

Introduction

As we return this morning to our stroll through Ephesians, I want to focus on the fascinating comments Paul makes in **1:7** where he says, “*In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace*”. It seems to me that a number of questions arise from reading that verse. Let me give you some: who is “*in Him*”? What is redemption and why do we need it? Why is blood involved? Do we really need “*the forgiveness of sins*”? Those are all perfectly valid questions and over the next few minutes I'll try and provide some answers.

Sin

First of all though we need to talk about something that has almost been forgotten by people and no doubt will soon be left out of the newspeak dictionary, and that is sin.

There are many subjects in this country that we do not mention or discuss. Some topics are shut down by pressure groups with people being “*cancelled*” whilst others are simply ignored. Sin is one of the latter; it is a topic that simply isn't discussed or even acknowledged in the 21st century. Whether we like it or not we are all sinners although there are those who deny that statement as they regard themselves as being “*good people*”. Sin is regarded as old fashioned and no longer relevant as we live in a world where anything goes and we may do whatsoever we like without being challenged or rebuked. Consequently sin is rarely talked about even though it needs to be. We can try and ignore it; we can try and deny it but eventually we will come to the time when we have to acknowledge sin and accept that we are indeed sinners. There are many of course who do deny that they are sinners and hide behind being good people who give to charity and such like whilst at the same time denying that God exists or has any say in their lives. Such people will be found out and as the Apostle John says in his First Epistle, “*If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.*” (**1 John 1:8**) Sin does exist and if we want to get into a right relationship with God before we die it needs to be confessed and paid for. If we ignore it or deny it then we will be punished for our sins on the day of judgement and that punishment will be to spend eternity in hell.

If we want to avoid that then something needs to happen to bring about a change in our relationship with God. We cannot make that change of our own volition since as the prophet Isaiah wrote “*... your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.*” (**Isaiah 59:2**) We need to be reconciled to God and that can only happen through our sins being paid for; that is, our sins somehow need to be redeemed. The big question is, how do we do that; how can our sins be paid for? How our sins are dealt with by God is the subject of today's sermon and I find it rather providential that this sermon should follow the recent Easter services when we were reminded that Jesus died on the cross of Calvary to pay for the sins of all those who accept Him as their Lord and Saviour.

It is only right that we should be reminded that the forgiveness of our sins by God came at a price; a very high price, that price being the blood of Christ. At Easter we remembered that it was Jesus Who died to pay the price to redeem us from our sins.

In Him

Paul opens **1:7** with those words “*In Him*”. To Whom is he referring; Who is he talking about? To answer that question we need to go back to **1:5-6** where the Apostle tells us, “*he [that is God] predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will — to the praise of his glorious grace, which he has freely given us in the One he loves.*” The ESV and NASB both change those final words of **1:6** to say, “*the Beloved*” which I feel carries a far stronger meaning. For example, the same phrase is also used in **Matthew 3:17** where Jesus, having been baptised, came up out of the water and God said of Him, “*This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased.*” (ESV). And then in **Colossians 1:13-14** Paul tells us “*He [that is God] has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.*” (ESV). We see those words “*in him*” used in **1:4**, **1:7** and **1:11** and that can surely leave us in little doubt that Jesus is at the centre of all that is happening with regard to redemption.

Redemption

The next question has to be “*What is redemption and why do we need it?*” As sinners we are separated from God and unable to approach Him or be in His presence. If that situation persists then we will spend eternity in hell with all the suffering that that brings. Many of course don’t worry about such things and are simply happy to ignore God and the consequences of not being reconciled to Him. They are seemingly oblivious or unbelieving of the prospect of spending eternity in hell totally and permanently separated from Him.

On the other hand if our relationship, or lack of it, does concern us then we need to do something to rectify the situation and be reconciled to God. Let me remind you that as sinners we cannot stand in God’s presence in our current sinful state. Something needs to happen to rectify that dire state of affairs. We need a major change in our lives which means that our sins have to be paid for, that is, redeemed, and it is this idea of payment for sin that is behind Paul’s words in **1:7**.

As I have already said there are many people today who don’t believe in sin or accept that they are sinners. There are those who believe that since they are good people they will go to heaven without the need to do anything special. How wrong can people be? We only need to read Paul’s comments in his Epistle to the Romans to see why. The Apostle warns us in **Romans 3:23** that “*... all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*”. Notice that, Paul doesn’t say some have sinned, or only a few have sinned, he makes it quite clear that all have sinned. As sinners we are slaves to sin and are consequently in bondage to sin; the only way to escape from that situation is by paying a ransom. Not only that but as I quoted earlier, the prophet Isaiah tells us, “*... your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.*” (**Isaiah 59:2**) That statement suggests that since our sins have hidden God from us and he will not hear our pleas, something else needs to happen.

