

## Our Redeemer God

February 14, 2016

There's a story that I've always loved about a brilliant 19<sup>th</sup>/20<sup>th</sup> century Polish concert pianist named **Ignacy Jan Paderewski**.

- According to the story, **just before** Paderewski was about to walk onto the stage for a major recital,
- a **9-year old boy managed to break free from his mom** and makes a bee-line to that **shiny grand piano** in front of them.
- Apparently, the boy had been taking piano lessons for a few months... so he **fearlessly made his way** up onto that piano bench and began playing his version of Chopsticks.

While this was cute for a moment or two, the sophisticated audience had little patience for this little kid.

- Not only had they had already been waiting a while for Paderewski to come out and play... but, **for a lot of people**, Chopsticks is kind of an irritating song.
- But beyond all that, everybody is **wondering what Paderewski was going to do**.
- **How would the maestro respond** to some 9-year old messing up his concert by playing "Chopsticks"?

Well, suddenly, Paderewski makes his way onto the stage. And to everyone's surprise, instead of being agitated, he simply goes up to the piano...

- **He puts his arm around the kid**, and starts to improvise alongside this kid's version of Chopsticks.
- Now they're playing a duet!

And, according to the story, while playing this spontaneous duet together, Paderewski whispered to the kid...

- *"Keep playing, kid... and I'll keep playing with you; we're going to do something everybody will always remember!"*
- By the time the night was over, Paderewski had played an incredible repertoire of mostly his own classic pieces...

But, the highlight... the moment nobody would ever forget... was his duet playing Chopsticks with a nine-year-old kid...

- *Those amazing few minutes* where the maestro took what seemed like a mess... and turned it into something unforgettable... a masterpiece.
- Now, **whether that story was a bit embellished** or not... I don't really know.
- But one way or another, people are still talking about it. In fact, there was a commercial that came out a few years ago that used this story to highlight their message of "Encouragement".

But, why? **Why does a story like that maintain so much traction?** Just Google "*Paderewski & Chopsticks*" and you find it all over the place.

- I think it's because, in way, **as we all walk thru life ourselves**, we're all kind of playing *Chopsticks*...
- in one way or another, **we're all kind of making a mess of things**.
- And we wonder... "*Will anybody come and set it all right?*"

You see... at one time or another, we all find ourselves in that place where life is just not turning out the way we anticipated.

- It's kind of a mess, and, truthfully, **we don't always know how to fix it**. So, consciously or unconsciously, we ask ourselves...
- Is there somebody out there who's *not only* willing *but* able to help me... Someone who's willing and able to pay whatever price is necessary to straighten things out?

Truth is, guys... if you want to know why I'm here this morning... why I give my life to this...

- It's because, like you, **I know the One person who was *not only* willing**... but who actually did pay the ultimate sacrifice...
- Someone **whose Amazing Grace moved Him** to lay down His own life to redeem a wretch like me.

And so, this morning, on St. Valentine's Day, I would like to talk about Him! I want to talk about our loving, Redeemer God!

- And to do that, I'd like to turn to one of my favorite parts of Scripture... way back to the beginning of Genesis...

- Because, as we look through these early pages of Scripture, we see this **pattern where human beings keep messing things up...** like **one never-ending encore** of *Chopsticks*.
- And yet, in each one of those circumstances, **we discover a loving Father doing something redemptive...**
- something that **turns an incredible mess** into something so much better.

You **probably know how it all starts...** on the sixth day of creation, God creates his masterpiece... the crown jewel of His creation...

- Not the stars or oceans or mountains... but a human being. And to that human being He gave a command:
- ***"And the Lord commanded the man, 'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it, you will certainly die.'"***
- Now, **as familiar as people are** with this passage, there's also a lot of misunderstanding.

You see, the idea here is **not** that **if the man eats from the Tree of the knowledge of good and evil**, that he will gain moral discernment!

