

***Atonement Riches -
Christ Our Substitute***

Romans 5:1-21

PREPARED BY
KEN GEHRELS
PASTOR
CALVIN CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH OF OTTAWA
ONTARIO, CANADA

Christ the victor.
And Christ our Ransom.

Those have been two facets which we've admired in the gemstone of our salvation, won for us by Jesus through his

Atonement.

Atonement -

how the death and resurrection of our Lord and Saviour brought us, who were estranged, into fellowship and unity with our God and Father.

It has been considered by believers from the earliest days of the faith. From many different angles. Many different theories put forward. Each helping us to grow in thanksgiving and praise to our God for the great gift of salvation that is ours.

And, honestly, we need these many different viewpoints. No single explanation of Christ's atoning work is sufficient in and of itself.

And so, we're choosing to see them as like facets on a gem stone - each with a different view into the interior of that precious stone.

Christ the Victor. The theme that is so often considered and celebrated on Easter weekend, particularly through the scriptural lens of 1 Corinthians 15.

O Death, where is your victory? O grave, where is your sting?

Christ our Ransom. Echoing the words of Jesus:

Mark 10:45: "For even the Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."

Two facets.

Tonight a third.

I invite you to savour in your mind the grand and miraculous work, which culminated on Easter morning, and which will be consummated at the return of our Lord on the clouds of glory through the facet of

Christ our Substitute.

It is, in technical terms, known as the *Recapitulation theory of the atonement*.

It celebrates Jesus' work to bring a complete restoration of all Creation, of all humanity, of you and of me.

A complete renewal.

Doing up what others have undone.

Doing rightly what others were unable to do.

Taking scattered pieces, and gathering them up into one perfect whole.

A theme verse is found in the first chapter of Ephesians. There we read about the mystery of God's saving plan for a lost and broken world. In the 10th verse it is described with a particular Greek word that is sometimes translated as

“bring together”

or “gather up”

or “sum up”

or “recapitulate”

1:10 (NLT) -

And this is his plan: At the right time he will bring everything together under the authority of Christ-- everything in heaven and on earth.

The ancient Greek word references the roller around which was wrapped the parchment or papyrus scroll of the volumen with a written text --

that which binds it all together,

that around which everything revolves.

Recapitulation theory of the atonement sees Jesus Christ as being the centrepiece around which all of Creation revolves; the one who gives meaning and hope to it all.

It first found expression through the writing of Irenaeus of Lyons in the second century. It has remained at the centre of Eastern Orthodox theology. And today it is finding renewed interest in Evangelical Christianity.

In the world of ancient rhetoric, *anakephalaiosis* referred to the ending of a speech or argument where the presenter would tie the whole argument together, drawing together all the strands in one final, strong statement.

In court it is the summary argument of the lawyer to the jury.

Jesus, said Irenaeus, is the Heavenly Father's final argument, his closing statement to Creation. He is the purpose of all the Father's work.

And, in that way Irenaeus sees redemptive history as the grand speech of God the Father.

Irenaeus pointed to scriptures that speak of Christ as the new Adam, who systematically undoes what Adam did.

Adam was disobedient.

The second Adam was fully obedient.

The first Adam went to the tree and brought sin to the world.

The second Adam hung from the tree and brought life to the world.

Beyond just being the second Adam, Recapitulation doctrine also sees Jesus as the New Israel.

AND, even more, as the New Creation.

It is, actually, not so much a statement of *how* the atonement all works in any sort of technical sense, but more of a celebration of what it all accomplished, the end point or *raison d'être* of it.

So, tonight we walk in the footsteps of Irenaeus.

We celebrate and honour Jesus, our Saviour, as:

- the new Israel (and we'll go to *Matthew* for that)
- the new Adam/humanity (that's the point of *Romans 5*)
- the new Creation (where we'll listen to *2 Corinthians 5*)

In each of these - Jesus sums up what God has planned. Jesus gets right and brings together what we had lost hold of and caused to unravel. He renews what has been broken.

JESUS AS THE NEW ISRAEL

Begin, then, with Jesus as the New Israel. What this angle does is help us affirm and understand the importance of the Body of Christ, the people of God, on earth.

Jesus is not just in the business of saving souls.

He is in the business of forming a new Kingdom community. Even more than that - but that's our third point. Here think of the Kingdom community. Which finds, in part, expression in the gathered, worshiping, serving church around the world.

Have you ever noticed how the gospels portray Jesus as the New Israel?

Each gospel does it in part.

But the most Hebrew of the gospels, written to a significantly Jewish audience, does it the most.

Know which one that is?

Matthew.

Echoes of Israel's history are all over the pages of Matthew.

There's way more than we can ever cover adequately in 20 minutes.

Let me bounce around a bit and offer you a taste.

This morning we considered the temptation of Jesus.

I'm not sure if you've ever noticed, but the answers that Jesus gives to counter the Tempter are taken directly from the story of Israel's struggle in the wilderness.

Did it strike you that his 40 day sojourn in the wilderness is a re-play of Israel's 40 years in the same place?

Or that Jesus had come through the waters of baptism like Israel came through the waters of the Red

Sea before going into the wilderness?

And before that - how the babe Jesus was carried, his life in peril, into Egypt.... just like Israel began. Their journeys begin the same.

And the question facing the reader is, "Will Jesus now get right what Israel got so wrong - that is to be a light to the nations?"

