those ships carried with them his shattered

dreams and his visions of far-off places and exotic destinations.

It wasn't until 1937 that a new dream began to be birthed in John's heart. His young son was now eight years old and John had begun to catch a vision for a new life, a life in which Greg, his little son, would work shoulder to shoulder with him. The first day of this new life dawned and brought with it new hope and fresh purpose. Excitedly, they packed their lunches and headed off towards the immense bridge.

Greg looked on in wide-eyed amazement as his Dad pressed down the huge lever that raised and lowered the vast bridge. As he watched, he thought that his father must surely be the greatest man alive. He marveled that his Dad could singlehandedly control the movements of such a stupendous structure.

Before they knew it, Noon time had arrived. John had just elevated the bridge and allowed some scheduled ships to pass through. And then taking his son by the hand, they headed off towards lunch.

As they ate, John told his son in vivid detail stories about the marvelous destinations of the ships that glided below them. Enveloped in a world of thought, he related story after story, his son hanging on his every word.

Then, suddenly, in the midst of telling a tale about the time that the river had overflowed its banks, he and his son were startled back to reality by the shrieking whistle of a distant train. Looking at his watch in disbelief, John saw that it was already 1:07. Immediately he remembered that the bridge was still raised and that the Memphis Express would be by in just minutes.

In the calmest tone he could muster he instructed his son “Stay put.” Quickly, he leaped to his feet, he jumped onto the catwalk. As the precious seconds flew by, he ran at full-tilt to the steer ladder leading into the control house.

Once in, he searched the river to make sure that no ships were in sight. And then, as he had been trained to do, he looked straight down beneath the bridge to make certain nothing was below. As his eyes moved downward, he saw something so horrifying that his heart froze in his chest. For there, below him in the massive gearbox that housed the colossal gears that moved the gigantic bridge, was his beloved son.

Apparently, Greg had tried to follow his dad but had fallen off the catwalk. Even now he was wedged between the teeth of two main cogs in the gear box. Although he appeared to be conscious, John could see that his son’s leg had already begun to bleed. Then an even more horrifying thought flashed through his mind. Lowering the bridge would mean killing the apple of his eye.

Panicked, his mind probed in every direction, frantically searching for solutions. In his mind's eye, he saw himself grabbing a coiled rope, climbing down the ladder, running down the catwalk, securing the rope, sliding down towards his son, pulling him back to safety. Then in an instant, he would move back down towards the control lever and thrust it down just in time for the oncoming train.

As soon as these thoughts appeared, he realized the futility of his plan. Instantly he knew there just wouldn't be enough time. Frustration began to beat on John's brow, terror written over every inch of his face. His mind darted here and there, vainly searching for yet another solution.

His agonized mind considered the four hundred people that were moving inextricably closer and closer to the bridge. Soon the train would come roaring out of the trees with tremendous speed, but this was his son...his only son...his pride...his joy.

He knew in a moment there was only one thing he could do. He knew he would have to do it. And so, burying his face under his left arm, he plunged down the lever. The cries of his son were quickly drowned out by the relentless sound of the bridge as it ground slowly into position. With only seconds to spare, the Memphis Express—with its 400 passengers—roared out of the trees and across the mighty bridge.

John Griffith lifted his tear-stained face and looked into the windows of the passing train. A businessman was reading the morning newspaper. A uniformed conductor was glancing nonchalantly at his large vest pocket watch. Ladies were already sipping their afternoon tea in the dining cars. A small boy, looking strangely like his own son, pushed a long thin spoon into a large dish of ice cream. Many of the passengers seemed to be engaged in idle conversation or careless laughter.

No one even looked his way. No one even cast a glance at the giant gear box that housed the mangled remains of his hopes and his dreams.

In anguish he pounded the glass in the control room. He cried out "What's the matter with you people? Don't you know? Don't you care? Don't you know I've sacrificed my son for you? What's wrong with you?"

No one answered. No one heard. No one even looked. Not one of them seemed to care. And then, as suddenly as it had happened, it was over. The train disappeared moving rapidly across the bridge and out over the horizon.

