

Songs for the Road

“I am Redeemed”

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Digging Deeper

Songs for the Road: “I am Redeemed”

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Background Notes

Key Scripture Text(s): Isaiah 35:8-10; Romans 8:1-10; and others throughout

Introduction

⁸ A highway shall be there,
and it shall be called the Holy Way;
the unclean shall not travel on it,[b]
but it shall be for God's people;[c]
no traveler, not even fools, shall go astray.

⁹ No lion shall be there,
nor shall any ravenous beast come up on it;
they shall not be found there,

but the redeemed shall walk there.
¹⁰ *And the ransomed of the LORD shall return,*
and come to Zion with singing;
everlasting joy shall be upon their heads;
they shall obtain joy and gladness,
and sorrow and sighing shall flee away

(Isaiah 35:8-10)

A full reading of Isaiah 35:1-10 (which you are encouraged to do) reveals a promise made by Lord Yahweh to His people Israel — a promise that foreshadows a hopeful future where deserted land is transformed into fertile plains with fruitful fields, and where towering mountains bear witness to the majesty of God. This God of Israel “comes to save you” (35:4): opening the eyes of the blind and the ears of the deaf (35:5), restoring the legs of the lame and the tongue of the speechless (35:6). Wastelands bloom because water is abundant. Civilization returns to busy highways filled with the people of God. And there is “singing” — so much music — filled with joy and gladness to drive away sorrow and sighing. Good days replace disaster, crisis, and death — with new life. And why is all of this possible? The words of the prophet echo the remembered history of his people who once languished under Pharaoh’s whip in Egypt before the Exodus, a history that pivoted when the Lord of the covenant showed up to set His people free from slavery. The language used to describe such deliverance uses words like “redeem, the redeemed, ransom, the ransomed.” Such terms became the hallmark of the great Exodus narrative so that Jews would shout “*Exodus*” in the same breath they exclaimed “*Redeemed*”!

People held long in captivity—whether prisoners of war, slaves to their masters, addicts to their costly habits, creatures of oppressive political regimes, debtors to financial obligations, and victims of disease or hunger or abuse—these endure the hopeless, hapless, and horrid trials of tragic circumstance without apparent light at the end of the tunnel. They endure *until* — the light filters through the cracks of broken dreams, shining down from out and beyond them:

17 Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the *Father of lights*, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning. 18 Of His own will *He brought us forth* by the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of His creatures (James 1:17-18)

When the Father of lights “brings us forth by the word of truth,” *James* intends for us to remember how the Lord of Israel cut off the bonds of His children’s servitude because *His word to them was faithfully true*. He *redeemed* them from Egypt, brought them through the Red Sea, buried the army of their masters in the river’s mud, but set *their* feet on the dry ground of freedom where he fed them with the gift of manna, the bread from heaven. For *Isaiah* that story repeats once again, after exile in a foreign land, when His people would feel the yoke lifted off their necks and their trek home to freedom finally fulfilled. “*I am redeemed*” is the testimony of the heart set free, the life liberated from whatever holds it captive, and joy bubbling up in songs of thanksgiving. *Redeemed* people can’t keep from singing or dancing or celebrating. Our theme this week begins with a few reflections of Isaiah 35:8-10 in particular (you should read all of 35:1-10 for the full context), a text that celebrates God’s redeeming love for His emancipated people — people “free at last, thank God almighty!”

I am Redeemed (Isaiah 35:8-10)

On closer examination our text from Isaiah 35:8-10 sets the stage for the arrival of a *Messianic entourage* — God is back in town for His people and He’s mightily *on His way* and on the move with *redeeming* power! The writer is concise: “A highway will be there ... the *Way of Holiness*.” This phrase can be read at several levels.

