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Redemption, Part 9

This morning we are going to be addressing the end/telos when it comes to our salvation. In philosophy, the *telos* is the highest end, the ultimate purpose for a given thing. With this we are brought to these questions:

- Why did God redeem us?
- Certainly it has to go way beyond the sake of our own personal well-being.
- So why ultimately did God save us?

We are going to answer these questions.

Hebrew Puns

In Hebrew, the pun is an important literary tool. Hebrew like most languages employs both vowels and consonants. However, unlike many languages, a very large number of Hebrew words have only three consonants, called radicals, in their root form.

Now initially and for well over two thousand years, the Hebrew language was not written with vowels. So instead of writing h-e-a-r-t, they'd write h-r-t. Instead of writing f-r-a-m-e, they'd write f-r-m. This is

what you see when you look at any manuscript of the Hebrew Old Testament prior to 600 AD.¹ In light of this a Hebrew pun occurred when two different words with the same consonants were placed in apposition to one another in order to express a truth or an idea. For example, if I were to give you advice utilizing a Hebrew pun with the three consonants H-R-T, I could say something like this:

- “If you don’t your HeaRT, it most definitely will get HuRT.”- notice the repetition of H-R-T. If we were writing in Hebrew that’s all that you’d see in the text.

Or if I were to write a story utilizing a Hebrew pun with the three consonants F-R-M, I might write this:

- “Because of his association with the FiRM (F-R-M) the mob was able to FRaMe (F-R-M) him.”- again notice the repetition of F-R-M. Again if we were writing in Hebrew that’s all that you’d see.

Now let me show you a real pun in the Hebrew. Listen to Amos 8:1-2 in two different translations.

Amos 8:1-2 NASB, “Thus the Lord God showed me, and behold, *there was* a basket of summer fruit. And He said, ‘What do you see, Amos?’ And I said, ‘A basket of summer fruit.’ Then the Lord said to me, ‘The end has come for My people Israel. I will spare them no longer.’”

Now when one reads the New American Standard Bible (NASB) it is not at all apparent how “a basket of summer fruit” relates to the judging of God’s people, “the end has come.” And that is because the NASB didn’t translate the Hebrew pun. Contrast this to the New International Version (NIV).

Amos 8:1-2 NIV, “This is what the Sovereign LORD showed me: a basket of ripe fruit. ‘What do you see, Amos?’ He asked. ‘A basket of ripe fruit,’ I answered. Then the LORD said to me, ‘The time is ripe for my people Israel; I will spare them no longer.’”

Do you see the impact of the Hebrew pun?

In the original the words for “summer” and “the end” have the same three Hebrew consonants and so form a pun which was beautifully captured by the NIV, just as summer fruit is ripe, so the time was ripe for God to judge His people.

Now, why am I making reference to this as we approach Philemon this morning?

Simply because as Paul closed out his argument in our section, he made use of the literary tool of the Hebrew pun. Thus for us to appreciate what Paul is saying here, it is important that we be familiar with the Hebrew pun.

Now you and I know that the focus of Philemon is that of redemption. Paul is writing this epistle to argue for the redemption of a runaway slave, Onesimus. And yet, as this passage ultimately bears reference to Christ,² we also derive from this text the glorious elements of our redemption.

Thus far we’ve seen

¹ When it looked like Hebrew was dying out such that Jewish people more and more were finding it difficult to read the Bible, a group of Jews from Tiberias known as the Masoretes added vowel markings mostly below the consonants so that there would be no confusion as to what was being said.

² Compare John 5:39

- The Consequences of Redemption, vv. 10-16.
- That which Serves as the Motive of Redemption, v. 14.
- The Particular Elements of Redemption, vv. 17-19.

The End of Our Redemption

We are now looking at the end of our redemption.

Philemon 1:20, “Yea, brother, let me have joy of thee in the Lord: refresh my bowels in the Lord.”

With this Paul indicates what ultimately would have happened if Philemon redeemed Onesimus and so forgave him: Paul would be “benefited” and “refreshed.” And yet, it doesn’t stop here. For as this entire passage ultimately speaks of the redemption we have received in Christ, we learn the twofold end of the redemption He effected on the cross on our behalf! Notice the telos/end of redemption is beneficent joy.

Beneficent Joy

Philemon 1:20, “Yea, brother, let me have joy³ of thee in the Lord.”

