

## **Born to Set Thy People Free**

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**Rich Nathan**

**December 5 & 6, 2020**

**Comfort & Joy**

**Ephesians 1:7-8**

My wife, Marlene, loves to collect family photos and put them together with music for special occasions. So, when my son, Daniel, married his wife, Melissa, Marlene put together a video of photos from both their lives from the time they were born until their wedding day accompanied by music. For my 50<sup>th</sup> birthday, Marlene collected photos from my life and put them together with music. She did the same thing for our granddaughter, Naomi's, 16<sup>th</sup> birthday.

She not only likes to assemble the photos with music, but she re-watches these music videos over and over again. In fact, if you come over to our house after Marlene produces one of these videos I guarantee that you will be forced to sit and watch the video of my son or me or my granddaughter while Marlene cries again as she revisits the memories of key moments of our lives. No exaggeration, she has watched each of these videos maybe three dozen times. How many of you like flipping through old family photo albums of births and birthdays and vacations and graduations and weddings?

I was thinking about this image of a photo album. Imagine if God, our Heavenly Father, had his own photo album. And imagine if God, our Heavenly Father, invited you and me to sit with him so he could explain some of his favorite photos to us. What subjects would God's favorite photos be about?

Last week, Pastor Julia began our Advent series called "Comfort & Joy". We took this series from the lyrics of famous Christmas Carols. It's so appropriate to draw our Advent series for Christmas Carols because if there's one thing that characterizes Christmas, it is singing! In the opening pages of the gospels what we find repeatedly is that everyone is singing. Jesus' mother Mary sings. John the Baptist's father, Zechariah, sings. The angels that appear to the shepherds sing. From the first Christmas till now, it's impossible to think about Christmas without thinking about singing.

So it was entirely appropriate to us to draw the themes of our Advent messages from songs! Today, my message is titled "Born to Set Thy People Free" from Charles Wesley's famous 18<sup>th</sup> century Advent hymn, "Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus". Before we turn to God's Word, let's turn to our heavenly Father in prayer. Let's pray.

As we begin today, I want you to imagine sitting with God, your heavenly Father. He's got a photo album. He looks at you and he says: My son, my daughter, I want to share with you some of my favorite photos.

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Three pictures of salvation

Our Father opens it up and we see first a photo of a husband and wife beaming as they are renewing their marriage vows. They are both crying. The second photo is of church members hugging each other. The third photo is two business partners with their arms around one another's shoulders. We ask: Father, what is the meaning of these photos?

My son, daughter, I'm showing you pictures of salvation. Salvation is so vast and so infinitely wonderful that one photo or one image can't do justice in communicating what I've done for you in saving you. I'm sharing with you different photos to help you grasp the enormity of the gift of salvation that you have received through your faith in my Son, Jesus Christ. The photos I just showed you are photos of reconciliation.

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Photos of Reconciliation: Images from personal relationships

So God the Father says: You see that photo of the couple who are renewing their marriage vows? That couple was going to get divorced. They had papers drawn up. They became so hopeless about their marriage, they believed the only way forward was to separate. But I intervened. I inspired them to participate in Vineyard Columbus' Begin Again ministry. Through that ministry and my Spirit's power they gained fresh hope and they reconciled.

And the photo of those two church members hugging? They had a falling out – they were angry and estranged. They were even gossiping about one another, but I intervened. By my Spirit, I softened their hearts and turned them back to one another. They forgave each other and they reconciled.

And those folks with their arms around one another? They are business partners who became so alienated and mistrustful of each other that they were going to go to court. But I intervened. Miracle of miracles, they are not only back in business together, but they are best friends again.

My son, my daughter, that's what salvation is like. There was hostility between us because of your sins. But I sent my Son, Jesus Christ, who removed the cause of the enmity that was between us by dying for your sins on a cross.