- It's not that humanity would suddenly know right from wrong; good from evil! Moral discernment is a real good thing!
- The idea in this story is that **in eating from the tree**, the man would be saying, *"I can now decide what is good and evil apart from God. I don't need to worry about making my life fit in with the way things are designed to be. I can be my own god."*

Amazingly, in all of this, God is allowing man the opportunity to choose... *"Do you want to live in community with Me? Do you want Me to be your God, or do you want to be your own god?"*

- Now keep in mind, **when God initially gives the command** about eating from the *tree of the knowledge of good and evil*, **only the man** is present.
- But, when the **tempter** comes (embodied by the serpent), he comes to who? To the woman.

And, **he comes to the woman NOT because she was inferior or more vulnerable...**

- But because, *unlike Adam*, what she knew about God's command to not eat of the tree **came to her second hand**.
- The **obvious assumption** is that Eve received her info about what God has said about not eating from the tree from Adam.
- Now, that leads me to a question for the women in the room:

How many of you have had the experience where a man has failed to fully recount some important detail to you?

- Perhaps you asked him how his day went... to which he thoughtfully replied, "Ok." Ever experience anything like that?
- So, the **serpent goes after** the one *who wasn't directly present* to hear what God had said... **and a long conversation** ensues.
- And in this conversation, what the serpent does is *plant doubts* in her mind **whether God can really be trusted**.

So the serpent asks, "*Did God really say you can't eat from any tree in the garden?*" But, did God ever say that they couldn't eat from *any* tree?

- No, it was just *one* tree! He totally misquotes what God has said.
- You see, *part of what Satan's after in tempting us* is to get us to consider whether God really does have our best interest at heart...
- *And... "If I can't trust that God has my best interests at heart, then I'm going to have to look out for myself. I can't put my trust & faith in God. It wouldn't be wise or safe to abandon my life, my well-being, to God."*

Well, eventually the woman, Eve, buys into this... and eventually eats from the tree, giving, as we're told "*... some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened.*"

Again this is the way temptation works. There is a value... there is something I believe... and I'm tempted to violate it.

- That temptation looks so good, so sweet. But **when we cave into it**, the guilt and shame is anything but sweet!

- It's like a fly who's utterly attracted to that beautiful bright blue bug-light... only to discover its fatal ZAP!

You see, in the fall, something happens to human nature... and that "something" is **captured in a word** we don't use too often anymore.

- It's the word "depravity." Like glass is predisposed to shatter, like nitroglycerin is predisposed to explode... *because of the depravity* given birth at the Fall...
- All of humanity... the crown jewel of Creation... you and I... we're **all predisposed to trust in ourselves** instead of God...

Predisposed to do wrong. So much of the mess in our world today **comes out of our utter depravity.**

- So, God creates everything perfect. And yet, the **humanity** whom He created in His own image, **decides they would rather be their own god.**
- And now, **where there was such perfect intimacy**, there's **alienation** and **shame** and **hiddenness.**

In **Genesis 3:8**, for example, God comes looking for Adam in the Garden... "*Adam, where are you?*"

- Again, we're learning about the nature of God. God isn't confused; He doesn't lack information. So, then why does He ask Adam a question?
- He's inviting Adam to interact with Him. He's inviting him to come clean. "*Adam, where are you?*"
- He's showing Adam that *even though I know you've messed up... I'm still here... I still love you.*

Adam says, "*I heard You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.*" God says, "*Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree?*"

- Adam then reflects on the importance of taking personal responsibility for his actions.
- He summons up all his courage, and he said, "*It was the woman...*"
- Suddenly, along with hiddenness and shame, **blaming** enters into the human experience.

- You think they'll be the last married couple ever to blame each other?

But Adam takes it one step further. He doesn't just blame the woman... He says, *"It was the woman YOU gave me.*

- *I mean, whose idea was that woman anyway? Was it my idea? No, it wasn't my idea at all."*
- Of course, the blaming doesn't get them very far.

They have to leave the Garden of Eden, and they settle, we're told, **east of Eden.**

- Now, for the early Israelites, this had particular meaning.
- You see, **while Israel was bounded to the west** by the Mediterranean Sea, **the east is where their enemies were.**

The east is a place of **danger & alienation**. But, before they do settle there, east of Eden, God makes a promise.

