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## Redemption

Good morning! I want to talk with you today about redemption. But before we do that let's take our bibles in our hands and proclaim this together in one voice, all together, "This is my bible. It is God speaking to me. I am who it says I am. I can do what it says I can do. I can have what it says I can have. So I open my heart today to hear God speak a word that will change my life forever." Let's open up our bibles to Psalm 107. I love the word redemption but more specifically I love the verb form of it, the action, the act of redeeming, the act of God redeeming both you and me. It's the action of words that change people's lives. Like the phrase goes, actions speak louder than words. James 2:26 says, "Faith without works is dead." And earlier he says to "be doers of the word, and not hearers only." (1:22) Even when talking about love we see that God is calling us to action. When the Apostle John says that God so loved the world, the Greek word used for love was agape. Agape love is about action, sacrifice, and unconditional love. It even says that God gave (He acted) because He loved us so much. So, since actions cause change in the world and in our lives, let's look at the definition of the action or verb form of the word redemption. To redeem means to gain or regain possession of something in exchange for payment. We see an example of this when you redeem a song on iTunes in exchange for a gift card. Or better yet when God regained possession of us (redeemed us) in exchange for payment (our ransom through Jesus' death on the cross). Thank You Jesus! To redeem also means to compensate for the faults or bad aspects of something, just as God compensated for our sins through His abundant grace. Paul says that "where sin abounded, grace abounded much more, so that as sin reigned in death, even so grace might reign through righteousness to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Romans 5:20-21) In other words, God saved us from sin once and for all, for all humanity. This is our salvation through Jesus. The words save and salvation are two different forms of the same word, but I think it's interesting that the action form (to save) has meaning to me while the static noun form (salvation) doesn't. I don't know about you, but for me there seems to be some words that I think of as "bible words" that really have no further meaning to me, like the word salvation. I don't use these words in regular conversation. For example, I wouldn't say, "Leaving for school was my salvation from having to do the dishes." Why wouldn't I say this? because it sounds weird. It's not normal. Instead I would just say, "Leaving for school saved me from having to do the dishes." You see, people don't usually use the word salvation or even

hear it unless you're in church and then you hear it all the time, but does that mean you actually understand what it means? Here's the problem, if you don't really understand a word how can you act on it? And if we're using words in church that the people we're reaching out to don't understand, why are we still using them? We should be reaching out to others using words they can understand so that change can happen in their lives. For instance, when I was younger the word repentance never produced anything of significance in me; it never changed me because its meaning never carried much weight in my heart. My definition of it was merely to feel regret or sorrow for my actions, for my sins. In my mind it was confession, or at least it brought me to the point of confession. But that was it, and the sin cycle would continue all over again. What's troubling for me is that I'm not sure if anyone really defined it for me, or if I chose that definition for this very purpose, so that my life wouldn't have to change. Have you ever taken a word in the bible and reduced its meaning to fit with your life's choices? So you wouldn't have to change? So you could continue in the same "fun" activities without feeling the guilt about doing it? It's not hard to see that the bible is radical, that God's word goes against the grain, against the way of the world. But that's why He is holy! Here's another one of those "bible words". Holy literally means to be set apart. So God is literally set apart from this world and its perversions. Perversion means to be corrupt, to go from good to bad, to alter from the original form or version. I don't mean to bore some of you with definitions, but it's so important that we all know what these words mean so we can act on them. And if you're like me, and didn't study during your vocab exams in high school, this is for you. If you substitute the word holy for set apart, 1 Peter 1:15 has a deeper meaning. In the amplified bible it reads, "But as the One Who called you is (set apart), you yourselves also be (set apart) in all your conduct and manner of living." You see, God is calling us to go against the thinking and belief of society, to be set apart from it. The verse just before this, verse 14, clarifies this instruction. "[Live] as children of obedience [to God]; do not conform yourselves to the evil desires [that governed you] in your former ignorance [when you did not know the requirements of the Gospel]." I really like the amplified bible in that it gives clarity to some passages. This brings me back to repentance. When I read Matthew 3:2 for the first time in the amplified bible, my eyes were finally opened to what God has been saying to me all these years. That light bulb in my head finally turned on. John the Baptist says, "Repent (think differently; change your mind, regretting your sins and changing your conduct), for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." I was in that position where I didn't want to change my life. I used to be that person who thought the New Testament didn't call us to really change because all we had to do was confess our sins. I thought it was that free ticket to live how I wanted to live. But something as simple as knowing the true definition of a word changed that. It tied the Old and New Testaments