With this phrase we are introduced to Paul’s first pun. The word rendered *joy* here is only used once in the New Testament. In classical Greek this word is a term of commerce having the force of claiming a return on an investment. The effect is paraphrased by one commentator: “Yes, my dear man- now come to think of it, I want some return from you!”⁴ Philemon just got a return on his investment in Onesimus from Paul, now it was Paul’s turn to get a return on his investment in Philemon.

See as Paul offered to repay the debt of Onesimus in verses 17-19, it now was Philemon’s turn to make good on a debt that he owed Paul, the debt of his life. Such is what was behind Paul’s use of this term *joy*.

Now word rendered *joy* here, *oninemi*, sounds familiar because it is the verbal form of the name from which *Onesimus* was derived. And that’s the pun. Accordingly we are left wondering whether Paul here is

- Asking for Philemon to send Onesimus back to Rome that the slave might continue to minister alongside the apostle- “let me have Onesimus from you in the Lord”- or is Paul...
- Simply wanting Philemon- in addition to the blessing this man was to the early church- to be that blessing to the Apostle by forgiving Onesimus. Earlier Paul said...

Philemon 1:5, “Hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints.”

For what is Paul asking here?

The text is not clear and it is most likely how Paul intended it. *Philemon in the matter of your runaway*

³ ονινεμι oninemi

⁴ N.T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon*, TNTC, p. 189.

slave, "Let me have benefit or Onesimus or both from you in the Lord!"

Do you see it?

It's beautiful!

Now what specifically is behind Paul's use of the term *oninemi*?

Again this is an *hapax legomenon*; that is a word used only one time in the Bible. Accordingly we can't look at other places in Scripture to determine the content or nuance of this term. We are left to derive our understanding of this word from the secular Greek writings of Paul's era. When we do that, we discover that this term does not mean "benefit" in the sense of aid or help RATHER it references the internal qualities of joy or delight which results from the beneficent work of others whether directed toward the person or society.

As a middle voice it is best translated as, "Let me be filled with joy/delight/satisfaction from your release of Onesimus in the Lord." This is how the King James Version (KJV) translated the text.

And isn't joy one of the ends of Biblical service in the lives of God's people?

It is NOT necessarily helping another person as it relates to this world. BUT it is establishing, encouraging, and promoting another's personal delight in Christ.

When you get together with another Christian over table fellowship, the focus is not the food, drink, or both. The focus is encouraging one another to

- Love the Lord.
- Serve Him faithfully.
- Delight in God.
- Know the joy of the Lord which is our strength.

Question: Isn't that what Paul taught in Romans?

Romans 14:17, "For the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost."

And that is what Paul is after here from Philemon! *Whatever you decide in this manner, don't forget that to which you have devoted your life: the blessing and so encouraging of the saints. That's what has driven you thus far. May it continue to drive you here.*

So the first end that Paul referenced here was the beneficent joy of the Apostle.

Why should Philemon forgive Onesimus?

That Paul might be filled with Joy!

Yet we have seen that this is NOT the ultimate reference here. This text indeed teaches us about the redemption which Christ affected on our behalf at the cross! In this regard, what do we learn here about our redemption?

Heretofore we have seen that the primary actors in this epistle correspond to the primary actors in salvation. Philemon's position corresponds to that of God the Father in our salvation. Paul's to that of Christ. Onesimus corresponds to that of the child of God.

And so we have interpreted this passage and have been blessed, for example, in contemplating Philemon 17-19 as the statement of Christ on the cross to His Father.

Philemon 1:17-19, "If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself. If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account; I Paul have written it with mine own hand, I will repay it: albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides."

Well, does the same hold true here? Does Philemon 20 reflect Christ's sentiment when it comes to God the Father and our salvation? Did Christ receive delight or a beneficent joy in the forgiveness which the Father granted us?

There is no question that the same holds true here. Speaking ultimately of Christ.

Zephaniah 3:17, "The LORD thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing."

Would you notice the end/telos of the salvation we have received in Christ?

It is the Joy of the Lord! In Christ, you are a source of great delight, rejoicing, celebrating to God! Recall the point of the parable of the lost sheep.

Luke 15: 7, "I say unto you, that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance."

You say, "*I've always understood this to be in reference to the angels.*"

Well then brothers and sisters, you've always been wrong. Paul wrote "For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing" (2 Corinthians 2:15).