- In **Genesis 3:15**, God promises that the day is coming when there will be an Offspring... One born of a woman.
- He says, ***"The serpent will strike at His heel, but He will crush the serpent's head."***

In other words, **one day**... Satan, temptation, guilt, and death are all going to meet their match. They don't get the last word!

- The early church understood early on how this promise of Genesis 3:15 was ultimately fulfilled in Jesus.
- In **Galatians 4:4-7**, Paul writes... ***<sup>4</sup>But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. <sup>5</sup>God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children. <sup>6</sup>And because we are his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, prompting us to call out, "Abba, Father." <sup>7</sup>Now you are no longer a slave but God's own child. And since you are his child, God has made you his heir.***

That first prophetic mention of Jesus (*there in Gen. 3:15*) speaks to God's heart to **never abandon** the creation He loves so much...

- It speaks of **His determination** to turn an incredible mess into something that could restore intimacy.
- It's another **redemptive note** of God's grace.
- But there in that Garden, **fallen humanity needed more than a promise.**

Standing there in their nakedness and shame, we're told, "*The Lord God made **garments of skin** for Adam and his wife and clothed them.*"

- Such a tender little detail in this story. **The God who creates the heavens and the earth now becomes a tailor...** He makes them a set of clothes.
- Talk about designer labels. Can you imagine having that set of clothes in your closet? "*Made by God.*"

Even after they sinned against Him... He's here covering them... clothing them... so they can come into His presence without shame.

- But you notice something in verse 21... He made for them ***garments of skin.***
- For the first time in history, blood is shed. **Innocent blood is sacrificially shed so their shame might be covered...**
- So their fellowship with God could be redeemed.

But as we're beginning to see, redemption comes with a cost. God is setting the stage.

- Even after all this, Adam & Eve must have wondered after the fall... *Will God continue His plan to fill the earth with human beings now that sin has entered the picture?*
- Or, would it only be the two of them until they die? Did they mess it up so badly that the dream is dead?

Then one day, **something happens to Eve.** She feels a little **nauseous.** She starts to get a little **moody.**

- She has these strange **cravings** for things. This is all new; this has never happened before.
- Adam says, "*Eve, you putting on a little weight? Your old garments don't fit. God's gonna have to kill a much bigger animal to make something that fits you now!*"

Then, in **Genesis 4:1** we read, "[And Eve] *gave birth to Cain. She said, 'With the help of the Lord I have brought forth a man.'*"

- I love this! She **doesn't say anything** about her husband's part in all this.
- Sure... **you and God did all the work...** well... what about me?! What am I? Chopped liver?!
- I suppose it's just part of the burden we have to bear as men.

But still... for Adam and Eve... every time they look at Cain, they're reminded of God's grace. He's a little bundle of redemption.

- God didn't let their sin mess up the dream. He's a Redeemer. Then another son comes along named Abel.
- Did Cain and Abel get along pretty well? Not so much. Cain is consumed by envy and hatred.
- We see the heart of a Redeemer God again. **God comes to Cain** before Cain does something wrong.

Have you ever confronted someone just before they're about to do something dumb... but they just won't listen to you?

- Have you ever had that experience? Well, imagine being God!
- In the very beginning of Genesis, we're told God just speaks things into existence. Whatever God says, happens.
- That's how creation gets started... He just speaks the stars into place. But **now He comes to Cain...** and Cain is contemplating doing something very bad.

**God speaks,** "*Cain, don't hate your brother. Cain, sin is crouching at your door. It wants to master you... don't let it. Cain, **let there be love.***"

- And there is not love. Now God speaks, and it is not so. In fact, Cain goes ahead and kills Abel.
- Now the depravity **that was given birth inwardly** at the Fall is **expressed outwardly** through jealousy, rage, and murder.
- So we're told that "***Cain went out from the Lord's presence and lived in the land of Nod, [Guess where?] east of Eden.***"

Having now killed Abel, Cain is now afraid that someone might want to kill him. So God places upon him what becomes known as the **mark of Cain**... this kind of mysterious mark...