together. It was just another example of how God never changes, but He wants us to change. Change from our old lives living in sin to a new life living in relationship with Him. 2 Corinthians 5:15 says “that if One died for all (Jesus paying our ransom, paying the penalty for our crime, our sin), then all died; and [Jesus] died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.” God want’s this change in our lives. When we accept Jesus’ death on the cross, we’re accepting our death on the cross with Him. We’re telling God that our old life is dead, that our past is behind us, and that we’re going to change. We’re changing from a life of perversity, a life of sin, a life going against God’s intent for true happiness in our lives to a life free from sin, where we can enjoy life how God intended it to be.

A few days ago I read the following passage in Psalms while doing my daily reading and verse 2 felt like it was God speaking just to me. “Has the Lord redeemed you? Then speak out! Tell others he has redeemed you from your enemies.” Sometimes it’s hard to share about a past that you want to forget. You’re so thankful that God saved you from that situation that you don’t want to look back. But then I remember that the old me died on the cross with Christ, that merely talking about it won’t take me back there. I feel God showing me how selfish it is of me to not share how God transformed me. It brings to mind 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 where Paul says that God is the Father of mercies and of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God. How can I hide my story of redemption if it can encourage others and lead them to God? Paul says in Ephesians 4:29 that our words should be used for good and for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. With that being said, I want to share with you about how God redeemed me from Satan’s grip on my life. But first I want us all to read God’s word. I started off this morning saying that we’re going to talk about redemption and Psalm 107 gives us some brief but real examples of God’s redemption in our lives. Did you find Psalm 107 yet? If not, just follow along with me on the screen. This is from the New Living Translation.

#### **Psalm 107 NLT**

<sup>1</sup> Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good! His faithful love endures forever.

<sup>2</sup> Has the Lord redeemed you? Then speak out! Tell others he has redeemed you from your enemies.

<sup>3</sup> For he has gathered the exiles from many lands, from east and west, from north and south.

<sup>4</sup> Some wandered in the wilderness, lost and homeless.

<sup>5</sup> Hungry and thirsty, they nearly died.

<sup>6</sup> “Lord, help!” they cried in their trouble, and he rescued them from their distress.

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- <sup>7</sup> He led them straight to safety, to a city where they could live.
- <sup>8</sup> Let them praise the Lord for his great love and for the wonderful things he has done for them.
- <sup>9</sup> For he satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things.
- <sup>10</sup> Some sat in darkness and deepest gloom, imprisoned in iron chains of misery.
- <sup>11</sup> They rebelled against the words of God, scorning the counsel of the Most High.
- <sup>12</sup> That is why he broke them with hard labor; they fell, and no one was there to help them.
- <sup>13</sup> "Lord, help!" they cried in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress.
- <sup>14</sup> He led them from the darkness and deepest gloom; he snapped their chains.
- <sup>15</sup> Let them praise the Lord for his great love and for the wonderful things he has done for them.
- <sup>16</sup> For he broke down their prison gates of bronze; he cut apart their bars of iron.
- <sup>17</sup> Some were fools; they rebelled and suffered for their sins.
- <sup>18</sup> They couldn't stand the thought of food, and they were knocking on death's door.
- <sup>19</sup> "Lord, help!" they cried in their trouble, and he saved them from their distress.
- <sup>20</sup> He sent out his word and healed them, snatching them from the door of death.
- <sup>21</sup> Let them praise the Lord for his great love and for the wonderful things he has done for them.
- <sup>22</sup> Let them offer sacrifices of thanksgiving and sing joyfully about his glorious acts.

