



RANSOM a Bible Study based on Matthew 20:20-28

AIMS AND OUTCOMES

- To consider one of the different images for the atonement found in the NT.
- To think about the concept of redemption, by considering Jesus words, '...son of man came not to be served.... to give his life a ransom for many.'

This study has been heavily adapted from the small groups book DEEPER ENCOUNTER: Knowing Christ Crucified by John Wilks Published by Scripture Union. (It is now out of print)

The booklet covers many of the scriptural images which give deeper insights into why Jesus died.

1. Really Dead
2. Sacrifice
3. Substitution
4. Reconciliation
5. Ransom
6. Propitiation
7. Christ Crucified – and victorious.
8. Leaders Notes:

If anyone would like to use the whole resource, which includes a CD please contact Pauline Burdett.
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RESOURCES:

- Leaders notes
- Bibles
- Participants sheets
- Pens
- (The Lion the Witch and the Wardrobe particularly chapters 13-15 as background reading.)

LEADERS NOTES:

As we systematically work through five of the different images for the atonement found in the New Testament, we come to the one that is found on Jesus' lips: ransom. With this word we link with the concept of redemption, the buying back of something. These terms describe the atonement as some sort of a transaction

Throughout history, some theologians have been uncertain about this image. If a ransom is being paid, who is it being paid to? The obvious answers could be 'God the Father' or 'the devil'. Neither is a completely satisfactory answer. The former too easily leads to a caricature of the atonement - with the Father and the Son seeming to be at odds with one another. And the latter seems to give the devil just too much power and authority.

For the past few decades, CS Lewis' *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* has been hugely influential in the way the English-speaking Western world sees the cross. If you want to study it in more depth, it would be a good idea to suggest that people look at the relevant portions of chapter 13 and 15.



Preparation

Read Matthew 20:20-28.

Extra texts that could also be read for a fuller appreciation of the New Testament use of ransom imagery would be Galatians 3: 10-14 (note verse 13) and 1 Peter 1:1 .19.

Hand out the Participants Sheets and pens

Break the group into 2's or 3's and answer the first 3 questions

- 1 What do we think of when we hear the word 'ransom'? What does it involve?
- 2 How do you think people hearing Jesus say that he would 'give his life as a ransom for many' would have understood him? What about after the resurrection?
- 3 Superficially, there is little difference between ransom and substitution. What is the difference?

Come back together as a large group and feedback answers.

Note: The answer needs to bring out the feeling of 'menace' involved in ransom. Something that rightly belongs to someone else has been snatched from them, and now a demand is made as a condition of the return. Substitution is simply swapping one thing for the other.

Break down into small groups again and answer the next 3 questions.

- 4 Ransom is the atonement image specifically mentioned by Jesus. Does this make it any different? And do we need to treat it any differently?
- 5 Which elements of the ransom image have been taken up by the New Testament writers, and which ignored?
- 6 Are there any aspects of the ransom image which cause problems for us when we use it to explain Jesus' death?

Feedback:

Note: The most common complaint about the ransom image is that there are only two candidates for the hostage taker: God the Father, or Satan. The first can be rapidly ruled out, which leaves the second. While some people see no problem with that, others would point to Genesis 3, Revelation and even Colossians 3 to suggest that God's rule over Satan precludes the possibility that we were captured by Satan.

So we might need to emphasise that asking who held us captive is incorrect. This part of the image is not what the New Testament writers were trying to focus on. Rather than someone specific holding us, we might be better to think that *something* held us: sin and our inability to free ourselves from it.

Discuss the next questions in the main group.



- 7 Can we summarise how the image of ransom and redemption (concentrating for now on just this image) answers the question, 'Why did Jesus have to die?'

If your group has done the background reading in LWW :-

'... there is a magic deeper still ... a different incantation ... when a willing victim who had committed no treachery was killed in a traitor's stead, the Table would crack and Death itself would start working backwards.' - CS Lewis, *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950, modern editions published by Collins, chapter 15).

- 1 Which images are used by Lewis in his narrative and explanation of Jesus' death?
- 2 Are there any aspects of Aslan's death that get in the way of a correct understanding of Jesus' death?
- 3 Is *LWW* too stuck in its time frame, with its setting in the Second World War and boarding schools, to be of any real use now?

If you have not used the background reading of LWW

Other questions

- 1 Redemption and pawnshops are not so common these days. Can we explain Jesus' death as a straightforward transaction without it sounding corny or crass?
- 2 One commentary notes that for Matthew 'atonement and its attendant themes were firstly matters of experience, not rational reflection'. What can we do to aid that transition from intellectual enquiry to experienced salvation?
Note: The quote comes from WD Davies and Dale C Allison, *Matthew: A Shorter Commentary*, Continuum, 2004, p339. Their point is that Matthew never really explains how Jesus' death affects us all; he is concerned simply that we respond to it.

Consider together any hostage situations that people remember or are at present ongoing. Information can be found on the internet. How was the ransom met? Was it met?

E.g Terry Waite was taken hostage in Beirut in late January 1987, and released on 18 November 1991. He had been working as a negotiator for the release of hostages in the Middle East through most of the 1980s. Brian Keenan and John McCarthy, who were captured at much the same period.

Or the number of Nigerian young women are being held hostage by ISIS at the time of writing.

Intercession: Pray together for those who are held to ransom, both physically and mentally.

Adoration

Choose an appropriate song or hymn to read around the group or sing, such as: 'The price is paid' (Graham Kendrick), 'Almighty God, we bring you praise' (Austin Martin), 'And can it be that I should gain' (Charles Wesley) or 'Come and see' (Graham Kendrick).



Thanksgiving: Pray together thanking God for his rescue plan, for the depth of love shown by Christ through his death

EXTRA

Besides the well-known *LWW*, there is an excellent story that introduces ransom ideas for younger children: Shirley Hughes, *Dagger* (current paperback edition by Red Fox Picture Books, 1993, ISBN: 009992790X, but originally published in 1977). She is best known as the author of the 'Alfie' books.

The 2000 film *Proof of Life*, starring Meg Ryan and Russell Crowe, is a hostage and ransom film set in South America. Not the best film by these two stars, but an acceptable film on this increasingly common form of kidnap.