This story is but a faint glimpse of what the Father did in sacrificing his Son to atone for the sins of the world, to bridge the gap between us and everlasting life. Can there be any wonder that He caused the earth to tremble and the skies to darken when His Son died? And how must He feel when we

speed along through life without even a single thought to what was done for us through Jesus Christ? Unlike the Memphis Express, however, an express that caught John Griffith by surprise, God in His great love and according to His sovereign will and purpose, determined to sacrifice his Son so that we might live. Not only so, but the consummate love of Christ is demonstrated in that He was not accidentally caught as was John's son. Rather, **He willingly sacrificed his life for the sins of mankind.**

Well, the story of course doesn't end there. Three days later, Jesus arose from the grave. Jesus overcame death and the grave through His resurrection. Moreover, like Jesus, we too shall rise and those who believe, we will live forever with our resurrected Lord in **Paradise Restored.**

The problem we fail to sacrifice and even to give up our right so that we can forgive others is because **we have forgotten the redeeming love God has sacrificed so much to save us.** May the Holy Spirit rekindle our memory. **The degree you forget is the degree you will not forgive. The degree you are blinded to the redeeming grace and sacrifice, is the degree you continue to be stuck in your pit and detours of life, with no redemption in sight.**

CONCLUSION

To any one going down any pit; to any one who is messed up; to any one who is in darkness; to any one who is sick today; to any one who is suffering or in trouble, we need an angel, a

mediator, a wise man to declare to us what is right and to extend divine mercy and grace to us from going down to pit. God the Father declares to us this morning:

“I HAVE FOUND A RANSOM IN MY ONLY BEGOTTEN SON, JESUS CHRIST”.

We all have deviated from the original design of God. Only Jesus with His ransom paid on the Cross can recover and restore us back to our original design. Not only that, God will elevate us to a higher glory.

But we need to surrender to the **PROCESS OF THIS REDEPTIVE WORK**. It takes time, sacrifice, forgiveness and restoration. The heart of God is redemptive. He loves to punctuate all our stories with His redemption – restoring things back to their original state and even elevating things to an even higher level. We will all have a glorious ending – thanks and praises to the redemptive sacrifice of Jesus.

MY STORY

I shared about our continual experience of God’s redemptive acts since the beginning of this year – about how God redeemed my estranged relationship with my granddaughter and today I am her favorite grandma.

Today, I want to share about three incidents of forgiveness which God wanted us to release this year.

1 – God sent a peacemaker in Singapore to reconcile the broken relationship between Pastor Toh Nee and Pastor Dong from LSBC. There was a fall out between Pastor Toh Nee and him due to our partnership with See Chuan in reaching out to the SOOC community here in Iloilo City.

2 - God also made me meet a leader who chose the side of my ex-sending Church to betray us and to stir unrest in our church. I bumped into her at the Iloilo Supermarket. I couldn't recognize her because my cognitive ability is bad. I mistook her to be a member from our church. I smiled at her which stunned her. Then my trolley bumped into hers again in the next aisle and I just said with a smile to her, "Wow! We keep bumping into each other." Then she smiled at me and said, "Pastor! Thank you for all these years of teaching us." I was confused, wondering why would my member say such words to me. It was until I was at the cashier counter that it dawned on me that she was the leader under our ex-boss who split our ministry. But the release of forgiveness was given to her and I know it was God who orchestrated it.

#3 – A funeral took place recently which I hated to attend because the deceased was related to a couple who used to be our members but took the side of our ex sending church. Ten years ago, we attended a birthday party with this couple there and the wife snubbed both of us. I was very offended and I vowed never to attend any more birthday party where that couple would attend also. But in this recent funeral, I couldn't extricate myself from it because two of my members are also

related to the deceased. Before I went, I prayed, “God if you want me to attend, please give me the humility of Jesus to be snubbed again.” So, we went to the funeral parlor and was very relieved to see that the couple wasn’t there. But halfway through, that couple entered and to my surprise, walked straight to us, shook our hands and thanked us for coming for the funeral. And while chatting with them, the weight of the past offense just fell off.

I believe God orchestrated this meeting because the fullness of time has come for Him [we have served Him as missionaries to Iloilo City for 39 years] to redeem, recover and restore Pastor Toh Nee and me to His original design and more so to elevate us to a higher realm. God was orchestrating many occasions for both of us to forgive those who have hurt us, betrayed us in the past so we can exit Iloilo next year with no excess baggage of unforgiveness and resentment. Praise God.

End

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