Israel, after these, goes to the mountain and receives the 10 words of life.

Jesus, after his temptation in Matthew, climbs a mountain, and delivers the famous beatitudes, which look for all the world like a restating of a *counter-cultural call* to the people of God.

And what is the calling of the 12 disciples?

It is the renewal of the twelve tribes by the One calling the New Israel into being in himself.

Can you recall Jesus speaking of the temple's destruction, and then it being built back up in three days? (John 2:18-22)

It wasn't just a cute or mysterious way to refer to his body.

Rather, in his body he is appropriating all that the Old Temple stood for.

The gospel of John pays closest attention to this theme, revolving his writing around the temple festivals of Passover, Tabernacles and Dedication.

Jesus is the new Israel.

That's why St. Paul writes in Galatians 3 about the descendants of Abraham.

Most readers would have instinctively responded when asked who those descendants were - "*Israel, of course.*"

Paul says, 'if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, heirs according to promise' (Gal. 3:29).

Believers in Him who is the New Israel, whether Jewish or Gentile, inherit the promises to Abraham.

The community that gathers around Jesus is the community of God.

They are the ones who live the light of God, the life of God, the hope of God in a dark and fallen world.

They are the ones who spread the reign of God across the world.

What the nation of Israel had lost along the way, God gathers up and restores and renews and reaffirms in Jesus and the community that Jesus builds.

JESUS AS THE NEW ADAM

That's one part of Recapitulation theory.

An even broader understanding comes through the lenses of St. Paul.

We read from Romans 5 about the Old Adam and the New Adam.

Recapitulation theory would say that Jesus got right what Adam got wrong. Adam was supposed to be the head of the human race, but he bungled it and sent the race off course. And so we need a new humanity headed by a new Adam.

That new Adam is Jesus.

Go back to this morning again, and the temptations of Jesus.

Behind those three temptations is the ancient story of Adam and Eve in the garden. A single command; a single temptation; a single, devastating, result.

Jesus kept his eyes on his father, and so launched the mission to undo the age-old effects of human rebellion.

[N.T. Wright *Matthew* v.1 p.25-6]

God created the human race in Adam.

He creates a new human race in Christ.

Adam brought destruction to the human race by sinfully plucking fruit from a tree.

The New Adam brought life to the human race by sacrificially becoming the first-fruits of Salvation as he hung on the tree.

We may never see the saving work of Jesus as just a "*me 'n Jesus*" sort of thing.

It is about a new community.

It is about a new humanity.

It is about *living* together as that new community, and spreading the hope of newness, and tastes of that newness throughout all humanity.

Let me quote from Irenaeus:

Therefore he renews these things in himself, uniting man to the Spirit; and placing the Spirit in man, he himself is made the head of the Spirit and gives the Spirit to be the head of man, ...

...He therefore completely renewed all things, both taking up the battle against our enemy, and crushing him who at the beginning had led us captive in Adam, tramping on his head ...

Christ is the new Adam, that is, the Firstborn of faithful humanity, who lovingly and obediently welcomes the plan of redemption which God designed as the soul and goal of history.

Christ cancels the work of devastation, the horrible idolatries, violence and every sin that rebellious Adam sowed in the age-old history of humanity and in the created realm.

By his total obedience to the Father, Christ opens the era of peace with God and among all people, reconciling dispersed humanity in himself (cf. Eph 2: 16).

JESUS AS THE NEW CREATION

A new Israel.

A new humanity.

AND

A new creation.

Recapitulation theology places our Christian lives squarely back in God's good created order. And it reminds us that Christ redeems not only people but an entire cosmos.

It is flesh and blood theology.

It is wide and broad theology.

It goes back from the wilderness to the goodness of the Garden.

It, as one person put it, closes the circle that was opened when our first ancestors rebelled. It puts back into order that which was disordered.

It is hinted at in 2 Corinthians 5:17 -

If anyone is in Christ they are a new creation.

It is looked forward to with longing in Revelation 21:1

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth...

Let me quote from Irenaeus:

"when the invisible Son of God became visible, the incomprehensible became comprehensible, the impassible became passible, the Word became man. He recapitulated all things in himself, so that, just as the Word of God has primacy over heavenly, spiritual and invisible beings, so he does over visible and corporeal beings.

Assuming this primacy in himself and giving himself as head to the Church, he draws all things to himself" (Adversus Haereses, III, 16, 6).

All creation that now groans in anticipation of the day of final renewal (Romans 8:18-30) finds hope and a future in Jesus.

Nature that was subjected to the senselessness, degradation and devastation caused by sin, thus shares in the joy of the liberation achieved by Christ in the Holy Spirit

Jesus -

the New Israel

the New Humanity

the New Creation.

In Him the Creator's original plan will emerge and be completed.

Namely, a creation in which God and people, man and woman, humanity and nature are in harmony, in dialogue and in communion.

This plan, upset by sin, is restored in the most marvellous way by Christ, who mysteriously but effectively carries it out in the present reality, waiting to bring it to fulfilment.

It is the plan that history is working towards -

that great final moment when

"God will be all in all" (cf. 1 Cor 15: 28)

That's the moment for which the Spirit and the bride of Christ pray,
saying "Come!"

A moment for which everyone who hears and believes prays,
saying "Come!"

And a truth that all of us who are thirsty and long for the water of life, and who long to see that water flow across the world, and through every corner of creation, reach for and hold on to,
saying, "Come!"