1. Comparing with 11:15-16, the “way” is a *way out of captivity and back home*. Every place where Israel languishes in exile will release its prisoners and send them on the *way* their land.
2. According to 62:10:
Go through, go through the gates, prepare the way for the people; build up, build up the highway, clear it of stones, lift up an ensign over the peoples ¹¹ The LORD has proclaimed to the end of the earth: Say to daughter Zion, "See, your salvation comes; his reward is with him, and his recompense before him." ¹² They shall be called, "The Holy People, The Redeemed of the LORD"; and you shall be called, "Sought Out, A City Not Forsaken" (Isaiah 62:10-12).
That is, here is the *way of salvation and recovery* that leads to a new identity (holy people) and a new city.
3. Within the context of Isaiah 35, the way is geographically located in the Arabah, land once controlled by Edom. But Edom will be no more, and its former land supplies the unencumbered road for Israel to return. The road becomes the way of divine restitution.
4. Then there is the theme of *welcoming newcomers* in 2:3:
Many peoples shall come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his paths." For out of Zion shall go forth instruction, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:3).
In this case, there is *way for the nations to come and find the Lord*. It is a missionary highway where those who seek God may find Him. By opening up the highway, more people are permitted entrance in “the house of God” and receive instructions in “his way” and walk in “his paths.”

The language of 35:8-10 emphasizes the *safety* of this highway (no lion found there) and the *purity* of this way (no unclean will journey on it). How is such a perfect path possible? The answer lies in the statement, “Only the redeemed will walk there.” When God opens up the road, He *redeems* those who walk on it. Something wonderful happens to those walk on this Way: they experience *redemption*. The underlying Hebrew word is *gā’l*. God is the *redeemer*, and what the prophet foresees is the coming of the Redeemer down the Way of Holiness — the road that *makes holy*. Watts comments:

גָּאָל [g’l] is a term used of Yahweh’s acts toward Israel in Egypt (Exodus 6:6; 15:13; Psalm 74:2; 77:16; 106:10; and Isaiah 63:9). It was originally a legal term which pictures the duties of a family member toward relatives. Wildberger notes that this ancient meaning still shows in 62:11 where Yahweh’s redemption is “buying” and “ransoming.” But the term comes to have a religious meaning which suggests that God has freed the redeemed from the consequences of their sins.¹

Throughout the New Testament, we are reminded that Jesus came to *redeem* — to release from slavery, to buy back displaced persons. Thus, on the lips of the disciples are the words:

But we had hoped that he was the one to *redeem* Israel. (Luke 24:21a).

And from the father of John the Baptizer:

Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath *visited and redeemed* his people ... (Luke 1:68).

Then there’s Anna the prophetess when she saw the infant Jesus in the Temple:

At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the *redemption* of Jerusalem (Luke 2:38).

Or from Paul the Apostle:

Christ *redeemed* us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us-- for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree" (Galatians 3:13).

¹ *Op. Cit.*, 16.

He it is who gave himself for us that he might *redeem* us from all iniquity and purify for himself a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds (Titus 2:14).

The writer to the Hebrews:

Hebrews 9:12 he entered once for all into the Holy Place, not with the blood of goats and calves, but with his own blood, thus obtaining eternal *redemption*.

Parallel to the idea that Messiah comes to *redeem* is also the promise that he comes to *ransom* (Hebrew: *pādāh*, “ransomed”). Again, the liberation of Israel from Egypt is in the foreground (firstborn: Exodus 13:13, 15; all Israel: Deuteronomy 7:8; 9:26). For Isaiah, these are people God released from the slavery of their sins, and Jeremiah 31:11 shares this understanding:

For the LORD has *ransomed* Jacob, and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him.

Both *redemption* and *ransom* involve the payment of a price, the willingness to give oneself away for the release of another. In becoming a human being at Bethlehem, Jesus descended from heaven’s glory to the humble environs of earth where real suffering and real death were possible. Jesus embraced vulnerability so that he might fully identify with lost people and ultimately die to recover them. Jesus comes, “full of grace and truth,” and so he becomes “The Way, the Truth, and the Life” (John 14:6).

