

## THE GREATEST PURCHASE

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EVER MADE! (1 CORINTHIANS 6:20; 7:23)

After all conquests made by the armies of Caesar, long lines of chained captives were taken to Rome either to become slaves or to be executed. Notorious enemies were put to death, but others were sold at auctions. During the early history of the Jewish people, there was a law which enabled a blood relation to redeem, rescue or deliver any kinsman who had become a slave. The slave-market was an establishment recognized throughout the ancient world. The citizens of Corinth were aware of this fact, for Roman warships were often seen in which prisoners worked in the galleys. Captives were sometimes seen marching to the ships which took them to perpetual bondage. Slavery has been abolished, but it is difficult to forget the ruthless traders who terrorized the tribes in Africa. The conscience of the world was aroused by the helpless people who were compelled to leave their homeland to become the slaves of strangers. This practice was known to the Corinthian people; they understood clearly what was meant when Paul said: "For ye are bought with a price."

A Terrible Predicament sold under sin"  
(Rom. 7:14)

The expression "Ye were bought" suggested a slave market where unfortunate captives sat dejectedly. Corinth was an infamous city in which corruption was predominant. Prior to the arrival of Paul, people did whatever they desired, and repentance was unknown. The missionary constantly reminded his readers that Christianity provided a salvation which was unobtainable apart from Jesus of Nazareth. Condemned by law, and helpless to resist, they were facing a future without hope. Chains reminded them of their bondage, and fear of the future revealed the uncertainty of their souls. They had been ". . . without Christ. . . having no hope, and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12). The plight of a slave might be summarized under three headings. Without help; without hope; without happiness.

(1) Without help. Slaves had no friends; they were strangers

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far from home. Some had been warriors, but their resentment continued as they awaited their fate. Young women faced an ignominious future. Rich and lustful men stared at the maidens, and it was easy to understand their thoughts. The captives were helpless as corks tossed on an ocean. They had become victims of circumstances beyond their control. Prior to the auction, prospective buyers examined the slaves who had lost interest in living. It was not important to whom they would be sold; the future could only be a nightmare of horrors. Men would feel the lash of whips, and the women would suffer indignities worse than death.

(2) Without hope. It was inconceivable that their night of despair could be followed by a radiant dawn. They were outcasts who resembled lepers banished from society; they had no choice in deciding their future. When slaves considered these things, their outlook remained bleak. The possibility that a kindly benefactor might purchase them was beyond comprehension. They believed they were destined to remain in bondage until they died and were forgotten by everybody.

Paul was a great preacher, he knew how to apply these details to the Christians in Corinth. They had lived sinful lives, ignoring the consequences. Evil passions subjugated their souls; they were addicted to evil, and had no deliverer. Constantly,

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they yielded to the cravings of sin, and everything indicated this would continue until death. Beyond that event, the Corinthians were unable to see. They would die and be buried, and enter eternity unprepared for what might be there. If the slaves had been wealthy, they might have purchased their freedom – but they were penniless. Had they been exceedingly strong, they might have snapped their chains – but they were weak. If they had influential friends in Caesar's palace, they might have been assisted in their quest for liberty, but they were strangers in a strange land; they were alone and helpless.

(3) Without happiness. The ancient Hebrews would have appreciated the predicament of people to be sold. Some Jews had been captives in Babylon where they were requested to sing some of the songs of their homeland. The psalmist wrote: "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept,

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when we remembered Zion. We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof. For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us required of us mirth, saying, Sing us one of the songs of Zion. How shall we sing the LORD's song in a strange land?" (Ps. 137:14). Esau was unable to sing after he had exchanged his birthright for a bowl of lentil soup. He became a slave to his appetite (Gen. 25:33-34 and Heb. 12:16-17). Simon Peter could not sing after he had denied his Lord. He was a slave of his fear, and went out into the night to weep bitterly (Luke 22:62). Judas would have been completely out-of-tune had he tried to sing after betraying the Lord; he forged the chains which bound him eternally (Matt. 27:3-5). A slave market was a night without stars!

A Tremendous Price... "Christ... gave himself a ransom for all" (1 Tim. 2:6)

The market place of the world was filled with excitement; even the prisoners wondered what was happening. The prospective buyers were in their places; the auctioneer was waiting to begin the sale; the fate of the captives was about to be decided. Then, suddenly, a Stranger entered the auction room. He was different from all others; He was calm; His appearance was dignified, and His face displayed eagerness to participate in the bidding. If imagination may be permitted to describe the scene, then if one asked: "Sir, do you wish to purchase a slave?", the Stranger calmly replied: "No, I have no desire to buy a slave. I wish to purchase all of them." Then someone said: "Sir, all the money in the world could not make such a purchase." "That is correct, but I possess everything. Nevertheless, I have no desire to continue their slavery; I wish to set them free." If Paul ever described that fascinating scene, he finished with the announcement: "And the Stranger's name was Jesus, and 'If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed'" (John 8:36).