- **that's meant to warn** anyone against bringing any harm against Cain. Amazingly, even now, God is **protecting** Cain.
- Maybe when people see this mark, maybe when people hear this story, maybe they will learn.
- Maybe brothers won't hate each other. Even now, God is **working to bring something good** out of something really, really bad. But things keep getting worse.

**Genesis 6:11**, "*Now the earth was corrupt in God's sight and was full of violence.*" **And God saw that it was ruined.** This language is so rich here.

- The phrase "*and God saw*" echoes what we read in the opening chapters of Genesis when God was creating.
- "*And God spoke, and it was so.*" **And God saw that it was good.** **Everything God sees**, it was good.
- Only this time God looks, and what He saw was **not** good. God saw that **it was ruined**.
- Imagine how painful this was to God... "*The (whole) earth was corrupt... and full of violence.*"

I mean, not long ago, God was showing up each morning to be with Adam and Eve... **walking together** each day in perfect intimacy. No more.

- You think about your heart and your life... about somebody you love. They mess up, they **head down a self-destructive path**...
- They make decisions that you know will *not only* hurt them... but those around them... and your heart's just broken for them.

Then you think about the heart of God who loves each of us more than we could ever imagine... who has experienced this countless times over.

- How much pain must be in the heart of God? "*The (whole) earth was corrupt... violent!*"
- *Was this it?* Was this the final straw... would this be the end of God's dream of community with the humanity He loves so much?"

For a moment in time **it seemed that way** as God sends a devastating flood... but He begins again with a man named Noah.

- One more time **He walks out onto the stage of history** and **rather than simply throwing us off** that stage,
- He **sits down and begins turning it into something so full of grace and love.**

God sees all this violence on earth. But instead of **withdrawing** from it... instead of **removing** it or **destroying** it...

- God binds Himself to the human race now by making a promise... a **covenant with Noah** and all humanity after him.
- He says, *"I'm going to make a sign that will remind you of this covenant."*
- Anybody remember the sign of the covenant He gives to Noah? It's the rainbow.
- Maybe when people see the rainbow, maybe they'll remember the covenant.

Maybe they'll think about what a good thing it is to be alive. Maybe they'll turn from violence and corruption.

- But they don't. Things get worse. **→ This is Genesis 11, "As the people moved eastward" (this is the drift of the human race continually away from God, away from community, away from what God wanted)...**
- *they found a plain and settled there. And they said to each other, 'Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly.' They used bricks instead of stone, and they said, 'Let us build ourselves a city with a tower that reaches to the heavens so that we may **make a name for ourselves** and not be scattered over the face of the earth.'*

All of this language is loaded. God had said back in Genesis 1 that He would create human beings **in His image** and make them to be **fruitful and multiply** and have **dominion over all the earth.**

- Now they don't want to do this; Instead, they're gonna collect in one place.
- They don't want to honor the name of God; Instead, they want to **make a name for themselves.**

- *"It's all about me and my life; I'm not going to bow my life to God. I know better."*

In fact, in building this monument, this tower to themselves, we're told here in Genesis 11 that they were wanting to ***"be like God..."***

- Isn't it amazing that at one time in history, people actually allowed mere human intelligence and skill to make them feel arrogant and superior... even toward God?
- In a way, the writer is ridiculing human arrogance here.
- Remember before how the writer says they used **brick instead of stone?**

Well, in ancient Babylon, where they were building this ***"Tower of Babel,"*** they constructed with brick... whereas Israel used stone.

- So, which do you think will last longer... stone or brick? Stone does! All the readers of Genesis would have gotten that immediately.
- It's the writer's way of saying, *"They think they're building like God; they don't even know enough to build with stone."*

It's funny... because the people said, in **verse 11:4**, *"Let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that **reaches to the heavens.**"*

- But apparently man couldn't quite make it *"to the heavens,"* and so, as we read in **verse 5** that *"the Lord **came down** to see the city and the tower that the men were building."*
- You see, God knew that if the human capacity for evil and violence goes unchecked, they will literally destroy themselves.
- **So God** scattered them over all the earth.

That's the end of the **prologue** in Genesis... the end of chapter 11... sort of the "introduction" to the rest of the Bible.