“The goal for the redeemed and ransomed pilgrims is *Zion*.”² The highway of holiness and the road of the redeemed lead forward to the *City of God*. The Hebrew word is *Ṣion*. When the word “Zion” occurs in the Bible, its meaning is nuanced. *Zion* is a *place*, a synonym for Jerusalem, Israel’s capital city. Another meaning is a *mountain* near Jerusalem where Jebus once stood, a fortress captured by David and designated “The City of David.” Once Solomon finished his *Temple*, it was called *Zion*. But the meaning transcended all of these locales, and became a way to refer to God’s future city where He would finally come to live forever among human beings in the kingdom of God. This designation of *Zion* is consistent with the use of ransomed and redeemed in the preceding section. Taken as a group, such persons constitute this new city of God. They have no limitations of time or space because their foundation is God Himself. Jesus, the Messiah, would come to make such a city possible. In a moving text from Hebrews, we read about this city:

But you have come to *Mount Zion* and to *the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem*, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering,²³ and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect,²⁴ and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.²⁵ See that you do not refuse the one who is speaking; for if they did not escape when they refused the one who warned them on earth, how much less will we escape if we reject the one who warns from heaven!²⁶ At that time his voice shook the earth; but now he has promised, “Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heaven.”²⁷ This phrase, “Yet once more,” indicates the removal of what is shaken-- that is, created things-- so that what cannot be shaken may remain.²⁸ Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us give thanks, by which we offer to God an acceptable worship with reverence and awe;²⁹ for indeed our God is a consuming fire (Hebrews 12:22-29).

Zion, understood like this, is really the fulfillment of the kingdom of God.

The central quality of the new city says Isaiah 35:10 is “everlasting joy ... gladness and joy ...” marked by “singing” and by the removal of “sorrow and sighing.” Cities sing! *Zion* is the city of joy. When the text says this joy “will crown their heads,” he is re-defining the nature of power and rule and kingship. The residents of the new city wear, not crowns of gold, studded with rubies, but crowns of joy shaped by redemption. Those who govern *this* city celebrate every time redemption escorts a new resident through its gates. Or as Jesus put it:

Just so, I tell you, there will be more *joy* in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance ...¹⁰ Just so, I tell you, there is *joy* in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents (Luke 15:7, 10).

What floods the city *Zion* with joyfulness is seeing sinners coming home because they have been *redeemed by Jesus*. As that happens, a new day dawns with the kingdom of God. In the words of the Psalmist:

² *Ibid*, 17.

For his anger is but for a moment; his favor is for a lifetime. Weeping may linger for the night, but *joy comes with the morning* (Psalm 30:5).

Claiming Our Future: The Gifts of Redemption

Because Jesus rose from the dead, we have a future! That future involves more than our soul or spirit, but necessarily includes our body. In another of Paul's moving texts about the future hope, he writes:

Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, *the redemption of our bodies* (Romans 8:23).

Already, God has given us a taste of the future by sending the Holy Spirit as "firstfruits" of what lies ahead of us. In this week's readings (15:20), Christ is called "the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep." One of the benefits of Jesus' resurrection has been his ascension to God's right hand and the gift of the Spirit. Remember the importance of firstfruits to the ordinary farmer: they are a sign of how the rest of the harvest will turn out; how the rest of the fruit will come from the tree. God has long-term plans for each of his children, and we have every reason to "eagerly wait" for their fulfillment. When Paul wants to talk about the completion of God's work, he uses the phrase "*redemption of our bodies.*"

Our study this week, "I am Redeemed," fits nicely into what Paul teaches in Romans 8:23. You don't need me to remind you that the body we now have is far from perfect, far from whole, far from lasting forever. "We groan inwardly," Paul says, precisely because our outside doesn't fully agree with our inside! Inside, we have a sense of forgiveness, peace, faith, hope, heart holiness, and relationship with God. In one sense, God has set us free — redeemed us — through the work of Jesus on the cross:

We are justified freely by his grace through the *redemption* that came by Christ Jesus. ²⁵ God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood (Romans 8:24a-25a; see also Ephesians 1:7; Colossians 1:14; Hebrews 9:12).

Jesus is already

our righteousness, holiness and *redemption* (1 Corinthians 1:30).