Son and daughter, we're no longer enemies. We are now friends. Listen, brothers and sisters, if you have put your trust in Jesus – God regards you as his friend. Now, live at peace with God! Don't ever push God, your friend, away. Relate to him as your friend. Spend time with him as a friend. Talk to him as you would your best friend! Live at peace with God!

And then, the Father says he has more photos to share with us. What is that we ask? The Father says: it's a courtroom. You see the man with his arms up and the entire courtroom on their feet cheering? Father, I see that, but what does it mean? This is another picture of salvation. This time it's not reconciliation, it's justification.

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Photos of Justification: Images from a law court

Father, please explain this to us. The Father says: listen, you were charged for repeatedly violating my holy law. The evidence was overwhelming against you. You were guilty, about to be condemned. My Son paid the penalty for you. I accepted my Son's sacrifice and acquitted you of all charges. This man has his hands up in celebration and the courtroom erupted in cheers because he just heard the verdict: Not guilty! Not guilty of all charges! As the Scripture says in Psalms:

Slide Psalm 103:10

<sup>10</sup> he does not treat us as our sins deserve  
or repay us according to our iniquities.

Do you understand, friend, how enormous the grace of God is for us? Almighty God does not deal with us as our sins deserve! Rather, God has dealt with his Son according to what our sins deserve. Do you understand what it means to be justified by faith? Do you live in the reality of your justification? For me personally, one way I try to live out my own justification, many mornings before I get out of bed I try to imagine how God my Father sees me. He looks at me with eyes of love. I rest in his love. I say about myself as I lay there resting in God's love that I am innocent in the sight of God right now. I am right with my Father. Not because of what I did yesterday – how hard I repented – but because of the blood of his Son, Jesus Christ, who paid for all of my sins.

So I want to walk close to God today, not in order to earn his approval, but because I am approved! Now, I want to feel his approval. I want to experience what it's like to be innocent in his sight. Do you know the joy of saying about yourself: I am innocent before God? Is God's verdict of Not Guilty real to you today?

But reconciliation and justification don't exhaust the meaning of salvation. What God has done in saving us is so enormous, that it can't be captured by one or two or even a dozen images.

So the Father says there are several more pictures from my photo album that I want to show you, my son, my daughter. This time, we see men and women and children on platforms in chains. One of the photos has men standing around poking and prodding the children and their moms and dads. These men are looking at their teeth, their arms

and legs. Father, what's going on? And the Father says: these are people who I love, who I created, who are made in my image, but they are being sold as slaves.

In the next photo, there's a kind-looking man taking the chains off of the children and their moms and dads. Father, explain this picture to us. He says: This is a picture of redemption.

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Photos of redemption: Images drawn from a slave market

You see, because of sin, men and women and children have become enslaved to sin and to death. So God says, What I did in saving you is I redeemed you. I bought you out of slavery!

Friends, the most common words for salvation in the Bible are the words redemption or redeemed. These words are used 150 times in the Bible – 130 times in the Old Testament, 20 times in the New Testament.

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The meaning of redemption

So, we read verses like this:

Slide Job 19:25-27

- <sup>25</sup> I know that my redeemer lives,  
and that in the end he will stand on the earth.  
<sup>26</sup> And after my skin has been destroyed,  
yet in my flesh I will see God;  
<sup>27</sup> I myself will see him  
with my own eyes—I, and not another.  
How my heart yearns within me!

Slide 1 Corinthians 1:30

<sup>30</sup> It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.

Slide Ephesians 1:7-8

<sup>7</sup> In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace <sup>8</sup> that he lavished on us. With all wisdom and understanding,

One of the most famous hymns in the history of the church speaks about our redemption and our redeemer. We sing:

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O for a thousand tongues to sing  
my great Redeemer's praise,  
the glories of my God and King,  
the triumphs of his grace!

And in Charles Wesley's Advent hymn that I drew today's message from - "Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus" we read a description of redemption.

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Come, Thou long expected Jesus  
Born to set Thy people free;  
From our fears and sins release us,  
Let us find our rest in Thee.

