

Weekly Encouragement

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Redemption

By Rev. Peter Eng



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"A prophetess, Anna, ... began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem" (Luke 2:36-38)

The prophetess Anna told us Jesus would redeem Jerusalem. That was explosive. To most Jews of that time, it meant only one thing: Jesus would free Jerusalem from Roman rule. It would be a political redemption; Jesus would be their nationalist hero. He was God's anointed one to free them from Rome.

In this instance Jerusalem is a synecdoche for the whole nation, meaning Jesus will redeem Israel. It

is like when someone says Washington declared war against Iraq. The capital city often represents the whole nation. That part of the prophecy was understood by those who received Anna's prophecy. But Anna's prophecy meant much more than deliverance for a nation. It meant freedom for the whole world.

We can readily see why many Jews would be thinking politically when Anna said Jerusalem would be redeemed. In recent years, America went to war against Iraq, and overthrew Saddam Hussein. As much as Saddam had abused his own people, there was also a clear sentiment among the Iraqis that they don't want their American liberators to become the new masters. They wanted America to relinquish control of Iraq.

The Jewish people were grateful to the Romans who prevented the Greeks from imposing Greek religion on them (under Antiochus Epiphanes and others). Rome was a liberator. But it also became an occupier. Roman occupation of Israel was not as innocuous as the American occupation of Iraq. Whatever the case, it is not difficult for us to understand that as

much as Iraqis want to determine their national agenda, the Jews, likewise, wanted the Romans out of their country. For the majority, the redemption of Jerusalem has to be a geo-political phenomenon.

According to Anna, the baby Jesus would redeem God's people. Luke, the author was clear that he was not referring to any political redemption from the Romans. Luke, together with the other Evangelists, told us that Jerusalem and the temple will suffer such total destruction that not one stone will stand on another ([Matt 24:2](#); [Mk 13:2](#); [Lk 21:6](#)). This happened in AD 70 when Rome destroyed Jerusalem and the temple. Anna was not talking about the political redemption of Jerusalem even though it was probably the majority view of the Messiah among the Jews.

The noun "redemption" is used only twice in Luke's Gospel. Here in Anna's prophecy and again in [Luke 21:28](#) in Jesus' prophecy. Jesus first told us that Jerusalem would be destroyed ([21:20-24](#)); and about cosmic and geologic disasters ([21:25-28](#)). It was in the midst of this carnage that Jesus said, *"Now when these things begin to take place, straighten up and raise your heads, because your redemption is drawing near"* ([Luke 21:28](#)). Redemption was cast in the destruction of Jerusalem and in cosmic chaos. The redemption of Jerusalem was anything but political deliverance for the city.

God's plan is to redeem us from a slavery more desperately urgent and

of infinitely greater worth than any political deliverance. Jesus will redeem us from sin and bring us back to God.

We like to think we are free agents. We have free choice. That is indeed a god-given right. We can choose to disobey God, reject him, ignore him, or even argue he does not exist. But that is only one facet of reality. The other facet is that we all belong to someone or something. We are not free agents. Somebody owns us.

God owns us.

For some of us we sell ourselves to sin and become enslaved by the devil. Think of the crack addict. Crack owns him. The devil enslaves him through this substance called crack. Think of the alcoholic. The bottle owns him. Think of the money addict. He just needs more of it. Think of the sex addict. There is never enough. Think of the gambling addict. His need cannot be satisfied regardless of whether he wins or loses.

Some of us serve our appetites. Jesus refused to serve his hunger after fasting 40 days because it involved an abuse of his ability to work miracles. For most of us, as long as that appetite is legitimate, we will not give a second thought to demand its satisfaction. Jesus said, "My food is to do the will of him who sent me." Yet, we make our appetites the Lord of our life without a second thought.

We serve human gods. My wife and I laughed over a kiddy T-shirt we saw.

The words said, “Dad is the boss, Mom is his boss, I am their boss.” Children, God’s gift to couples can also own them. What aspect of a divorce causes the most acrimony? Custody of children, of course! I suspect one important reason why marriages fail is when a couple revolve around their children. The children become the center and that splits the marriage apart. Our children can become our gods—easily.

The redemption of Jesus Christ on the cross pays for the penalty of sin we deserve. We become God’s children when we receive Jesus as our Savior and Lord. That relationship is secure. But being a child of God does not prevent us from foolishly enslaving ourselves again. We need redemption again and again. By neglect alone, we drift from our true center. We sell out to other interests, and God is no longer our master. Redemption from the *penalty* of sin (eternal death) is a one-time event. But redemption from the *power* of sin is a repeated event.

I know I need redemption today—again. And strangely, I feel this need more than when I was first redeemed from the penalty of sin. Do you feel the need for redemption? The return to God as center is the call to be owned by God afresh. Redemption from sin is redemption for God.

We may not like our political situation; Jesus is here to redeem us from sin to himself, not from our political trials. He redeems us from enslavement to sin to fully belong to God. The more we surrender to God as the master of

our life, the more we enjoy him and experience true freedom.

America is a free country, and many wish for the freedoms enjoyed by the Americans. But the best freedom the world has to offer us, American freedom, is a freedom to sin—or not. In Christ, we belong to a holy nation. In that nation, we have freedom from sin. Political solutions give us a humanistic freedom to sin. God’s solution for us is freedom from sin.

Note: The ESV is used unless indicated otherwise

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Rev. Peter Eng is an ordained minister from the Reformed Tradition, but he is truly global in perspective. He served the Lord in various capacities starting from his teenage years in the 70s. His undergrad studies were done in Singapore, his grad studies in the USA, and post-grad studies in the United Kingdom, with additional post-grad research in Germany.