The first step has to be a realisation that we do need to do something about our relationship with God. We have to realise that we have a need in our lives; a big hole in our hearts that can only be filled by someone special and that someone special is Jesus Christ. The American theologian and preacher, John MacArthur says this: *“Until a person realises his need for redemption, however, he sees no need for a Redeemer. Until he recognises that he is hopelessly enslaved to sin, he will not seek release from it. But when he does, he will be freed from the curse of sin, placed in Christ’s Body, and blessed with His every spiritual blessing.”*¹ In a recent podcast from the MacArthur Center for Expository Preaching, the narrator Austin Duncan, when talking of Dr Martyn Lloyd Jones and salvation, said of the Doctor: *“There was a growing recognition of his own sinfulness. Salvation is not a mere decision; it is a mysterious act of God’s sovereign grace when He regenerates a sinner.”*²

Realising our need is a good starting point. The next problem to consider is how we do that; how can we be enabled to come before God? Nothing is free and quite simply our sins have to be paid for. We need to repent of our sins, say sorry to God and pay the price to be redeemed. That price however is very, very high and way beyond our normal means. To move forward we need to know what the price is and then for someone to pay that price for us. That brings us to the price and then to the redeemer; that is, the person who paid the price.

The Price

It is clear from **1:7** that price involves the shedding of blood. The question is; whose blood?

The shedding of blood to atone for sins began in Old Testament times. The Day of Atonement was an annual Jewish festival that focussed on the redemption from sin of the Priesthood and the people. This was an annual ritual which needed repeating because of the constant cycle of sin, followed by repentance and confession, followed by redemption which would be followed by sin again and so on. The Day of Atonement was probably the biggest and most significant act of atonement and forgiveness that we can read about in the Old Testament, especially in **Leviticus 16**. It was a very special day in the life of Israel and consequently it was a sacred day in the Jewish calendar and a day when no work was done. The main proceedings took place in the Holy of Holies; that place in the Temple behind the veil or curtain where only the Priests could go. This was such a special ritual that the High Priest would remove his normal fancy robes and wear a simple white garment whilst the ritual itself involved a bullock and two goats. Atonement for the Priesthood would be offered first with the blood of the slaughtered bullock being taken by the High Priest into the Holy of Holies and sprinkled in various places as a sin offering for himself and the Priesthood. Having finished that part of the ritual the High Priest would take some of the blood of the bullock together with the blood of one of the goats and sprinkle that in various parts of the Holy of Holies in order that it too could be cleansed. Having completed all that, the High Priest would take the second goat, place his hands on its head and confess the

¹ MacArthur, John, *MacArthur New Testament Commentary - Ephesians*, Moody Publishers: Chicago, 1986, page 21

² Duncan, Austin T, *MacArthur and the Doctor podcast*, MacArthur Center for Expository Preaching, 08 Apr 2022, heard on 13 Apr 2022

sins of Israel over it before driving it out into the desert where it carried the sins of the people. This second goat became known as the scapegoat hence the expression that we still use today.

This annual ceremony was all well and good but it needed to be repeated every year. We read in **Hebrews 9:13** that, “*The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean.*” (My emphasis) The shedding of the blood of animals may have assuaged the conscience of the priesthood and the people but it could do nothing about cleansing the sins of the heart; those internal, and perhaps hidden, sins. Having this constant cycle of sin and sacrifice did not satisfy God’s needs since none of those taking part in these regular ceremonies were cleansed in their hearts nor were they made righteous.

Something more was needed; something more permanent so as to avoid this constant cycle of sin – repentance – shedding of blood – forgiveness – sin and so on. God had already planned to do something about that situation but only when the time was right; that is, “*when the times will have reached their fulfilment*” (**1:10**). He had a big plan in mind to bring about the redemption of sinners.

The Redeemer

That brings us to deal with the question of who was the redeemer; who was the person to pay this incredibly high price for us? That brings us back to those opening words of **1:7** which read, “*In Him*”. I explained earlier that those words are talking of Jesus Christ; He is the Redeemer Who paid the price on our behalf. Jesus shed His blood by dying on the cross of Calvary to pay the redemption price for our sins. He died willingly and obediently. Shortly before His arrest, Jesus prayed in Gethsemane “*My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.*” (**Matthew 26:39b**) Those words don’t strike me as meaning that Jesus was unwilling to go to the cross or had to be coerced to do so.

The Price

I said earlier that the price of our redemption was high; very high. It involved the shedding of blood of a sacrifice something which obviously required the sacrifice to pay with their life. In Old Testament times the Day of Atonement was an annual event involving the sacrifice of a heifer and a goat whilst similar ceremonies of sacrifice took place regularly throughout the year. However, the blood of animals was not a high enough price which is why decided to send His Son Jesus to shed His blood as the price to be paid. It was Jesus Who shed His blood on the cross which is why Paul reminds us in **1:7** “*we have redemption though his blood*”. It is the blood of Christ that washes us clean from our sins.

