

FROM AN EMPTY LIFE

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Presented at Trinity Community Church, San Rafael, California, on Sunday, November 3, 2013

1 Peter 1:18 For you know that God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors.

Peter used the word “empty” to describe a life that is spiritually fruitless, unproductive (even though it might be very religious).

Peter was writing to his fellow countrymen, the Jewish people, who, for all of their backsliding and spiritual diversions, defined themselves by their religion. Their government was God-centered, their culture was God-centered, their families were God-centered, their language was God-centered. But, alas, their hearts and minds were not God-centered. They had all the outward emblems and indicators, but lacked the inward reality.

Their history gave them God’s miracles, the angels, the Scriptures, and the prophets, yet all they could hold onto was the form, without the power—the tree, without the fruit.

While they were too afraid to leave altogether the God who had revealed Himself to them, their hearts and minds were captured by worldly matters: how they measured up against neighboring tribes—in crops and flocks and herds—and how they measured up against their neighbors—by the clothes they wore and the food they ate and the pleasures they enjoyed.

Nothing evil in these things themselves, until they become a distraction from the true riches of life with God—His presence, His blessing, His deliverance, His protection and provision.

No matter how rich, how active, how fun—that is an empty life.

The tragedy is this: if your life is empty, there is nothing you can do for yourself to fill it, except with even more empty activities. Within you, when God is absent, there is no source of supply, only emptiness. So, you can gather more stuff and fill your time with more busyness, but it will not tip the scale even a little bit. Still empty.

It takes something from outside of you, someone from outside, to redeem you—to buy you back—to pay a ransom to save you from yourself (and your emptiness). And the only One who can afford what you’re worth is God.

You see, you may be empty and fruitless, but your potential is astounding—priceless. That’s the way He made you. He made you for Himself. To be with Him. To walk with Him. To talk with Him. To do exploits with Him. To glorify His name. To be like Him.

So, God had to buy you back from your empty life, in order to turn it into a full life.

¹ Peter 1:18 For you know that God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors. And the ransom he paid was not mere gold or silver. ¹⁹ It was the precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God. ²⁰ God chose him as your ransom long before the world began, but he has now revealed him to you in these last days.

The expression “the precious blood of Christ” means not only that Christ shed His blood in death, but that He poured out His very life before God. The ancient ones understood that sacrifice was not merely the killing of animals—the spilling of their blood—but that their life, which, according to Leviticus 17:10, was in their blood, was poured out to God, its Giver. Their LIFE was poured out.

Leviticus 17:10 The life of the body is in its blood. I have given you the blood on the altar to purify you, making you right with the Lord. It is the blood, given in exchange for a life, that makes purification possible.

This is the imagery behind the introduction of Jesus given by John the Baptizer: “*Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*” (John 1:29). The “sinless, spotless” Lamb of God.

God did not ransom you with man-made things, like money, or with earthly things, like silver or gold. He ransomed you with the precious blood of Jesus. Jesus gave His LIFE for you.

The original definition of the word “precious” was rare. The more rare a valued thing was, the more precious it became. Something that is one-of-a-kind is as rare (and precious) as it can get.

And the life of Jesus was no ordinary life to give. Jesus was the world’s only God-man—Almighty God in human form—born to a woman who was still a virgin. He lived a life without sin. The self-appointed religious police dogged His steps for nearly four years, but they could not convict Him of a single sin. They had to hire false witnesses to accuse Him, and in the end, their only charge was that He spoke and acted like God in human skin.

Twenty long centuries have come and gone, and this One man is still the centerpiece of the human race. When we try to sum up His influence we will be forced to conclude that of all the armies that have ever marched or the navies that have ever sailed, of all the parliaments or congresses that have ever sat to deliberate, and all the kings and presidents that have ever ruled... all together they cannot compare with the influence on humankind of Jesus’ one solitary life.

That's why God chose Him—*"long before the world began"*—to be your ransom. Who could better serve the need? Who else would be willing? Who else could pull it off?

When the blood of Jesus ran down that wooden cross to the earth, it was not the blood of one man given in just payment for the death of another, or the blood of a political martyr that was spilled in protest; it was the life of God poured out to redeem the world. The life of God poured out!

That's what it cost to redeem your life. Jesus' cross was not merely the cross of a man, but the Cross of God—that is, God offered Himself for the purpose of bringing back the human race into fellowship with Himself.