But redemption also lies in the future:

¹³ And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the *redemption* of those who are God's possession-- to the praise of his glory (Ephesians 1:13-14).

There's a progression here that moves from 1) believing the Gospel, 2) becoming included in Christ's church, 3) sealed by the Spirit, 4) promised a future when we are fully redeemed. What happens to us in the future is closely connected to how we live our lives now:

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of *redemption* (Ephesians 4:30).

There is coming a "day of *redemption*" when God finishes what He started on the day we put our faith in His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ.

When Jews in Paul's audience heard the word "redemption," they recognized the Hebrew idea of *g'ullāh*. According to the Torah, if one's kinsfolk were in trouble or danger economically, a kinsman would step up and pay the necessary price to restore them to economic freedom within the community. Good examples can be found in Leviticus 25:25ff, 48ff; 27:11ff. The famous story of Ruth, in the book bearing her name, powerfully illustrates the idea of the "kinsman redeemer" through the person of Boaz (Hebrew: *gō'el*, Ruth 3:9, 12-13; 4:1, 3-4, 6-8, 14). More important than these human examples, is Yahweh's agency as the Redeemer of Israel, embodied in liberation from Egyptian slavery:

And who is like your people Israel-- the one nation on earth that God went out to *redeem* as a people for himself, and to make a name for himself, and to perform great and awesome wonders by driving out nations and their gods from before your people, whom you redeemed from Egypt? (2 Samuel 7:23; also 1 Chronicles 17:21).

The story of Job contains a dramatic moment of faith when the lead character declares:

²⁵ I know that my *Redeemer* lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. ²⁶ And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; ²⁷ I myself will see him with my own eyes-- I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me! (Job 19:25-27).

Redemption requires costly payment to secure the release of another. It is about rescuing the other from loss.

Beyond our own resurrection, something more is indicated by Jesus' resurrection, namely, that all of creation is destined for transformation as well. That means whenever we contribute to the renewal of earth and its environment, to the salvation of other people by our witness, we are signaling the future new earth that God has promised in His Word. Nothing we do in that effort is ever wasted or lost, but in the coming resurrection, God will incorporate the fruits of our labor into the new world He is birthing. As Paul told Titus about Jesus:

who gave himself for us to *redeem* us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good (Titus 2:14).

And this was part of his long-term promise made to father Abraham:

He *redeemed* us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit (Galatians 3:14).

Notice: blessing to the world and the promise of the Spirit to us! Peter affirms that means a new way of life:

For 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 (1 Peter 1:18).

When we think about resurrection biblically, everything about us is touched by it. That is why it is so appropriate to use the language of *redemption* when discussing *resurrection*.

We are able to experience the fruits of resurrection *now*, for already we have been raised up with Christ, as Paul describes with highly exalted language

⁴ But because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, ⁵ made us alive with Christ even when we were dead in transgressions-- it is by grace you have been saved. ⁶ And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus, ⁷ in order that in the coming ages he might show the incomparable riches of his grace, expressed in his kindness to us in Christ Jesus. ⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith-- and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God-- ⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast. ¹⁰ For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (Ephesians 2:4-10).

Resurrection life makes possible our standing before God, and also makes possible the workmanship that produces good works. That is *redemption* to the ⁿth degree! It is by grace, and therefore a gift. It results in something permanent that lives on through "the coming ages."

A Song of Redemption: "Redeemed" (Big Daddy Weave Lyrics)

Exodus, Calvary, and Easter Sunday each narrate our Lord's work to liberate — redeem — human lives from bondage of life's reversals, abuse, and oppression. Taken together these pivotal moments in salvation-history become the *muses* for the music we will be exploring this week. Our chosen selection is simply titled, "Redeemed." This song is by contemporary the Christian band *Big Daddy Weave* from their 2012 album *Love Come to Life*. It was released on May 3, 2012, as the second single. We print the lyrics below and then offer comment on the central theme earmarked for our study this week.