Four of the happiest years of my life were spent in South Africa where I was the national evangelist of the Baptist Churches. I preached to white people, Indians, Africans and the wonderful colored people of Cape Province. As I mingled with

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these people I was taught many things. I was intrigued by the native custom of buying wives. Within the African culture, a man is required to purchase his wives, and the price for each one is ten cows, plus one fat cow – as a bonus gift for the mother-in-law. One day I talked with the native servant of a Baptist minister in Natal. I said: "Sam, do you plan to be mar-

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ried some day?" He replied, "Yes, Baas, I sure do." "How much will you pay for your wife?" "Ten cows, Master—plus one extra for her mother." "Sam," I continued, "What if you married the daughter of a minister. How much would that cost?" "Twelve cows—plus one." Then I asked: "What if you wanted to marry the daughter of a chief? How much would you have to pay then?" Suddenly, the fellow's eyes rolled upward as he answered: "Oh, Baas, fifty cows—plus one." That delightful African laughed when I said: "Sam, you pay for your wife before you get her." "That is so, Master." "We white people are different. We get our wives for nothing, but we pay for the rest of our lives!" His eyes shone when he said: "Yes, Baas; yes, Bass, yes, Baas."

Afterward I said: "Sam, I know somebody else who had to buy his bride, but He gave much more than ten, twelve, or even fifty cows. Do you know His name?" Samuel's eyes became pools of delight when he replied: "Yes, I know His name. Jesus gave all that He had— even His precious blood." I knew then that Samuel was another who had been "bought with a price!" The biblical doctrines of redemption are so challenging, that even the greatest thinkers have been unable to exhaust their meanings, but three simple headings might explain some of their mysteries.

(1) The Compelling Task. The redemption of kinsmen was one of the best known Jewish laws. It was restricted to members of a family. No person could demand the release of a slave unless he were a member of the slave's family (see Leviticus 25:47-49). That law presented problems when God desired to redeem sinners. The Almighty did not belong to the human race; He was Divine; people were human. Therefore, it was considered necessary that Jehovah, in some strange way, would become "bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh." This was

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accomplished when through the Incarnation the Son of God was made in the likeness of men. Only then did He become eligible to participate in the redemption of sinful people. His action speaks eloquently of the motivating reasons behind the decision to attempt what He did. The laying aside of His glory; the descent to earth, the ensuing temptations and suffering were overcome by the greatness of His resolve to complete what He commenced. After considering all these facts, the poet wrote: "How greatly Jesus must have loved us." The apostle John wrote: "For God so loved the world (John 3:16). Divine love is immeasurable. The love of Christ overcame every challenge made against it.

(2) The Completed Transaction. Within an eastern slave-market the liberation of a slave was visible for all to witness. When the worth of the human produce was established, the redeemer or purchaser paid whatever was required, and from that moment ownership was transferred from the seller to the buyer. It is difficult to interpret these facts. For example, the question might be asked: "To whom did Christ pay the redemption requirements?" When writing to Timothy, Paul said: "Who (Christ) gave himself a ransom for all . . ." (I Tim. 2:6). The New Testament teaches that the Lord redeemed us with His blood—but to whom was the debt paid? Many affirm that since sinners had broken the laws of God, the debt was dischargeable to the Almighty; that appeasement was made whereby sinful man could be exonerated and pardoned. Others believe that since men had become the slaves of Satan, the purchase price was the legal way by which even the prince of evil had to acknowledge God was justified in demanding the release of

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captives. Theological arguments could continue indefinitely, but the fact remained that what Christ accomplished through His death was the guarantee that all who know the power of His redeeming love will never again become slaves.

At the end of the Battle of Britain during World War II, Winston Churchill declared: "Never have so many owed so much to so few." His statement could be paraphrased to read: "Never have so many owed so much to one Man—Who died to bring us to God." Christ gave all that He possessed to set us

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free. This truth was expressed through His parables. He said: "And again the kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field; the which when a man hath found, he hideth, and for joy thereof goeth and selleth all that he hath, and buyeth that field. Again the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchant man, seeking goodly pearls: Who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had, and bought it" (Matt. 13:44-46).

