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BEYOND REDEMPTION TO TRANSFORMATION

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INTRODUCTION

For the past year and a half we have focused on transformation—personal, congregational, and community. We have been the recipients of significant insights and valuable information shared by extremely gifted and dedicated presenters. Our attempt has been to bring to us “doers” not mere talkers, practitioner’s not just theoreticians. We have considered transformation from several disciplines and perspectives. Among these were the theological, the psychological, the sociological, and the spiritual. We reflected on transformation and social consciousness. Case studies of transformed congregations and transformed institutional practices were also presented.

Based upon Romans 12:2, we discussed how the mind is the door to transformation. Paul wrote, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.” We referenced H. Richard Niebuhr’s book entitled: Christ and Culture. It is the position of Niebuhr and Paul that Christ is the transformer of culture. This is my position also. I presented a second paper entitled “Transformation from the Inside Out.” It was based on Paul’s words recorded in Romans 7:10-20, “For the good that I will do, I do not do; but the evil I will not to do, that I do. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.” Thus the theological issues of sin and Satan were introduced. It was contended that these were issues of the inner person, spiritual issues requiring a spiritual transformation, “from the inside out.” It was the contention of the presenter, Dr. Richard Chapple, that there exist within each of us deep seated unresolved issues, “deep structures” which obstructs our spiritual transformation and causes us to experience inner conflict.

This address today contends that individual transformation and hence congregational and communal transformation are made stagnant by our tendency to be satisfied with personal redemption. “We have been washed in the blood of the crucified one.” We sing “O happy day, O happy day, since Jesus washed my sins away.” Too many of us desire to leave the matter there. This is not acceptable to God and it should not be acceptable to us. Therefore, the purpose of this address is to challenge us to move “Beyond Redemption to Transformation.”

HUMAN TENDENCIES

A study of human behavior will show that many of us want more of what we don’t need, especially if we think that it won’t cost us any more. Have you noticed the plates of some at buffets or at church repasts where it is self service? Often, plates are stacked high and running over. Many exhibit this inappropriate behavior when drinking or gambling. Just one more or one for the road as if the road ever wanted a drink.

So even where it is costly, and we don't need it, nor is it good for us, we want it anyway. We roll for the big win one more time.

On the other hand, many of us are satisfied with less than what is available to us even when it is good for us, especially if it will require more of us. Such is the case when it comes to redemption and transformation. Both are good for us and are available to us. But because transformation requires more of us, in spite of the fact that it is beneficial for us, we settle for Redemption. We accept much less than what is provided for us. We are redeemed; what more do we need?

REDEMPTION: WHAT IS IT?

To be redeemed is to be delivered at a price. It is salvation from the wages of sin, and the wrath of God. It is liberation from the eternal pain of death. It is freedom from the obligation incurred and is paid by the blood of another. Our redemption is the result of God's abiding love, His tender mercy, and the sacrifice of His only begotten Son. Redemption is possible because the requirements of the law have been satisfied. Jesus paid it all.

Redemption is wed to Good Friday which cleaned us up, enabled us to be reckoned righteous, justified by faith. I am reminded of the times at home in Alabama when Mama would clean us up and have us just sit on the porch because she knew that if we left the porch, we would get dirty again. So we were cleaned up, and we had no place to go. But with time and effort (and the strap) we learned how to stay clean even off the porch. We had changed; our ways were transformed; and we experienced Mama's favor.

To use another metaphor, redemption is like getting in the house through the door. But that is only the first step; it does not carry you through the many rooms in the house. You have to go beyond the door in order to receive the full benefits, and all of the blessings found in the many rooms of the house. The journey beyond the door takes you to the family room, the living room, the dining room, the kitchen, and the upper rooms.

Redemption positions us for birth into the family of God. When we are born again, our status is that of a babe in the faith. The enormous benefits are realized in a limited way. The concerns of an infant are simple. When hungry, feed me; when wet, dry me, when dirty, clean me; when fretful, hold me. In this state, the babe in the faith continues to be the recipient. Thus, we can understand why some think that being a babe is enough. We never want to grow up, go to the next level. Obviously, however, the God of life and grace has much more to offer to those who would "put away childish things."