- For the readers of it, they would see this kind of pattern where there's **this fall**, but then God does something redemptive.
- Then there's **more fall**, but God does something redemptive. There's **more fall**; God does something redemptive.

But **then there's Babel**, and you come to the end of the chapter 11, and then there's nothing... and you wonder...

- *Have we gone too far? Will God finally give up on us? Is this the end? Is there any turning back?*
- *Have I messed up so bad that there's nothing that can be done? Are things so shattered that there's no hope?*
- See all of this is prologue to chapter 12... an introduction **setting the stage for the rest of the Bible** starting in chapter 12.

In Genesis 12, God does the unexpected. From this sea of humanity, He takes this ordinary man named Abram... and gives him a new name and a new purpose.

- He says, *"We're gonna do things a little differently now. I'm going to start a new people called Israel... and I'm going to bless them."*
- *And through them, all the other peoples will be blessed. You see, the dream isn't dead. I'm going to redeem the human race."*
- And with that comes this promise... **over and over again...** *"I am the Lord... I will redeem you with an outstretched arm. You will be My people... and I will be your God."*

Knowing how God has loved His people through the centuries, Job was able to cry out, in spite of all he was going through, *"I know my Redeemer lives."*

- You see, that's what I need in life. I don't need a little more **intelligence** (well, maybe I could!)...
- I don't need a little more **cleverness**. I don't need a little more **strength**. What I need is a Redeemer...
- because I'm like Adam and Eve... like Cain and Abel... like humanity of old, I built a Tower of Babel *with my own life*.

And yet, ultimately, the whole point of that prologue... those first eleven chapters of Genesis...

- is to remind us that **God hasn't given up** on anybody yet.
- That **God would never abandon** the humanity He created and loves so much... and that **one day**, in the fullness of time, He will send a Redeemer.
- But here's the thing... **a price must be paid for redemption**.

I know I've asked you this before but let me ask you a little trivia question: What do you think was the **largest, single publication available in the US** in the 1960s?

- What **book, magazine, published product** of whatever kind that was the biggest publication of the 1960s... just take a shot at it.
- Ok... it wasn't a book; it wasn't a magazine. It was actually a catalog... a catalog published by a company called... Not Sears, not Penney's. Ok...for the sake of time... let me tell you.

It was published by a company called **Sperry & Hutchinson, better known as S & H. Anybody remember S & H green stamps?**

- Believe it or not, S&H actually printed three times more stamps than the Post Office.
- In fact, they published enough catalogs to more than circle all the way around the globe.
- Basically, you'd save these stamps in a book until you had enough to buy a toaster... or just about anything.
- All you had to do was to take your stamps to a special place called a... **redemption center**.

Well did you know that S & H is still around? *Greenpoints.com* You can go online... they offer green points mostly online.

- But you can still redeem your S & H green stamps.
- No kidding, it's not too late if you find some in the attic or something.
- S & H is still in the redemption business after all these years.

With **endless patience**... at **infinite cost** to Himself, our **God has been waiting** since the beginning of history...

- watching, pursuing, aching, loving... until one day, in the **fullness of time**, there came to this earth, an Offspring...
- a Son of Eve who would crush the Serpent and restore humanity back into the intimacy of the Garden.
- And, after some time, God would send Him to this ultimate place of redemption called Calvary.
- For *who He was* and *what He was prepared to pay*... He could've had anything.

In fact, there in the desert, facing forty days of temptation, Satan offered this Him **all the kingdoms** of this world.

- Yet, this Lamb of God, the ultimate sacrifice sent to cover the shame and guilt of humanity once and for all...
- **Was only interested in ONE thing...** you... and me. *“I’ve always loved you... I’ve never given up on having our walking together again in intimacy like I always created you to live.”*
- You see, guys... this is your story and my story. It’s how our story fits into our Loving Father’s story!

Paul writes in **Colossians 1:13**, ***“For He has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and has brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.”***

We could **never live long enough** to have worked our way **out of our depravity** and **back into the intimacy** that we were created to share with God in the Garden.

