



## GREAT REDEEMER

Becky Combee

Every year at Christmas time, my heart gravitates again to the prophecy of Zacharias given after the birth of John the Baptist. It is a marvelous declaration of the gospel of redemption that was coming to the world through the Lord Jesus Christ. Listen to this Word from God. *"Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people."*<sup>1</sup> This great verse is written in the past tense because God's plan of salvation was assured. Redemption was certain!

In Revelation 13:8, the apostle John says that Jesus was the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. What glorious news! From the beginning of time, God had a plan. He was going to redeem the world through the death of His Son. He was going to redeem mankind with the precious blood of Jesus. This was God's foreordained plan.<sup>2</sup> When something is foreordained, it is known beforehand.

On the Day of Pentecost, the apostle Peter preached to a large crowd and about three thousand souls were saved. In his sermon, he said that Jesus was crucified *"by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God."* I love the Message Bible which says this was *"the deliberate and well-thought-out plan of God."*<sup>3</sup> Calvary was NOT a last-ditch effort to rescue rebellious and sinful men. It was intentional!

In order to understand God's pre-determined plan, we must comprehend the meaning of the

## I WILL HAVE MERCY

Suzanne D. Williams

I found my older dog on the porch last night in the growing darkness enduring strong winds. Very unlike her, to the point I was worried. I spoke kindly and picked her up and brought her inside. I set her down in the foyer, but she continued to act unusual. Typically, that time of night, she's tucked in her bed, sound asleep.

"Don't you want to get in your bed?" I asked. I walked over there and lifted the dog blanket she loves. She cringed, her eyes wide.

Then I spotted it — a puddle. There was the cause of her strange behavior. Why would she put herself somewhere she didn't want to be, suffering something she didn't have to suffer? Guilt.

I'd been too hard on her. Clearly, I'd yelled to much, and she feared my reaction. I put her on the porch in the cold. My anger on some previous occasion did that. I lacked compassion. I lacked mercy, and she was afraid.

I didn't love her any less. One mishap wasn't enough to make me give up on her. This year, more than anything, I am grateful she's alive.

*"(For the LORD thy God is a merciful God;) he will not forsake thee." (Deut 4:31)*

God is unending mercy. He never runs out. He never reacts to us in any other way. When we fall, He is always there to pick us up. When we stumble,

(Continued from "Our Great Redeemer")

word "redeem." This word is usually a mystery to modern minds. It is somehow foreign to us, although I do remember there was once a business in our city called the Redemption Center.

One of the best explanations of the word "redeem" is found in the Old Testament. In Numbers 8:17, God said, "All the firstborn of the children of Israel are mine." In the book of Exodus, God told Moses that every firstborn man and beast belonged to Him, and they must be redeemed.<sup>4</sup> Animals such as sheep and goats were redeemed by sacrifice, but unclean animals had to be redeemed with a monetary sum.<sup>5</sup> They could not be sacrificed. The money was a substitute for the unclean animal. Of course, children were not sacrificed.

The redemptive price provided a substitute! This is the key word that opens our understanding of redemption. In order to redeem man, God must provide a substitute. Some time ago, the newspaper reported an interesting story about a lady sentenced to several months in jail because of failure to pay many, many traffic tickets. Her husband asked to substitute for her, and the judge granted his request. While she was at home, eating from her refrigerator and sleeping in her bed, he was paying the price for her neglect.

Jesus was the substitute for all men. He gave Himself for us so that He might redeem us from all iniquity.<sup>6</sup> He became sin so that we might be made the righteousness of God.<sup>7</sup> The song of the four beasts and 20 elders in heaven echoes this great truth. Hear them sing, "For thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation."<sup>8</sup>

Man could not pay for his own sin. He needed the sinless Son of God to stand in his place. The substitutionary sacrifice of God's spotless Son would offer eternal redemption to everyone who believed in Jesus' death and Resurrection. Through faith in Him, we would be delivered from the darkness of sin into God's kingdom.<sup>9</sup> We would be rescued! We would be redeemed!

This is the beauty of Zacharias' prophecy. He speaks of Jesus, soon to be born of the virgin Mary, saying, "He hath visited and redeemed his people." The word "visited" in the New Strong's Dictionary is

defined as "to visit, to go to see, to relieve." This means that Jesus' visit to earth had a specific purpose. He came to make sin's payment and relieve man of sin. He came to offer eternal life to everyone who would confess Him as Lord.

I know, like me, you have opened the refrigerator and forgotten why you are there. You have gone to the store and come home without what you needed. You have forgotten your purpose. But we can never forget the purpose of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem. He came to redeem. He came to save us from our enemy Satan and bring us the mercy of God.<sup>10</sup>

With the songwriter we say, "Great Redeemer, we adore Thee, God's great love to man Thou art; We adore Thee, Great Redeemer, Reign supreme in every heart."<sup>11</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Lk 1:68 <sup>2</sup>1Pe 1:19-20 <sup>3</sup>Act 2:23 <sup>4</sup>Ex 13:12-13 <sup>5</sup>Num 18:15-16  
<sup>6</sup>Tit 2:14 <sup>7</sup>2Co 5:21 <sup>8</sup>Rev 5:9 <sup>9</sup>Act 26:18 <sup>10</sup>Lk 1:71-72 <sup>11</sup>"The Great Redeemer We Adore" by Joseph Stennett <sup>12</sup>Heb 2:17-18

(Continued from "I Will Be Merciful")

He strengthens us and points the way. His love isn't changed by our stumbling. If anything, in our messes, it is that much stronger. "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us," Romans 5:8 says. God loves us despite our mistakes. His forgiveness is wide and full and free.

How much more should we as His children strive to be like Him? How much more should we, His church, be unified with each other and dedicated to spreading His mercy? Or do we yell and bicker and cause strife? Do we complain and criticize? Meanwhile, that one lost soul is crouched in the wind, hoping they don't get beaten.

As He is merciful, I will be merciful.

To the dog. To my friends. To the car in front of me that cut in line and slowed me down. To the women with rambunctious children at the grocery store, making a scene. To the waitress at the restaurant. To the clerk at the convenience store.

That image of my dog out there, dreading me, will forever remain in my consciousness, and I want it there so I never forget. He was merciful to me. I will be merciful to others and so reflect Christ, who died for them as much as He died for me.<sup>12</sup>