Seems like all I can see was the struggle
Haunted by ghosts that lived in my past
Bound up in shackles of all my failures
Wondering how long is this gonna last
Then You look at this prisoner and say to me "son
Stop fighting a fight that's already been won"

I am redeemed, You set me free
So I'll shake off these heavy chains
And wipe away every stain now I'm not who I used to be
I am redeemed
I'm redeemed

All my life I have been called unworthy
Named by the voice of my shame and regret
But when I hear You whisper, "Child lift up your head"
I remember oh God, You're not done with me yet

I am redeemed, You set me free
So I'll shake off these heavy chains

And wipe away every stain now I'm not who I used to be
Because I don't have to be the old man inside of me
'Cause his day is long dead and gone
Because I've got a new name, a new life I'm not the
same
And a hope that will carry me home

I am redeemed, You set me free
So I'll shake off these heavy chains
And wipe away every stain now I'm not who I used to be

I am redeemed, You set me free
So I'll shake off these heavy chains
And wipe away every stain now I'm not who I used to be

Oh God I'm not who I used to be
Jesus I'm not who I used to be

'Cause I am redeemed
Thank God, redeemed

“Free at last, free at last, thank God Almighty, I’m free at last.” Those familiar words echoed on August 28, 1963, at the Lincoln Memorial, in Washington D.C, from the lips of Dr. Martin Luther King when he climaxed his powerful speech which ended like this:

And when this happens, and when we allow freedom ring, when we let it ring from every village and every hamlet, from every state and every city, we will be able to speed up that day when all of God's children, black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands and sing in the words of the old Negro spiritual:

Free at last! Free at last!

*Thank God Almighty, we are free at last!*³

Although these words were *spoken*, the way Dr. King delivered them, they might just as well have been *sung*. His cadence, melodic flourishes, and compelling rhythms continue to move audiences who hear the speech replayed. Young children memorize these lines and apply their own gifted improvisation to communicate the deep meaning of his eloquent speech for our own time. Martin led the nation in a prayer of confession while offering hope for a better future, after repentance had done its work in people’s hearts. Racism and injustice are deep transgressions on America’s soul, and through his speech this gifted man gave citizens the words to find their way back to the path of liberty and justice.

*Big Daddy Weave*⁴ heard the muses of a dozen biblical texts, combined with the very real personal and collective conflict of souls in distress. The song begins with a series of key words: “struggle, ghosts, past, shackles, failures, wonder, prisoner, fight.” These are the *objective* circumstances of a person’s life, the external realities which conspire to hold human beings captive to sin, fear, and death. They are the things beyond our control, against which we struggle, from which there seems to be no escape, and about which we wonder if there will ever be an end. There’s only so much confession about such things that a person can make before hearing the good news about release and, yes, *redemption*: “I am redeemed, set free, chains shaken off, stain wiped clean, former self transformed.” Three times the words of emancipation ring from the lyrics: “I am redeemed, I am redeemed, I am redeemed” — reminders of the Triune God, Father, Son, and Spirit whose work for human redemption “is over all, and through all, and in all” (Ephesians 4:6). The good news whispers in the ears of harassed and troubled souls, “Son, daughter, the fight has already been won.” Hearing such good news is a bit like adjusting one’s eyes to bright sunlight after spending time in the darkness: we are shocked, suspicious, and doubtful about its truth, having known only the endless struggle for freedom.

The second stanza focuses on the *subjective* aspect of this person’s experience: the sense of “unworthiness, shame, and regret.” A fresh word whispers encouragement, “Child, lift up your head,” and then memory adds its own wisdom, “You’re not done with me yet!” Here are words of *relationship* restored and renewed which replace the thoughts of self-deprecation and lost self-esteem. Purpose corrects misdirection and doubt about self-identity. We are, after all, made in God’s image so that we might bear witness to His likeness.