Israel's strength and consolation,  
Hope of all the earth Thou art;  
Dear desire of every nation,  
Joy of every longing heart.

What does the word redeem mean? To redeem has to do with a financial transaction in which a person buys back something they forfeited or in which a party pays a price to another to obtain freedom. A piece of property has been forfeited and it's bought back. When a person is set free from slavery through the payment of a ransom – that's redemption!

But you see in the Bible, redemption is not just an abstract idea. Redemption is personified through the word "go'el".

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*Go'el* = kinsman-redeemer

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The Personification of redemption

In the Old Testament, the *go'el* was the family member whose duty it was to act on behalf of other family members who were in need. The *go'el* was the family protector, the family defender, the family champion. The *go'el* was the one in the family that the whole family set their hope on. They said: if everything in our lives falls apart, our *go'el*, our kinsman-redeemer, will rescue us. If we can't solve our own problems, if we fall into debt, if we are attacked by people too strong for us, if we find ourselves in slavery, if we blow up our lives by doing something incredibly stupid, our kinsman-redeemer will find us and rescue us.

The *go'el* was the big brother who all of us wish we had. The big brother who doesn't taunt his little brother or sister. He protects them. The *go'el* is the big brother who watches out for his little brother or sister. He beats up every bully who tries to hurt them. The Bible calls Jesus our redeemer, our *go'el*. What it's saying is that Jesus is our big brother. He came on Christmas morning to the place where his little brothers and little sisters were being beaten up and were living as slaves. We are slaves to sin. We are slaves to ourselves and our own needs and wants. We are slaves to God's broken law. We are slaves to death.

But on Christmas morning, God our redeemer entered the world – not as a critical older brother shaking his finger at us saying we totally messed up – but he came to us in love and mercy to rescue us as our family protector and defender and liberator.

The kinsman-redeemer in the Old Testament had lots of different roles. They were the family's advocate in court and the family's avenger if a family member was murdered. But I want to just draw attention to one role of the kinsman-redeemer. They were the family liberator.

Let me explain something. Why do we need Jesus as our *go'el*, as our family liberator?

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The necessity of redemption

According to the Bible, when we human beings draw our first breath, we don't draw our first breath as free men and free women. We come out of the womb as slaves. Every human being is born into a world dominated by powers too strong for us. The power of sin, the power of self, the power of Satan, the power of sickness and the power of death. The Bible says that you and I are born as slaves. Here's what we read:

Slide Romans 7:14-15

<sup>14</sup> We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. <sup>15</sup> I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do.

This describes every one of our autobiographies. People ask if Romans 7 is a personification of the law? Is it instead Paul describing his pre-conversion life or is it the story of every human being? To all of these things, I want to say yes! Romans 7 is every one of our autobiographies. I was born as a slave to sin and so has every one of you! When you drew your first breath on earth, you drew that breath as a slave.

Think about this reality of slavery with me. Let's say we resolve that we are going to break some habit or some addiction. We start off with great gusto but then we run out of gas and go back to the same behavior over and over again. We resolve we are going to be kind. We know what it feels like to be judged and we commit ourselves to stop

judging others. We are going to be merciful and kind to people. But before the day is out we find ourselves becoming critical and judgmental again!

It is this experience of being unable to get free of this slavery to habitual sin that caused the Apostle Paul to cry out:

Slide Romans 7:24

<sup>24</sup> What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body that is subject to death?

His answer is found in verse 25:

Slide Romans 7:25a

<sup>25</sup> Thanks be to God, who delivers me through Jesus Christ our Lord!