We see in this psalm three different groups of lost people; the wandering, the rebellious, and the foolish; each coming from a place where they were separated from God but through His abundant grace they were redeemed. This should give you hope that God is able to rescue you from any circumstance. No matter how dark your situation might be, no matter how strong Satan's grip is on your life, God can save you! Like I said before, I know this from personal experience.

When I was young I found myself, as James puts it, drawn away by my own desires and enticed. (James 1:14) We all have different vessels (physical bodies) to work with and they each have their own strengths and weaknesses due to their chemical makeup (raw material). So we each have different struggles that we must overcome. C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity* writes about morality and psychoanalysis, the analysis of the soul, and he says "we see only the results which a man's choices make out of his raw material. But God does not judge him on the raw material at all, but on what he has done with it. Most of the man's psychological make-up is probably due to his body: when his body dies all that will fall off him, and the real central man, the thing that chose, that made the best or the worst out of this material, will stand naked." Though we all have different struggles to deal with, it is important to choose God and let Him work on you from the inside out. For some those struggles may be drugs, violence, hatred, homosexual tendencies, vanity, greed, power or control issues, but for me it was the lust of the flesh, or more specifically online pornography.

These worldly desires are excused by our society as normal. I call them worldly desires because John says in 1 John 2:16, "For all that is in the world-the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life-is not of the Father but is of the world." But as children of God, we have the Holy Spirit living and dwelling within us. His Spirit is a light, exposing these desires so we can finally see the real destruction it has been causing in our lives, and the lives of those close to us. James 1:15 says "when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death." Peter says to "be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith." (1 Peter 5:8-9) When we open our hearts to these perverse desires we are allowing Satan to devour us, and this is how it starts, by exposure. Little by little we get more of the world into us, into our hearts through our eyes and ears, and soon the world's desires become our desires and we get enticed and drawn toward evil. Solomon warns us not to enter the path of the wicked and not to walk in the way of evil, but to avoid it and not travel on it, to turn away from it and pass on. (Proverbs 4:14-15) This is the key, to stay away from temptations. Don't flirt with them and don't think you're strong enough to keep temptations out of your house while you allow them to stand in your doorway. It just takes one instance of being weak and vulnerable for them to slip past you into your house, starting their path of destruction in your life. Deuteronomy 17:6 warns us not to bring an abomination into our house, lest we be doomed to destruction like it. That's what happened to me, destruction in my life. But if we do let this destruction in our lives, we need to be humble enough to ask God for help. Ask your family and friends for help, do whatever you need to do to get out of it. This brings to mind some helpful advice in proverbs about delivering yourself. Solomon says, "So do this, my son, and deliver yourself; go and humble yourself. Give no sleep to your eyes, nor slumber to your eyelids. Deliver yourself like a gazelle from the hand of the hunter." (6:3-5) You must do whatever it takes to free yourself from it, your very life is at stake! Like I said before, don't think you can do this alone. Proverbs 14:16 says, "A fool rages and is self-confident." Verse 3 says, "In the mouth of a fool is a rod of pride." For me, it may have been a tower of pride in my mouth. That pride in me thought I was mentally strong enough to fight Satan on my own. What a joke! Satan, whom God cast out of heaven, was sly enough to deceive a third of the angels and have them cast out with him. (Revelations 12:4) That same being is deceiving the whole world right now (12:9) and the only reason he comes is to steal, kill, and destroy us. (John 10:10) He's not an amateur. He's a trained professional with many years of experience. We can't risk underestimating his abilities or denying that he's out there. The only way we can overcome Satan is with God's help. It's for this very purpose that Jesus was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. (1 John 3:8) We need help. We need God.