When God looks upon us, He beholds His Son in whom He is well-pleased.⁵ As such just as in the Old Testament we read of God taking delight in the soothing aroma which ascended when a true worshipper offered themselves to God by grace.⁶ So now in Christ our redemption is well-pleasing to God such that He ever and always delights in us! Consider this:

Ephesians 1:5-6, "Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will, To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved."

Why did God save us?

Because it pleased Him! Truly, when it came to your salvation, the end/telos/ultimate reason was the

⁵ Compare Matthew 3:17

⁶ Compare Exodus 29:18, 25, 41

Joy of the Lord!

Do you understand this? Do you understand that ultimately you were saved NOT because God couldn't stand the thought of you or me suffering in hell for eternity BUT because it brought pleasure to the Lord?

You say, *"You mean it wasn't on account of compassion that God saved us?"*

That's not what I'm saying, for indeed God is a compassionate and gracious God who in love looked upon our state and groaned!⁷ Rather what this text is teaching is that *ultimately* your existence, which includes your salvation, is for the honor, glory, and pleasure of God in Christ!

Now, at first glance this may seem like bad news as it means that we are not the center of God's plan for the universe. But I'll tell you what, I wouldn't want it any other way.

Let me ask you...

- Have you ever seen parents whose lives revolve around their children?
- Forget what it does to the parent, how detrimental is this to the child?
- Would you really want to live in a universe in which God and His will revolve around you or me?

NO WAY!!!

And yet, because it pleased the Lord to save us and God's pleasure is what is at the heart of all that God is doing here, get this: God's greatest end resulted in our greatest blessing! I love the words of Ray Scott:

*He was the Son of God sent to one and all,
Put on this earth to hang there on that cross.
Born to die, so we could live,
He had the birthday... we got the gift.⁸*

Do you understand what this means?

Ultimately the genesis of your salvation had nothing to do with you! And if that is true, then the working out of your salvation remains separate from you as well. It is not based on what you do, how you do, or why you do it but the good pleasure of God! In other words, it is completely and totally secure! You'll never lose it. You'll never be outside of the good pleasure of God... unless God changed His mind which we know is an impossibility!

Pretty amazing, huh?!

Personal Satisfaction

And yet there is another "end" referenced here when it comes to redemption; personal satisfaction.

⁷ Compare Matthew 9:36-37

⁸ *The Gift* from Randy Travis' "Rise and Shine" album.

Philemon 1:20, "Yea, brother, let me have joy of thee in the Lord: **refresh my bowels in the Lord.**"

Once again we have here another pun. One of the key things which stood out to Paul about Philemon was that the effect of this man's service was bringing refreshment to the saints.

Philemon 1:7, "For we have great joy and consolation in thy love, because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother."

The word Paul used here for "refresh" is the word used in the Septuagint (LXX) in reference to the "rest" which was promised in the Sabbath! Now, in our Study Hour we have been considering the Sabbath as prescribed by God's word. We have seen that this concept of "refreshment" is what the Sabbath is all about.

When God created man, Adam was a lump of dirt until God breathed into him.⁹ Well, it is this "breath" which comes when God redeems a person from their sin.

Acts 3:19, "Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord."

The term used here for *refreshing* is the same word used for *breath*. In other words, just as God's breath made man a living being, transforming him from the dust of the ground to living flesh, so God's breath is that which re-births us and so takes away the heart of stone and replaces it with a heart of flesh.¹⁰

Now the "refreshment" involved in our creation and re-creation (God breathing into man) is the refreshment which God intended the Sabbath to provide.

Exodus 23:12, "Six days thou shalt do thy work, and on the seventh day thou shalt rest: that thine ox and thine ass may rest, and the son of thy handmaid, and the stranger, may be refreshed."

The Sabbath was designed by God to be a day in which the child of God via the worship of God AND the fellowship of the brethren is refreshed, that is, "breathed into by God!"

It is the latter part of this, that is, the refreshment which is derived through fellowship, that is referenced here. Philemon was a vessel in the hands of the Lord by which God encouraged, strengthened, revived, and renewed the faith of the body of Christ. That is how God used this man in the body! And it was this refreshment, this spiritual reviving, that Paul had in mind when he wrote this:

You've lived to refresh the body of Christ; now refresh me! Through self denial you've built up the body of Christ; deny yourself one more time and encourage me.