Either the cross of Jesus Christ is the only way to explain God, the only way to explain Jesus, and the only way to explain the human race, or there is nothing to it at all. If the human race apart from the cross is all right, then God's act of redemption was a useless waste.

Hebrews 9:22 *For without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness.*

It is a common problem that people do not realize what sin is, they confuse it with sins. Sin is the dark force behind our sins. *Sins* must be forgiven, but *sin* has to be cleansed. The cross of Jesus Christ deals with *sin*.

Do you agree with God's judgment on sin and self-realization on the cross? If so, you will see that His judgment hits the mark and you will agree that God is right. Self-realization and God cannot live together.

Sin is not wrong doing, it is *wrong being*—independence of God. God has undertaken the responsibility to remove our sin on the ground of the Christ's redeeming work. We have all been born with a tragic and deadly warp in our nature: sin. However, that is not what condemns people today. The seal of condemnation comes when a person sees the Light, yet prefers the darkness (John 3:19). Jesus said, *"The world's sin is that it refuses to believe in Me"* (John 16:9). Flee the darkness of an empty life and run to the Light of the cross of Jesus.

2 Corinthians 5:19 *For God was in Christ, reconciling the world to himself, no longer counting (calculating) people's sins against them. And He gave us this wonderful message of reconciliation.*
²⁰ *So we are Christ's ambassadors; God is making His appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, "Come back to God!"* ²¹ *For God made Christ, who never sinned, to be the offering for our sin, so that we could be made right with God through Christ.*

Christ redeemed the world by shedding His blood, by putting the whole passion of the Triune God into it. He did not become somewhat interested and offer His arm and hand to help the

human race up. He entered into the redemptive process completely, leaving nothing of Himself left out.

Am I willing to put my whole self into becoming His? Or am I one who wants to accept His salvation, but objects to giving up my right to myself?

The message is not for me alone. God made His appeal to me through Jesus Christ. Now, He wants to make that same appeal to others through me. By my own conversion I have been authorized by God to pass on this wonderful Message.

We speak on Christ's behalf when we say to others, "*Come back to God!*"

Jesus became the offering for sin—He took our sin upon Himself—so that we could be put right with God. This means more than simply being saved from Hell and made ready for Heaven. We have been freed from a wrong disposition (sin) and have received the very disposition of the Son of God (righteousness) in the person of the Holy Spirit.

Just as we reject atheism, also let us wholeheartedly reject pietism (the "higher" Christian life)—the notion that by extreme prayer and consecration, by giving up many things and intensely devoting ourselves to God, He will give us special attention. We can never get to God in that way. We cannot impress Him like that.

Come to God through Jesus Christ. Then, just *purpose to obey* what He tells you to do. You don't have to be extreme, but you do need to be faithful.

Paul knew what it was to have a full religious life, that was *empty* by God's measure. He advised the church in Philippi:

Philippians 3:2 Watch out for those dogs, those people who do evil, those mutilators who say you must be circumcised to be saved.³ For we who worship by the Spirit of God are the ones who are truly circumcised. We rely on what Christ Jesus has done for us. We put no confidence in human effort,⁴ though I could have confidence in my own effort if anyone could. Indeed, if others have reason for confidence in their own efforts, I have even more!

⁵ I was circumcised when I was eight days old. I am a pure-blooded citizen of Israel and a member of the tribe of Benjamin—a real Hebrew if there ever was one! I was a member of the Pharisees, who demand the strictest obedience to the Jewish law.⁶ I was so zealous that I harshly persecuted the church. And as for righteousness, I obeyed the law without fault.

⁷ I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done.⁸ Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as

garbage, so that I could gain Christ⁹ and become one with Him. I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ. For God's way of making us right with Himself depends on faith.¹⁰ I want to know Christ and experience the mighty power that raised Him from the dead. I want to suffer with Him, sharing in His death,¹¹ so that one way or another I will experience the resurrection from the dead!¹² I don't mean to say that I have already achieved these things or that I have already reached perfection. But I press on to possess that perfection for which Christ Jesus first possessed me.¹³ No, dear brothers and sisters, I have not achieved it, but I focus on this one thing: Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead,¹⁴ I press on to reach the end of the race and receive the heavenly prize for which God, through Christ Jesus, is calling us.

Let's have the same attitude and confidence. Jesus Christ has redeemed and possessed you for a purpose—a good purpose. Make that your goal: to fulfill His purpose. Don't let the past hold you back. In the power of a new life move forward with fresh hope. You don't have to be first; you can even be last—just concentrate on crossing the finish line with your faith in Jesus intact.