Jesus came as our liberator, as our redeemer to liberate us from our bondage to petty jealousies, and life-sapping envy, and soul-deadening bitterness and all the attachment that weigh us down. Can all of us simply acknowledge that in some area or other, we are enslaved? Jesus came to set us free from the power of sin that is too strong for us. Let me ask you this personal question: are you a slave? Are you a slave to having to get the approval of others? Are you a slave to your mother or your father or your spouses or your child or your boss's approval? Are you a slave? Are you a slave to food? To work? You simply can't not work. Are you a slave to jealousy or unforgiveness? Are you a slave to video games or alcohol or drugs or sexual compulsions? Gambling? Simple question: Are you a slave?

One way to tell if you're enslaved is if you try to hide your behavior or if you are really embarrassed to admit it – I envy so and so! I am still so bitter about the way so and so treated me. I secretly do x and I'd be ashamed if anyone knew about it.

So how do we find freedom through our kinsman-redeemer, Jesus Christ?

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The experience of redemption

I want to quickly touch on three things you can practically do to more fully experience the redemption purchased for you by Jesus. First,

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Realize something

If you have put your trust in Jesus Christ as your Redeemer, your Savior, you no longer live under the mastery or the domination of sin.

The Apostle Paul wrote this in the book of Romans:

Slide Romans 6:6-7, 11

<sup>6</sup> For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin—<sup>7</sup> because anyone who has died has been set free from sin.

<sup>11</sup> In the same way, count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

In other words, sin is no longer our master. We're no longer obligated to obey the commands of sin. The power of sin no longer has the authority to force us to obey it. Before Jesus redeemed us, we were powerless to resist sin. Sin was inevitable. The power of sin always defeated us. We were enslaved to sin and our selfish desires. But no longer. Because Jesus defeated sin on the cross, the only power sin and self have on us is the power to lie to us, to say, "You still have to obey me!" But Jesus Christ, our big brother, comes along and says: no, you don't! You can listen to me! Open your heart and allow me to work in your life. Let my Spirit go to work. You can choose to follow me. If you want to experience your redemption you must first recognize this truth: You are released from the power of sin and self! Jesus is your Redeemer.

And second

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Offer something

Slide Romans 6:12-14 (NASB)

<sup>12</sup> Therefore sin is not to reign in your mortal body so that you obey its lusts, <sup>13</sup> and do not go on presenting the parts of your body to sin as instruments of unrighteousness; but present yourselves to God as those who are alive from the dead, and your body's parts as instruments of righteousness for God. <sup>14</sup> For sin shall not be master over you, for you are not under the Law but under grace.

A decision by a Christian to have one foot in the world dominated by sin and self and another foot in the kingdom of God is insane. The reason that some of us are so unhappy, so ineffective, so full of shame and secret guilt is because we are trying to live under two kings at once. The way to stop doing that is to offer your physical body – your eyes and what you watch on television, what you read, what you take in, your mouth and what you speak out and what you take in, your feet and where you go, your hands and what you touch, your mind and what you set your thoughts on, your private parts, all of you. Give your body over to God. If God has your body he has you! And if God has you, you will experience the liberation Jesus bought for you!

Slide

- Recognize something
- Offer something



And finally,

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Connect with someone

Part of the way that we can experience Jesus' liberating power is to join together with other sons and daughters of God who are all pursuing freedom. Freedom is not something we find in isolation with God alone. We find freedom in the company of God's other children. We need the encouragement of our brothers and sisters. We need the prayers of our brothers and sisters. We need the example of our brothers and sisters. We need the accountability of our brothers and sisters. COVID has only deepened our isolation and the bondage that accompanies isolation.

Make a decision today to experience the freedom Jesus was born on Christmas to bring. If you're not currently connected to one of our online groups, here's how you can connect.

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[smallgroups@vineyardcolumbus.org](mailto:smallgroups@vineyardcolumbus.org)

And if you think that it might be helpful for you or a loved one to get more significant support to get free from a specific problem or issue, you can get some confidential information about that by writing to our Support For Life ministry.

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[Dave.Kuta@vineyardcolumbus.org](mailto:Dave.Kuta@vineyardcolumbus.org)

Three pictures of salvation

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