

“The Curse Is Lifted” (the Anonymous Tree)—Galatians 3:13

The text for this sermon, the theme of which is, “The Curse Is Lifted” (the Anonymous Tree), is Galatians 3:13 → *Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree.”* This is the text.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ Jesus:

Our Lenten sermons have considered a number of trees spoken of in Scripture describing our relationship with Yahweh and His dealings with His people: the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, the cedar, the acacia, the oak, the palm and the olive trees. Speaking about the crucifixion of Jesus on the cross, our text refers to the cross as *a tree*. However, it is an anonymous tree as we do not know the type of wood from which it was crafted. Actually, while it is referenced throughout the preaching of the apostles as *a tree* (cf. Acts 5:30; 13:29; 1 Peter 2:24), it doesn’t really matter what kind of tree it was.

In his writing to the Christians in the region of Galatia about their salvation by grace through faith in Jesus Christ **alone**, Paul quoted Deuteronomy 21:23. It is a reference dealing with the hanging of a criminal who has been convicted of a crime punishable by death. The

purpose of death on a cross for the Roman government was also because of a crime committed which was punishable by death. Thus, *two others, who were criminals, were led away to be put to death with Jesus, being crucified . . . one on His right and one on His left* (cf. Luke 23:32-33). Such a person was considered *cursed by God* according to Old Testament Law. What does it actually mean to be *cursed by God*?

Being cursed by someone or “put under a curse” may conjure up pictures of wizardry, sorcery and witchcraft where incantations are spoken in an effort to produce misfortune for someone. We have such concepts thanks to the dramatic industry of movies and books. Being under God’s curse has no such connotations. Rather, coming under God’s curse has to do with the inability of sinful human beings to obey the demands of His holiness. God demands perfect obedience to His commandments (i.e. His Law), a demand which sinners cannot fulfill perfectly. His curse upon your disobedience to His Law places you under His **righteous** wrath. That is what it means to be *cursed by God* and is why Scripture says: *the power of sin is the law* (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:56).

Because of God’s steadfast love for people He has provided a way for His righteous wrath to be turned away from you so that you can live under His blessing, that is, in His **righteousness**. He had established the sacrificial system under the old covenant which looked forward to **the** one sacrifice under the new covenant which would remove God’s wrath

once and for all—for all people, for all sin, for all time. When Jesus was hanged on the tree of the cross He became *a curse for us*. By faith in Him alone you no longer stand under God’s curse but rather experience His blessedness now and eternally.

Notice our text says this is an act associated with your redemption: *Christ **redeemed** us from the curse of the law*. Redeem means “to buy back.” The concept of redemption may be better understood in the more familiar word of “ransom.” Jesus said He came *to serve, and to give His life as a **ransom** for many* (cf. Mark 10:45). 1 Timothy 2:6 says Jesus *gave Himself as a **ransom** for all*. A ransom is generally the price paid necessary to free someone from being held hostage against their will. The price is paid to the one holding the person hostage.

To redeem is a different kind of buying back. Scripture describes all mankind as slaves to sin as a result of Adam & Eve giving in to the devil’s temptation in the Garden of Eden. This slavery to sin expresses itself when *out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander, etc.*, just a few of those sins which Jesus mentioned in His teachings (cf. Matthew 15:19). It expresses itself every time you become mastered by ways in which you try to escape the curse of God’s Law in your guilty conscience by overindulgent idolatry.

Many look to other human relationships to free them from their

slavery in sin. This will not work as Psalm 49:7-9 says: *Truly no man can redeem another, or give to God the price of his life, for the ransom of their life is costly and can never suffice, that he should live on forever and never see the pit.* Looking to another human being to do only what God can do fails because people make lousy gods. They will not be able to shoulder the heavy demands under the curse of the Law. **Only God can provide sufficient ransom for your soul!**

Thus, in Christ He paid the price necessary to buy you back to Himself from the power of sin, death and the devil. However, He did not give His life (i.e. pay the price) to the devil, the one holding captive. Rather, He paid Himself the price demanded by His righteous wrath by *becoming a curse for us* when He hung on that anonymous tree that first Good Friday. He was both the sacrifice and the One to Whom the sacrifice was offered in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. **He did it all.**

Because the curse of the Law has been lifted by Jesus you have the privilege of experiencing His wonderful forgiveness and new life in the Holy Spirit today. *He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness* (cf. 1 Peter 2:24). It gives you a whole new perspective of God's Law, no longer a curse but rather a joy. It creates in you a love for the Lord which is expressed by striving to live in obedience to His commands. 1 John 5:3 says: *This is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not*

burdensome. Why? Because on that anonymous tree of the cross Jesus lifted the curse off of you and placed it on Himself. Amen.

*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 NIV)

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