I really like science fiction movies and end of the world movies, which is why I really like the movie "The day the earth stood still". There's a quote in it I'd like to share with you. It comes at a point in the movie where the aliens, represented by Keanu Reeves, are about to wipe out the human race because they're destroying the earth. He meets a professor, played by John Cleese, who says that "it's only on the brink [of destruction] that people find the will to change. Only at the precipice do we evolve." A precipice is a very steep or overhanging place, a hazardous situation. This is where I was at and unfortunately this is where most of us have to be in order to make real changes in our lives. There's a great example of this in the bible in the book of Jonah. God told Jonah to go to the great city of Nineveh and announce His judgment against it because He saw how wicked its people were. (1:2) Jonah shouted to the crowds: "Forty days from now Nineveh will be destroyed!" (3:4) Nineveh was on the brink of destruction but at the edge of death they had a change of heart. The king of Nineveh and his nobles sent throughout the land a decree, saying, "Cry mightily to God; yes, let everyone turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands." Not only did they say this with their mouths, but the bible says that they believed God and acted on it, from the greatest to the least of them. (3:5) And what did God do in return? Did He ignore their cry for help? No. "God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it." (3:10) This is our God and this God of ours is love. (1 John 4:8) God is agape love. As I mentioned earlier, this type of love is an action, sacrificial, unconditional love, it's the highest form of love. And through God's love, He granted the city of Nineveh repentance. He granted me repentance, and He can grant you repentance too. God does this so that we may know the truth, and that we may come to our senses (have our blind folds removed) and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will. (2 Timothy 2:25-26) Jesus says that one must be bound in order to be plundered. (Matthew 12:29) In other words, Satan has to bind us first in order for him to be able to plunder (destroy and kill) us. If you're in this position, if you're bound by Satan, it's not too late to be freed from it. James 1:21 says to "get rid of all the filth and evil in your lives, and humbly accept the word God has planted in your hearts, for it has the power to save your souls." (NLT)

God can save our souls, but we may still have filth in our lives that are a direct result of our poor decisions. This filth needs to be wiped out! We need to be free from the worldly desires in us and we need God's desires to replace them and fill our hearts. Unfortunately, this won't happen all at once. We won't just wake up one day finding that our lives are restored. It's a process that involves purposeful actions. Jesus says, "first cleanse the inside of the cup and dish, that the outside of them may be clean also." (Matthew 23:26) This is what we have to do. Through God working in us, we have to purposefully

change what our eyes and ears are exposed to and get God's word into our hearts. Out with the old and in with the new. Paul says, "Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect." (Romans 12:2) David says that by delighting yourself in the Lord, He will give you the desires of your heart. (Psalm 37:3-4) No longer do we have to be slaves to the desires and perversities of this world because God will give us His desires and put those desires in our hearts, so that our cravings will be good and pleasing and perfect in God's sight. Amen! So be it!

I'm saying this because I know this is true and I know it's possible. Through God's love and mercy in my life I've been able to be transformed. God is putting His desires in my heart and those desires are far greater than my own. They're not selfish desires. They align with His word. So now it's up to me to be obedient and carry out those desires He's put on my heart.

Would you like to have God's desires in you? If you do, it's within your reach. God wants that for you! Philippians 2:13 in the new living translation says that "God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases Him." God says in the book of Ezekiel that He will give you a new heart, and He will put a new spirit in you. He will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart [a heart of flesh]. And He will put His Spirit in you so that you will follow His decrees and be careful to obey His regulations." (Ezekiel 36:26-27 NLT) Paul says in the book of Ephesians, "let the Spirit renew your thoughts and attitudes." (Ephesians 4:23 NLT) I don't know about you, but this is really exciting for me. I don't want to think the way I used to think. I don't want to live my life how I used to live it. I don't want to be a slave to sin any longer. What about you?