Redemption offers the redeemed an opportunity, an option, a choice. Because of justification by faith, one can accept the offer to become an heir, a member of a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people. One can become an adopted son or daughter with all of the rights and privileges. The benefits of redemption are available for those who choose to accept them. There is no coercion, only an offer. It's a choice that each must make.

TRANSFORMATION: WHAT IS IT?

To be transformed is to experience a radical spiritual change. A new character emerges; natural inclinations are altered. Instinctive behavior takes on a new dimension. Things that are valued change and the value of things change. New interests are developed and different behavior patterns are seen. The things of the world give way to the things of God. Our orientation and the basis of how we perceive things are different. We began to live for the Man who died for us. We relate to others differently. We see differently and hear differently and feel differently and understand differently because we are not the same. Everything has changed.

The purpose of transformation is the restoration of our right relationship with God. It transports us back to the place where God wants us to be and where He placed us. In order for the new to be born, the old must die. It is through the process of transformation that humanity is reconciled with divinity. Without transformation we can never be what God intended for us to be; nor can we do what He intended for us to do. It is through transformation that the creation motif, God's original plan, is manifested and reigns. Short of transformation there can be no human wholeness, no spiritual fulfillment, no peace of mind, and no unspeakable joy. Life would be no more than empty routines and purposeless existence.

Transformation raises the energy level. The unchanged life is drained by the circumstances of life. Energy that is self generated and is quickly dissipated. The changed life brings an infusion of new energy. It provides the power to become. It comes from an endless supply and it is readily available to the transformed life. It is spiritual in its source and in its nature.

As previously stated, redemption is available for all. It is a fact established and sealed by the blood. What we do with it is our choice. It is there for the just and the unjust. We can avail ourselves of it or we can choose to remain enslaved in sin. Redemption is an entitlement for God's human creation. It can be claimed or it can remain unclaimed.

Such is not the case with transformation. Once a person accepts the offer of redemption, transformation becomes a requirement, the next step in the process. While redemption is centered in the Good Friday event, transformation is a post Good Friday process. Said another way, while Mama didn't want us to get dirty, she did not clean us up just to stay on the porch. What is the point of being cleaned up with no place to go and nothing to do? Being cleaned up is redemption and being transformed gives you something to do. Each has a purpose and an end beyond itself.

Redemption was achieved by a sacrificial death event. Transformation is a sanctifying process. It begins when one is redeemed and it continues until one is perfected. It is life altering, life long and life giving. During this process, we go from grace to grace. If uninterrupted, we grow stronger with each passing day. We understand the will of God better and we understand the ways of God better. Our witness becomes more fruitful as more and more are won for Christ. The change in us engenders changes in others. As we grow in our reconciled relationship with God, we are able to engage in our ministry of reconciliation. As we grow in the things of the spirit and increase our faithful walk with God, we are better able to aid others in their spiritual development and to support them in their walk with God.

Transformation is a living phenomenon, and God has a growth principle which is applicable to everything that has life. This principle says that you grow or die. Those are the only options. It is as simple as that. There are no plateaus where life levels off and flattens out. There are peaks and valleys. The peaks are not there as places of habitation nor places of rest. Rather they are turning points. Having scaled to the summit of life, the journey to the grave begins. You continue up or you come down. You do not remain in the same place. Transformation is not static.

THE TRANSFORMATION PROCESS

The process begins when we recognize that we need a savior. We want to be freed from the grips of sin and brokenness. We want to be made whole. Recognizing that salvation, freedom, and wholeness can be ours in Christ, we make Him our choice. At this point we cease to be our own, we become His. One of the changes that takes place at this time is we lose our right to choose. Choices are then replaced by chances. We are afforded many chances to serve Him, but are denied choices regarding if, when, where, and how we will serve Him. Those matters are addressed by our circumstances, our gifts, and our graces. Our steps will be ordered by His will. The things we are blessed to be able to do are reflective of what He wants us to do. We then must become intentional about what we do for the Lord. The process of transformation must be pursued with due diligence. Admittedly, transformation is the work of the Holy Spirit. However, our action is a part of the process as we move beyond redemption.