The third stanza testifies to divine action and the robust work of God on our behalf. It is in the form of a petition from the self to God: “Wipe away every stain, deal with the old man inside, give me a new name, and inspire hope...” Each of these is either stated or implied in the language of the song. Clearly the remaining refrains and echoes of the chorus affirm the end of the old life and the commencement of the new life. These affirmations remind us of both the comments made in Isaiah 35 and of our other texts that declare the *redeeming* work of God for the human race. Consider these further important Scriptures which inspire the affirmations of this week’s song, “Redeemed.” Underline words and phrases that are also found in the song’s lyrics. In what ways do these texts offer you hope and a greater sense of liberation as children of God?

³ <https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkihavedream.htm>

⁴ The group consists of: Mike Weaver, Jay Weaver, Joe Shirk, Jeremy Redmon, and Brian Beihl. Mike, band frontman, released his autobiography, *I Am Redeemed: Learning to Live in Grace*, in 2019.

The Newness of Life vs. Oldness of Death

¹⁴ For Christ's love compels us, because we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died. ¹⁵ And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again. ¹⁶ So from now on we regard no one from a worldly point of view. Though we once regarded Christ in this way, we do so no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! (2 Corinthians 5:14-17).

Old Man vs. New Man

We know that our old man was crucified with him so that the body of sin would no longer dominate us, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin (Romans 6:6)

When he nullified in his flesh the law of commandments in decrees, he did this to create in himself one new man out of two, thus making peace (Ephesians 2:15)

You were taught with reference to your former way of life to lay aside the old man who is being corrupted in accordance with deceitful desires, ²³ to be renewed in the spirit of your mind, ²⁴ and to put on the new man who has been created in God's image—in righteousness and holiness that comes from truth (Ephesians 4:22-24).

Stain of Sin Washed Away and A New Heart Created Within

I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean; I will cleanse you from all your impurities and from all your idols. I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh (Ezekiel 36:25-26).

The blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer sprinkled on those who are ceremonially unclean sanctify them so that they are outwardly clean. How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! (Hebrews 9:13-14).

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin (1 John 1:7).

"My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous (1 John 2:1).

I will remember their sins and their lawless deeds no more (Hebrews 10:17).

For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God (Ephesians 2:8).

For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But whoever does not have them is nearsighted and blind, forgetting that they have been cleansed from their past sins (2 Peter 1:5-9).

Christ Jesus Defeated the Powers Against Us

¹³ When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your sinful nature, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, ¹⁴ having canceled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross. ¹⁵ And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross. (Colossians 2:13-15).

¹⁴ Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death-- that is, the devil-- ¹⁵ and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death. (Hebrews 2:14-15).

³¹ "Now is the time for judgment on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out. ³² But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself." ³³ He said this to show the kind of death he was going to die. (John 12:31-33).

New Name, New Identity

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who overcomes I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a *new name* written on the stone that no one knows except the one who receives it (Revelation 2:17).

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light (1 Peter 2:9).

No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you (John 15:15).

For in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith (Galatians 3:26).

And to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness (Ephesians 4:24).

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is (1 John 3:1-2).

Conclusion

One final text guides our thoughts as suggested by the lyrics of this week's worship song.

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, ² because through Christ Jesus the law of *the Spirit of life set me free* from the law of sin and death. ³ For what the law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering. And so he condemned sin in sinful man, ⁴ in order that the righteous requirements of the law might be fully met in us, who do not live according to the sinful nature but according to the Spirit.

⁵ Those who live according to the sinful nature have their minds set on what that nature desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires. ⁶ The mind of sinful man is death, but the mind controlled by the Spirit is life and peace; ⁷ the sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so. ⁸

Those controlled by the sinful nature cannot please God. ⁹ You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ.

¹⁰ But if Christ is in you, your body is dead because of sin, yet your spirit is alive because of righteousness. ¹¹ And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit, who lives in you. (Romans 8:1-11).

Condemnation by self, others, or God may well be the severest form of bondage. Trapped inside broken identities, human beings chafe from the gnawing voices within and without, "You aren't good enough, you don't measure up, and you will never have enough." Spend five minutes watching commercial television and hear advertisers tell you that some problem stands between you and the perfect life, your most complete existence. You have a problem, but they have the answer. From this narrative of shameless consumerism springs many relevant messages about the question, "Who am I?" Absent the truth of the gospel, that question wanders aimlessly through the corridors of our hearts without an answer. Our identity is owned by others.