Living a life in sin is like gulping down seawater. It looks like fresh water, like it should be good and refreshing, but the salt we can't see (the perversion) actually kills us.

This seawater that kills is all around us, just like perversity in the world. In fact, according to Universe Today 97.5% of water on the Earth is contained within the oceans. Drinking from this water source, in the ocean, is like taking part in things that Satan has corrupted. Satan has distorted and perverted so many things in this world that God has meant for good, and partaking in this distortion will lead to your separation from God which is death, not only physically but spiritually. This is that wide gate that Jesus says will lead to destruction, and many will enter through it. (Matthew 7:13-14) So the next time you say to yourself "well, everyone else is doing it", think about this and decide if you want life or destruction in your future. Remember God is calling us to be set apart from this world. Why? Because

He wants us to have life. Since this perversity lies all around us we need to make the right choices and be on guard. David says that evil people try to drag him into sin, but he is firmly anchored to God's instructions. (Psalm 119:61) We need to stay in God's word to protect ourselves. We also need to be surrounded by Godly people. Solomon says the righteous should choose their friends carefully, for the way of the wicked leads them astray. (Proverbs 12:26) Paul tells us not to be unequally yoked with unbelievers [do not make mismatched alliances with them, inconsistent with your faith]. For what fellowships has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? (2 Corinthians 6:14)

The tough part is that we need to constantly be on guard and constantly make the right choices. When we make small compromises we start our path down towards the wide gate, and we know where that leads. So we need to be aware, not only of where perversity is, but how it destroys us. Let's look back at our seawater analogy and see how it affects us. Here's an excerpt about the effects of drinking too much seawater.

"The salinity of seawater is almost four times that of our bodily fluids and unless you drink a lot of freshwater, the body's regulatory mechanism becomes potentially fatal. In order to remove the extreme amount of sodium taken in by saltwater we urinate more water than we actually drink and dehydration sets in. This net loss of water leads to depleted body fluids, muscle cramps, dry mouth, and thirst. The body tries to compensate for fluid loss by increasing the heart rate and constricting blood vessels to maintain blood pressure and flow to vital organs. You're also most likely to feel nausea, weakness and even delirium. As you become more dehydrated, the coping mechanism fails. If you still don't drink any freshwater to reverse the effects of excess sodium, the brain and other organs receive less blood, leading to coma, organ failure and eventually death."(www.science.howstuffworks.com)

So we can see how seawater, just like perversity and sin, kills us. Not all at once, but gradually. Just like the frog in a pot of water who doesn't notice the temperature rising slowly. If it was a drastic temperature change he would respond and get out, saving his life, but he doesn't. Instead, he stays, and the change in temperature is so subtle he doesn't even notice that it's slowly killing him. James says that "sin, when it is fully matured, brings forth death." It may not seem like it at first, and with small doses of it you may be able to reduce its effects on you, but the more you let sin into your life the more it destroys you and it will eventually kill you unless you let God into your life and allow Him to fix you. Again, I'm saying this because I know from personal experience. I'm saying this because God saved me and He can save you too. All you have to do is trust God and let Him work in your life! David said it beautifully in Psalm 13:5, "But I have trusted in Your mercy; my heart shall rejoice in Your salvation." David is overwhelmed with joy that God delivered and rescued him. Have any of you been rescued from



a destructive past? If you have, as I have, I'm sure you feel this overwhelming joy too. If you haven't been rescued yet it's not too late because God is offering to save us all. 2 Peter 3:9 says that God "is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." The bible says that God loves us so much that He gave a part of Himself, His only Son, and whoever believes in His Son Jesus will not perish but will have everlasting life. (John 3:16) God designed our vessels, our bodies, to be satisfied by fresh water, not seawater which kills. But He designed our spirit to be satisfied by the Holy Spirit, by the living water. Jesus says that "whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life." (John 4:14)