(3) The Commanding Triumph. The writer to the Hebrews wrote: ".... Jesus the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Heb. 12:2). Perhaps even slaves found it difficult to comprehend the importance of the transaction completed before them. The transfer of ownership could mean going out of the frying pan into the fire! The second master might be worse than the first. Yet, if and when the new owner offered unlimited freedom and sufficient help to assist the liberated slave in his new experience, the redemption suggested became unbelievable. How could any man clad in fine garments be considerate to a slave dressed in rags? Why should a rich man desire to provide sustenance for a beggar? Jesus said: "I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst" (John 6:35). The greatest evidence for Christ and His message is the power that transforms slaves into princes and princesses. Hannah, the mother of Samuel, expressed this wonderful fact when she said: "He raiseth up the poor out of the dust, and lifteth up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory" (1 Sam.12:8).

A Thrilling Privilege... "glorify God in your body"  
(1 Cor. 6:20)

The Christians in Rome understood what Paul meant when he wrote: "I beseech you therefore, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1). The novelist Lewis Wallace (1827-1905) wrote the very popular book

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Ben Hur, in which he described the life of Judah Ben-Hur. Sentenced to work in the galley of a Roman warship, Judah eventually saved the life of the officer in charge of the sinking vessel and was rewarded by adoption into one of the most famous families in Rome. Wallace described the faithful abnegance of the one-time slave to his illustrious foster-father. It might be interesting to know if that author ever found inspiration in the New Testament.

Paul described the plight of the slaves, and appealed for sincere service to be rendered to their Heavenly Benefactor. Since the Son of God did so much for man, it was to be expected that all redeemed slaves render grateful allegiance to the

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new Master. The apostle emphasized that this was reasonable service. That is, it was a way to liquidate some of the debt owned to Christ He gave His all for us; we are expected to give our best to Him. The reason for our desire to serve the Lord may be explained under three headings.

(1) We serve Him to Express Gratitude. Without the redemptive power of the love of Christ, everybody would still be in chains! "For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly" (Rom. 5:6). Without strength meant incapability to gain our freedom. Another had to work on our behalf. As a seriously ill person, restored by the skill of a devoted doctor remains grateful to his physician, so Christians raised to newness of life should never forget the Great Physician.

(2) We serve Him to Experience Grace . sufficient for every need. The world into which a liberated slave entered was not always an easy place in which to live. Temptations abounded, and other traders might try to take them back into bondage. The secret of successful living was found in proximity to the Redeemer. He Who liberated us in the first place, made it possible for people to stay close to Him; to live in His presence; to feed at His table, and draw upon His resources. Writing to the Corinthians, Paul said: `There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation, also make a way to escape, that ye may be able

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to bear it" (1 Cor. 10:13). The struggles of a baby bird to emerge from an egg strengthens it for future requirements. Likewise, the problems of life sometimes are channels of blessing by which we are enabled to overcome the difficulties of tomorrow.

(3) We serve Him to Enjoy Gladness. As it becomes impossible to forget the past, so it is increasingly difficult to ignore the future. To help the Redeemer emancipate others in bondage to drugs, alcohol and other evils, is among the greatest privileges of life. To see appreciation in the eyes of the afflicted, and recognize our Lord's approval, provides a gladness for which there is no substitute. Paul said: "For we are laborers together with God.. ." (I Cor. 3:9). He is never far away.

Frederick Barton, in his entrancing book, One Hundred Great Texts and Their Treatment, tells the story of an elderly colored Christian who attended a despondent master. She asked: "Massa, does yo see de bright side dis morning?" "No, Nanny, it is not as bright as I wish it." She replied: "Well, Massa, I allus see de bright side." He replied: "You do! maybe, you haven't had much trouble." "Maybe not," she answered, and then she went on to describe what had taken place when she lived in Virginia. Her children had been auctioned one by one, her husband had been sold, and finally she herself had become a slave. She had never heard from any one of her family. She concluded by saying, "Maybe I ain't seen no trouble." The man replied: "But, Nanny, have you seen the bright side all the time?" "Allus, massa, allus." `Then how did you do it?" Her reply was eloquent. "Dis is the way, Massa. When I see de black cloud coming over," and she waved her dark hand inside the tent, as though one might be settling down there, "and it `pears like its crushin' down on me, den, I just whips aroun' on de oder side, an I find de Lord Jesus dar, and den it's all bright and cl'ar. Da bright side's allus where Jesus is."

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