

# The Price of Salvation: The Paschal Meaning of Redemption

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## Pope Francis and the Poor

If we, who are God's means of hearing the poor, turn deaf ears to this plea, we oppose the Father's will and his plan; that poor person "might cry to the Lord against you, and you would incur guilt" (Dt 15:9). A lack of solidarity towards his or her needs will directly affect our relationship with God: "For if in bitterness of soul he calls down a curse upon you, his Creator will hear his prayer" (Sir 4:6). The old question always returns: "How does God's love abide in anyone who has the world's goods, and sees a brother or sister in need and yet refuses help?" (1 Jn 3:17).

## Debts and Slavery in Ancient Israel

1. Options for a debtor to "redeem" himself
  - a. "Redeem": to pay price or cost of deliverance<sup>1</sup>
  - b. Repay a debt by sell land (Leviticus 25:25–34)
  - c. If debt too great: sell yourself into servitude (Leviticus 25:39–55)
2. If debt especially grave debtor's family enslaved (2 Kings 4:1–7)

Now the wife of one of the sons of the prophets cried to Elisha, "Your servant my husband is dead; and you know that your servant feared the LORD, but *the creditor has come to take my two children to be his slaves.*" (2 Kings 4:1)
3. Paying off debt<sup>32</sup>

*You wicked servant! I forgave you all that debt because you besought me;*<sup>33</sup> and should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?'<sup>34</sup> And in anger his lord delivered him to the jailers, *till he should pay all his debt.*<sup>35</sup> So also my heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart." (Matthew 18:23–34)

## Sin as "Debt"

... forgive us our *debts*, as we also have forgiven our *debtors*. (Matthew 6:12).

## The Exodus, Passover, and Redemption

Say therefore to the people of Israel, 'I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will deliver you from their bondage, and *I will redeem* [LXX: *lutroō*] *you* with an outstretched arm and with great acts of judgment . . . (Exodus 6:6)

## Righteousness as "Credit" and "Heavenly Treasure"

He who is kind to the poor lends to the LORD, and *he will repay him for his deed.* (Proverbs 19:17).

*Whoever honors his father atones for sins,*<sup>4</sup> and *whoever glorifies his mother is like one who lays up treasure.* . . .<sup>14</sup> For kindness to a father will not be forgotten, and *against your sins it will be credited to you;*<sup>15</sup> in the day of your affliction it will be remembered in your favor; as frost in fair weather, *your sins will melt away.* (Sirach 3:3–4, 14–15)

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<sup>1</sup> See the discussion on the Greek terminology used in the Septuagint and New Testament in Nathan Eubank, "Purchasing the Rewards of Eternal Life: The Logic of Resurrection and Ransom in Matthew's Gospel," *Letter & Spirit* 8: 233–38.

... judge all the works of the holy ones in heaven above, weighing in the balance their deeds. (*1 Enoch* 61:8)

Give to the Most High as he has given, and as generously as your hand has found. <sup>11</sup> For the Lord is the one who repays, and *he will repay you sevenfold*. (*Sirach* 35:10–11)

### The Messiah and the Forgiveness of Sins

... you shall call his name Jesus, for *he will save his people from their sins*. (*Matthew* 1:23)

### The Ransom for Many

Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to him, with her sons, and kneeling before him she asked him for something. <sup>21</sup> And he said to her, “What do you want?” She said to him, “Command that these two sons of mine may sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom.” <sup>22</sup> But Jesus answered, “You do not know what you are asking. *Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?*” They said to him, “We are able.” <sup>23</sup> He said to them, “You will drink my cup, *but to sit at my right hand and at my left is not mine to grant*, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father.” <sup>24</sup> And when the ten heard it, they were indignant at the two brothers. <sup>25</sup> But Jesus called them to him and said, “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. <sup>26</sup> It shall not be so among you; but whoever would be great among you must be your servant, <sup>27</sup> and whoever would be first among you must be your slave; <sup>28</sup> even as the Son of man came not to be served but to serve, and *to give his life as a ransom [lutron] for many [polus]*.” (*Matthew* 20:28)

A mixed *multitude* [LXX: *polus*] also went up with them. . . (*Exodus* 12:38)

### Fulfilling all Righteousness

Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. <sup>14</sup> John would have prevented him, saying, “I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?” <sup>15</sup> But Jesus answered him, “Let it be so now; for thus it is fitting for us *to fulfill all righteousness*.” Then he consented. (*Matthew* 3:13–15)

### Jesus and Storing Up Heavenly Treasure<sup>2</sup>

Beware of practicing your piety before men in order to be seen by them; for then *you will have no reward* from your Father who is in heaven. <sup>2</sup> “Thus, when you give alms, sound no trumpet before you, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may be praised by men. Truly, I say to you, *they have received their reward [misthos]*. <sup>3</sup> But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, <sup>4</sup> so that your alms may be in secret; and *your Father who sees in secret will reward [apodidōmi] you* (*Matthew* 6:1–4).