We know that the majority of water on our Earth is deadly seawater which comes from our oceans, so where does restoring freshwater come from? It comes from the heavens. Job 5:10 says that "God gives rain on the earth, and sends waters on the fields." Hebrews 6:7 says that "when the ground soaks up the falling rain and bears a good crop for the farmer, it has God's blessing." God literally pours down His blessings and restoration on us from above. True joy and fulfillment doesn't come from worldly things, it comes from heavenly things. God is our true provider. Story after story in the bible we're reminded to let God be our provider. God said in Jeremiah 2:13, "For my people have done two evil things: They have abandoned me— the fountain of living water. And they have dug for themselves cracked cisterns that can hold no water at all!" When we try to provide for ourselves we create more problems and we become reliant on ourselves to maintain those provisions. If we put our trust in God and allow Him to provide for us, we become reliant on Him to maintain those provisions. We're then casting our worries on Him and ridding ourselves of fear, allowing us to live by faith that God will do what He said He would do. God says in Hosea 14:8, "I am the one who answers your prayers and cares for you. I am like a tree that is always green; all your fruit comes from me." God knows our needs and wants to provide for us, but when we seek other means for provision we're saying that we don't need Him. 1 Timothy 6:17 says to "teach those who are rich in this world not to be proud and not to trust in their money, which is so unreliable. Their trust should be in God, who richly gives us all we need for our enjoyment." Matthew 6:31-33 drives the nail home when Jesus says, "do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' for after all these things the Gentiles seek (the world seeks). For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you." Hallelujah! Thank You God for being so good to us!

Before we close, let's look at some action steps.

***In case you find yourself in the middle of sin; (1) Stop it. (2) Confess it to God.*** For me, it also helped to confess my past to others as well. This was not easy, and it still isn't, but every time I confess my past to others it not only humbles me, which is always a good thing, but it reminds me of how sin really kills and how I need to be diligent to protect my heart. **(3) Turn from it, following God's path for you.** Proverbs 28:13 says, "He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them will have mercy." 1 John 1:9 says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." David says in Psalm 32:1-5, "Oh, what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sin is put out of sight! Yes, what joy for those whose record the Lord has cleared of guilt, whose lives are lived in complete honesty! When I refused to confess my sin, my body wasted away, and I groaned all day long. Day and night your hand of discipline was heavy on me. My strength evaporated like water in the summer heat. Finally, I confessed all my sins to you and stopped trying to hide my guilt. I said to myself, 'I will confess my rebellion to the Lord.' And you forgave me! All my guilt is gone."

***If you're being tempted by sin, RUN FROM IT! Do whatever you can to get away from it!*** The book of Proverbs gives us some good advice. "A prudent [wise, careful] man foresees evil and hides himself; the simple pass on and are punished."(27:12) "Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not walk in the way of evil. Avoid it, do not travel on it; turn away from it and pass on."(4:14-15) "Remove your way far from [sin], and do not go near the door of [it's] house."(5:8)

***Lastly, if you want to be rescued from the death of sin but don't have God in your heart, choose today to make God the leader of your life!*** Confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead and you will be saved. (Romans 10:9)

As a friend of mine would say, "John, what's the take home message for today?" The take home message for today is that our salvation and redemption comes only from God. We need to draw near to Him so that He'll draw near to us in order for Him to change us from the inside-out.

Let's pray. God, thank You for loving us. Forgive us for our sins. Be our Lord, our Shepard, and lead us in Your ways. We believe that You raised Jesus Christ, the anointed one, from the grave and seated Him at Your right hand. Thank You for giving us victory over sin and death through our Lord Jesus Christ. Take away the veil that blinds us to the work of the devil and give us all a clean heart. Open our

hearts to hear You speak to us. Give us daily the strength to fight the wicked one. Give us the heart of a servant to shine as lights in this broken world and to do Your will. In Jesus's name we pray. Amen.