What the gospel promises is what the Lord God of Israel gave to enslaved Hebrews in Egypt: *redemption*, the freeing of bodies and souls from the tyranny of ruling powers. It is for those who seek the Lord with their whole heart that One comes *to redeem* by setting free from the tyranny of sin and death. Identity — human identity — requires a defining action by a divine Savior, a triumph over whatever keeps us in bondage under the yoke of alien powers. Paul's words in Romans 8 summon us in Jesus our Lord and through the Spirit to receive deliverance from sin and death so that we might begin the new life promised to us. May Jesus raise us up from the brickyards of Pharaoh and set us free to serve the Lord of the Exodus and of Calvary who makes all things new.

We have a redeemer, Jesus Christ the Lord. Much like the song we have considered this week are the lyrics of Keith Green's lovely worship chorus, "There is a Redeemer" (1982):

*There is a redeemer
Jesus, God's own Son
Precious Lamb of God, Messiah
Holy One
Jesus my redeemer
Name above all names
Precious Lamb of God, Messiah
Oh, for sinners slain*

*Thank you, oh my father
For giving us Your Son
And leaving Your Spirit
'Til the work on Earth is done*

*When I stand in Glory
I will see His face
And there I'll serve my King forever
In that Holy Place*

*Thank you, oh my father
For giving us Your Son
And leaving Your Spirit
'Til the work on Earth is done*

*There is a redeemer
Jesus, God's own Son
Precious Lamb of God, Messiah
Holy One*

*Thank you, oh my father
For giving us Your Son
And leaving Your Spirit
'Til the work on Earth is done*

*And leaving Your Spirit
'Til the work on Earth is done*

Jesus instructed his disciples about *the redemption that is nearby*. Luke gives us our Lord's assuring words: At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory. When these things begin to take place, stand up and *lift up your heads, because your redemption is drawing near* (Luke 21:27-28).

In his writings for the season of *Advent* (which begins next week), Dietrich Bonhoeffer the 20th century Christian pastor and martyr penned these words about redemption:

Let's not deceive ourselves. "Your *redemption* is drawing near" (Luke 21:28), whether we know it or not, and the only question is: Are we going to let it come to us too, or are we going to resist it? Are we going to join in this movement that comes down from heaven to earth, or are we going to close ourselves off? Christmas is coming—whether it is with us or without us depends on each and every one of us.

Such a true Advent happening now creates something different from the anxious, petty, depressed, feeble Christian spirit that we see again and again, and that again and again wants to make Christianity contemptible. This becomes clear from the two powerful commands that introduce our text: "Look up and raise your heads" (Luke 21:28). Advent creates people, new people. We too are supposed to become new people in Advent. Look up, you whose gaze is fixed on this earth, who are spellbound by the little events and changes on the face of the earth. Look up to these words, you who have turned away from heaven disappointed. Look up, you whose eyes are heavy with tears and who are heavy and who are crying over the fact that the earth has gracelessly torn us away. Look up, you who, burdened with guilt, cannot lift your eyes. Look up, your *redemption* is drawing near. Something different from what you see daily will happen. Just be aware, be watchful, wait just another short moment. Wait and something quite new will break over you: God will come.⁵

In light of our conversations this week, let us heed the good pastor's invitation to "Look up and raise your heads" so that our Lord might create a new people of us, even when our "eyes are heavy with tears...over the fact that the earth has gracelessly torn us away. Look up, you who, burdened with guilt cannot lift up your eyes...look up, your redemption is drawing near. Wait and something quite new will break over you. God will come," *for He is our Redeemer!* He is already on the way as the church calendar begins a new year with celebration of Advent which begins next week.

Glory to God! Amen.

⁵ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *God is in the Manger*, "Advent Week Three: Redemption," trans. O. C. Dean Jr. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010).