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, <sup>20</sup> but *lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven*, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. (*Matthew* 7:19–20)

<sup>24</sup> Then Jesus told his disciples, “If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. <sup>25</sup> For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. <sup>26</sup> For what will it profit a man, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his life? *Or what shall a man give in return for his life?* <sup>27</sup> For the Son of man is to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then *he will repay every man for what he has done*. <sup>28</sup> Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death before they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom.” (*Matthew* 16:24–28)

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<sup>2</sup> For what follows I am especially indebted to the extensive and brilliant treatment in Nathan Eubank, *Wages of Cross-Bearing and Debt of Sin: The Economy of Heaven in Matthew's Gospel* (BZBW 196; Berlin: de Gruyter, 2013).

## St. Paul and the Collection for the Poor

We want you to know, brethren, about the grace of God which has been shown in the churches of Macedonia, <sup>2</sup> for in a severe test of affliction, their abundance of joy and their extreme poverty have overflowed in a wealth of liberality on their part. <sup>3</sup> For they gave according to their means, as I can testify, and beyond their means, of their own free will, <sup>4</sup> begging us earnestly for the favor of taking part in the relief of the saints— <sup>5</sup> and this, not as we expected, but first they gave themselves to the Lord and to us by the will of God. . . <sup>9</sup> For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that *though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that by his poverty you might become rich.* (2 Cor 8:1–5, 9)

## The Passover and the Poor

Then after the morsel, Satan entered into him. Jesus said to him, “What you are going to do, do quickly.” <sup>28</sup> Now no one at the table knew why he said this to him. <sup>29</sup> Some thought that, because Judas had the money box, Jesus was telling him, “Buy what we need for the feast”; or, *that he should give something to the poor.* <sup>30</sup> So, after receiving the morsel, he immediately went out; and it was night. (John 13:27–30)

## Redemption in the New Passover

And the disciples did as Jesus had directed them, and they prepared the *passover*. <sup>20</sup> When it was evening, he sat at table with the twelve disciples. . . Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, ‘*Take, eat; this is my body.*’ <sup>27</sup> And he took a cup, and when he had *given thanks* [Gk. *eucharistēsas*] he gave it to them, saying, ‘Drink of it, all of you; <sup>28</sup> for *this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.*’ (Matthew 26:26–28)

Then two robbers were crucified with him, *one on the right and one on the left.* . . <sup>55</sup> There were also many women there, looking on from afar, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him; <sup>56</sup> among whom were Mary Magdalene, and *Mary the mother of James and Joseph*, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee. (Matthew 27:38–55)

## Jesus as the Servant

[Jesus] rose from supper, *laid aside* [*tithēmi*] *his garments*, and girded himself with a towel. <sup>5</sup> Then he poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples’ feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which he was girded. <sup>6</sup> He came to Simon Peter; and Peter said to him, “Lord, do you wash my feet?” <sup>7</sup> Jesus answered him, “What I am doing you do not know now, but afterward you will understand.” <sup>8</sup> Peter said to him, “You shall never wash my feet.” Jesus answered him, “If I do not wash you, you have no part in me.” <sup>9</sup> Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!” <sup>10</sup> Jesus said to him, “He who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but he is clean all over; and you are clean, but not every one of you.” <sup>11</sup> For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, “You are not all clean.”

<sup>12</sup> When he had washed their feet, and *taken* [*lambanō*] *his garments*, and resumed his place, he said to them, “Do you know what I have done to you? <sup>13</sup> You call me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. <sup>14</sup> If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. <sup>15</sup> For I have given you an example, that you also should do as I have done to you. <sup>16</sup> Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him. (John 12:4–16)

For this reason the Father loves me, because *I lay down* [*tithēmi*] *my life*, that I may *take it* [*lambanō*] again. <sup>18</sup> No one takes it from me, but I *lay it down* [*tithēmi*] of my own accord. I have power to *lay it down* [*tithēmi*], and I have power to *take it* [*lambanō*] again; this charge I have received from my Father.” (John 10:17–18)

## Christ as the Servant

So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any incentive of love, any participation in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, <sup>2</sup>complete my joy by being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind. <sup>3</sup>Do nothing from selfishness or conceit, but in humility count others better than yourselves. <sup>4</sup>Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. <sup>5</sup>Have this mind among yourselves, which was in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup>who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, <sup>7</sup>but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. <sup>8</sup>And being found in human form he humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even death on a cross. <sup>9</sup>Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, <sup>10</sup>that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, <sup>11</sup>and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:4–11)

<sup>14</sup>What does it profit, my brethren, if a man says he has faith but has not works? Can his faith save him? <sup>15</sup>If a brother or sister is ill-clad and in lack of daily food, <sup>16</sup>and one of you says to them, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” without giving them the things needed for the body, what does it profit? <sup>17</sup>So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. (James 2:14–17)