- But, because of His **love**... because of His **Grace**... because of the **Cross**, He has **purchased** our redemption for us... with His own life.
- In **Romans 3:23-24**, Paul says, *“For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God; Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”* □ □

In **Galatians 3:13**, we’re told that *“Jesus set us free from the curse of the law.”* In other words, He set us free from the effects of the Fall... the depravity, the guilt.

- But **we knew going all the way back to Genesis 3:15**, that this redemption would **come at a cost**.
- We saw that foreshadowed as blood was spilt for the first time in order to cover the shame of humanity as God forged garments for Adam and Eve.
- Why would God do this? Because He is our Redeemer God who never stopped loving us.

You see, a redeemer is someone who **buys back** something that was once theirs. Someone who comes to **save, rescue, or deliver** someone out of trouble by **paying a great price** for their freedom.

- Guys... if we really take the time to look, we would see that the **whole story of human history** is really His-Story... the story of a powerful & gracious Redeemer God...
- **who takes messes** in people's lives and **stuff that's shattered** and **stuff that's broken** and **stuff that nobody can fix**... and turns them into something so much better.

Our Savior is a Redeeming God whom we can trust even through the darkest times. No one understood that more than Job.

- And yet, again, through his suffering, he's still able to say, in **Job 19:25-27**, *"But as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and he will stand upon the earth at last. <sup>26</sup> And after my body has decayed; yet in my body I will see God! <sup>27</sup> I will see him for myself.  Yes, I will see him with my own eyes.  I am overwhelmed at the thought!"*

God says, *"You bring it to Me. You bring it to the redemption center, and I'll redeem it. I paid a price; that's who I have been from all eternity, that will never change."*

- That's our God! **There is no story like the story of redemption.**
- Truth is, I'm not sure we'll ever grasp this side of heaven, just what it means to call Jesus our Redeemer.
- I mean... what a mess our world is in. It's not the world God created for us... It's not the world we were meant to live in.

As a **Holy, Righteous God**, He called Adam and Eve to a place East of Eden... but, as a **Loving, Gracious Father**,

- What do you suppose He did next? After calling them out of the Garden, He left the Garden after them... He pursued them.
- And amazingly, He's spent the rest of human history working to redeem us back into the intimacy of the Garden.

And so, **in the midst of this giant mess we've created for ourselves**, He looks at the mess, and He says,

- *"I will cover their shame. I'll love them... I'll be their Pursuer God... I will make a promise... that I'll never leave you or abandon you. I'll never give up on you.*
- *That, throughout your life I'll be your Redeemer God. I'll pay the ultimate price."*

There's an old song that says, *"Because He lives, I can face tomorrow. Because He lives, all fears are gone. Because I know who holds the future. And life is worth the living just because He lives."* □ □

- **Guys... no matter what challenges and storms may come your way, just remember that Jesus is still your Redeemer...**
- That no matter what **setbacks you may experience**, no matter what **pain you may be suffering** from right now... **don't let yourself forget** that Jesus is still your Redeemer.

No matter what **disappointments** you may have, no matter what is **weighing so heavy** on your soul...

- Don't let yourself forget... **don't let yourself doubt...** that Jesus is your Redeemer... and that your Redeemer lives.
- And if your Redeemer lives, than you can know that your **troubles won't last forever.**

That, **if your Redeemer lives**, that means **He's still on the throne.** And if He is still on the throne, that means **He is still Sovereign and Powerful...**

- And, if He's still Sovereign & Powerful... and Because He loves you more than you could imagine...
- than **you really can face tomorrow...** You can face even your fears... because **you know who holds the future!**

And **not only** can you face tomorrow... but you can make a difference today in the lives of those around you.

- You can be an extension of our Redeemer God to them...
- Loving people the way Jesus loves you... **extending His mercy & grace** the way He's extended them to you.

You can embrace someone around you who's made a terrible mess of things... that person sitting alone at the piano...

- And, through your love for them... **introduce them to the One who can turn a messed up version of Chopsticks into a Beethoven Symphony.**
- And, because of you... they'll understand **just who holds the future...** a Redeemer God... Jesus.