In **2:13** Paul reminds us that “*... now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ.*” That phrase “*far away*” refers specifically to Gentiles who at the time were regarded by the Jews as being outsiders and far away from ever being part of God’s family. However, it could also apply to sinners who were also far away from God because of their sinfulness. The writer of Hebrews tells us in **Hebrews 9:14**,

“How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God!” The Apostle Peter shared similar thoughts when he reminded us that our redemption didn’t come cheaply. He wrote, *“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, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.”* (1 Peter 1:18-19) Paul told us in 2:1 that we *“were dead in [y]our transgressions and sins”*. However, as a result of being redeemed we have been made alive and died to sin just as Peter reminds us in 1 Peter 2:24, *“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.”* Peter is making it very clear that this turnaround comes about by the shedding of blood and the death of Jesus on the cross; we no longer live for sin but live for righteousness because of what Jesus did for us.

It is the blood of Christ that cleanses sinners once and for all in a way that the blood of animals could never do. When we come to faith in Jesus as Lord and Saviour we accept that He paid the price for us and that it is by His blood that we are redeemed. The prophet Isaiah prophesied that Jesus would suffer for us when he wrote, *“... he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.”* (Isaiah 53:5) Jesus was flogged; had nails hammered through His hands and His feet; had a crown of thorns rammed onto His head; and had a spear thrust into His side. Each of those caused wounds from which His blood flowed and it is that blood that washes us clean from our sins and because it is the blood of an innocent sacrifice there is no need for it to be repeated; Jesus is the once and for all sinless and innocent sacrifice. When Jesus died on the cross at Calvary not only were we cleansed but our sins were washed away by His blood. Stuart Townend wrote a wonderful song titled *Oh To See the Dawn* and that song has a chorus with these wonderful words: *This, the pow’r of the cross:/Christ became sin for us./Took the blame, bore the wrath:/we stand forgiven at the cross.* As we think back to Easter we would do well to remember that it is by Christ’s dying on Calvary’s cruel cross that we are forgiven.

Salvation

That all builds up to lead us to salvation which happens when we come to faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. Paul tells us in Romans 1:17 that we are saved by faith alone; he actually said *“For in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last, just as it is written: ‘The righteous will live by faith.’”* This is not a new thought from Paul since that latter phrase loosely quotes Habakkuk 2:4b. Justification means being accepted as righteous in God’s eyes and this can only be achieved by our coming to faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. Paul reiterates that thought in Galatians 3:11b where he again quotes Habakkuk 2:4b when he says *“The righteous will live by faith.”* As well as making that great statement that we are saved by faith, Paul also highlights the major role played by God’s grace in our salvation. Notice in 1:8b that we are forgiven by God *“in accordance with the riches of God’s grace”* and that same thought occurs in 2:5b and 2:8 where Paul reminds us *“it is by grace you have been saved”*. Without the grace of God none of this would happen and we would be left as

hopeless sinners with no future whatsoever other than spending eternity in hell; not a pleasant prospect.

Brian Clough, the esteemed football Manager who coached Derby County and Nottingham Forest amongst others, once said “*it only takes a second to score a goal*”. As any football fan will know, that is very true. However, in the life of a Christian it takes less than that to actually receive salvation. It may take time for the message of salvation to get through to us, but once it does and we accept Christ as Lord and Saviour salvation is instantaneous. Salvation, you may be surprised to hear, involves many steps, all of which happen very rapidly and without our necessarily being aware. In the blink of an eye we are redeemed; washed clean from our sins; accepted into God’s family; adopted as His child; filled by the Holy Spirit and receive a gift of the Spirit; all part of God’s glorious grace.

The well known preacher from the mid 20th century, Dr Martyn Lloyd Jones said this of salvation, “*To be saved is to be in Christ; not simply to believe His teaching, but to be in Him, and to be a sharer in His life, in His death, in His burial, in His resurrection, in His ascension.*”³

Conclusion

Sin is the elephant in the room; the subject that is never discussed or even thought about. The big problem is that we do need to discuss it; we do need to think about it; and we do need to do something about it. If we ignore the issue on the basis that it will quietly go away then we will soon find ourselves spending eternity in hell. On the other hand we can do something about it by coming to faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour. We need to be forgiven for our sins and those sins need to be paid for. Jesus paid the price for us by dying on the cross and shedding His blood so that we might be forgiven. In the verse we have just looked at Paul made it very clear that, “*In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins*” (1:7a) If we accept that Christ died for us we are redeemed from our sins and our sins are washed away by His blood.

Time has a habit of slipping away without our really noticing. With that in mind we could soon find ourselves reaching the end of our lives in a poor relationship with God. If you don’t already know Christ as Saviour I urge you to think very carefully about your future and where you will spend it. Seek God’s forgiveness for your sins; accept that Jesus shed His blood to pay for those sins and come to faith in Him as soon as possible.

³ Lloyd Jones, Martyn, *God’s Ultimate Purpose – An Exposition of Ephesians One*, Banner of Truth: Edinburgh, 1978, page 153