Howard E. Friend, Jr. in his book: Recovering the Sacred Center – Church Renewal from the Inside Out, depicts two metaphors of transformation that I found to be very helpful. He refers to the first as “From the Tadpole to the Frog.” Friend describes this model as being gradual, orderly, and incremental. The change is visible and occurs over a period of time. He states that this process makes clear that “What is” comes from “What was.”

His second metaphor is called “From the Caterpillar to the Butterfly,” This process is quite different from the first. It is more mysterious, hidden and there are unexpected transformative events which occur. He speaks of a disintegration of the caterpillar followed by a reorganization out of which comes a butterfly. This procedure tends to be more chaotic and disruptive.

The transformation of Peter seems to be more reflective of the Tadpole to the Frog model. Peter was quick to follow Jesus and be made a fisher of men. However his transformation was extended over a long period of time. It was a gradual process achieved by spending time with Jesus in the group and in individual conversations. His was an up and down experience. He demonstrated an understanding of some things some times, and at other times he seemed to be at a lost regarding what the Master was saying.

He could be spiritually clear at one time and totally lacking in insight at another. But, he was growing and developing incrementally. The following episodes are indicative of the contradictions in Peter’s journey to transformation:

“Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God...I don’t know the man.

“Launch out into the deep and let down your nets...Master we have toiled all night, and have taken nothing...Nevertheless, at thy word I will let down the net.”

“Carest thou not that we perish?”

“He walked on the water to go to Jesus...Lord save me.”

“I go a-fishing.”

“Lord, how oft shall my brother sin against me and I forgive him? Till seven times?”

“Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!”

“Simon, son of Jonah, do you love me? Lord you know all things: You know that I love you.”

In the end Peter would grow out of his impetuous behavior. The pronoun I would be replaced by the noun Christ, and Peter would become the rock upon which Christ would build His church.

Paul’s transformation was much like the metaphor of the Caterpillar and the Butterfly. It was unexpected, without warning. The old man died and the new man was born. There were no extended developmental sequences. The transformation was not perfected but it was complete. Paul was a new creation.

CONCLUSION

Peter and Paul traveled different roads but each arrived at that place called transformation. Being freed from the consequences of their sin, by being washed in the blood of the Lamb, was not enough. They like we, were compelled to go Beyond Redemption to Transformation. Where are you in the process? Redemption is not enough. What is the point of being cleaned up if you don’t have anywhere to go? What is the point of being redeemed if you don’t have anything to do?

The Rev. Jessie Dixon penned a very popular song called, “I am Redeemed.” So many of us sing it with a powerful conviction, with heartfelt thanksgiving, and with a joy that reaches to the depths of our souls; however, I have noticed that many sing only the chorus:

“I am redeemed, bought with a price,
Jesus has changed my whole life!
If anybody asks you just who I am,
Tell them: I am redeemed!”

The tendency is to repeat this chorus again and again. To those who would do this, I remind you that redemption is not enough. Rev. Dixon understood that so he went on to say:

“Where there was hate, love now abides,
Where there was confusion, peace now reigns.

I'm walking with Jesus all because,
I am redeemed.”

Rev. Dixon had gone, “Beyond Redemption to Transformation.” Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! But the question is what about you? Are you making the move? Are you going “Beyond Redemption to Transformation?” Or are you the same person doing the same things in the same way, for the same reasons over and over and over? You should be better now, stronger now, more faithful, more determined now and more victorious now. You shouldn't be making the same mistakes now, telling the same lies now, making the same excuses now, committing the same sins now, You should be able to look back and see how far you have come. Others should be able to see change in you, hear change in you, and feel change in you.

You are moving beyond redemption to transformation. ***Beyond Redemption to Transformation! Beyond Redemption to Transformation!***