How only could Philemon do this?

By swallowing hard when it came to the desire for vengeance and the vindication of his good name in Colossae, and forgiving and so releasing Onesimus! This indeed would bring untold blessing to Paul.

⁹ Compare Genesis 2:7

¹⁰ Compare Ezekiel 36:26-28

Such is the second end or telos of the redemption referenced here. And yet when it comes to Christ, the focus here shifts just a little. Can we in any way speak of an unchanging God being “refreshed” in any way? Can this be true of the Lord?

Indeed, speaking of the Sabbath, God said this:

Exodus 31:17, “It is a sign between me and the children of Israel for ever: for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed.”

What took place on the day that God rested from His six-day labor in creating the world?

God didn’t sit back in an easy chair and take a nap! Rather just as God could not swear by anything greater than Himself¹¹ so God cannot delight in any other work than what He Himself has done. Accordingly on that seventh day, God ceased from His work of creation and derived satisfaction from the work of His hands! That is the idea behind God “being refreshed” on the seventh day!

God looked at the work of His hands. And then He marveled within Himself over Himself, “Now that’s good! Very good!” (Genesis 1:31).

It is in this way that we apply the words of our text to Christ. When the Lord accomplished the work of redemption and applied it to our lives, the heart of God in Christ indeed was refreshed. A marveling took place which evoked a sentiment deep from within that said, “Very Good!” And so how is it that our redemption brought refreshment to Christ?

It WASN’T our choice of Christ which revived His heart. RATHER, it was the gazing upon the work of God by which the sinner became a saint. Truly beholding this work, Christ was refreshed! And so we come to the second end or telos of redemption: the personal satisfaction of Christ! Thus just as God looked over creation on that seventh day and said, “Very Good!” today God looks over His re-creation, your redemption, and says, “Very Good!”

From this we conclude that we really are “a piece of work!” We are the marble from which God has hewn a trophy of grace. We are the canvas upon which God has brought forth His masterpiece. We are the strophes in a poem which have been written to highlight the praise and glory of God’s grace. This is why God saved you!

Ephesians 2:10, “For we are his workmanship¹², created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.”

You know the word behind *workmanship* is the word from which we get the word *poem*. As the Lord works His redemption out in our lives, He writes a poem, as it were, a poem which proclaims His glory. And thus we read this speaking of the purpose behind our redemption:

Ephesians 3:10-11, “To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

¹¹ Compare Hebrew 6:13

¹² ποιηματα ποιημα

It was God's plan before the world began to demonstrate His glory by working redemption in you. Thus as the Lord looks upon the work of His hands, indeed the conclusion is, "Very good!" From this we derive our place in the outworking of God's plan!

The Material Used in Art

How many of you have ever seen a famous piece of work in person- like...

- The Mona Lisa?
- Michael Angelo's "David"?
- A Rembrandt?

To stand in the presence of such masterpieces can take one's breath away. And yet have you ever considered it from the perspective of the canvas, clay, or rock upon which or from which the masterpiece arose?

Think of it!

- Blessed canvas upon which Da Vinci applied his trade!
- Blessed rock that was used to demonstrate the greatness of Michael Angelo!
- Blessed paint which Rembrandt used to create his masterpieces!

These materials are always seen, yet they are never seen. For they direct our gaze to their master! That is the end for which God saved you, to highlight the beauty, glory, grandeur, and skill of the Master! Thus as the world looks upon the work of God's hand the angels consider us. God observes our comings and goings. There is the corporate sigh of satisfaction, "Very Good!"

It was for this that you were created... redeemed: The Personal Satisfaction of God!

Now as this is true, what does this mean when it comes to your relationship with God? Is it possible for you to do anything which could obstruct or derail this purpose?

You'd have an easier time holding back the tide! Today, according to God's eternal purpose, the Lord derives satisfaction from His work in you. Pause... wonder... and praise!

About Bethel Presbyterian Church

The Bethel Presbyterian Church Ministry of the Word is published regularly.

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Feel free to visit Bethel Presbyterian Church when in Broomfield, Colorado. Bethel Presbyterian Church meets at Broomfield High School, Eagle (10th Street) and Main, Broomfield, Colorado. The telephone number of the church is 303-469-6912. The worship services are at 9:30 a.m. and 6:00 p.m. each Sunday. Bethel Presbyterian Church is a member of the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

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About the Preacher

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