

The Firstborn Redeemed

1. Early significance of the firstborn

From early in the history of man recorded in scripture, there is significance placed upon the firstborn of life.

Gen. 4:4 Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the LORD respected Abel and his offering.

In many of the lists of descendants of the patriarchs in the book of Genesis, the firstborn of the sons are identified. Traditionally, the firstborn son receives a greater proportion of rights, privileges, and the family inheritance, which is called the "birthright" (Gen. 27:27; 43:33; Deut. 21:17).

2. God lays special claim to the firstborn

At the Exodus, God, through Moses and Aaron, declares to Pharaoh that the nation of Israel is His "firstborn son," so to speak:

Exod. 4:22 "Then you shall say to Pharaoh, 'Thus says the LORD: "Israel is My son, My firstborn..."'"

When Pharaoh refuses to release the Israelites, God strikes dead all of the firstborn in the land of Egypt among the people and their livestock. However, God redeems and spares the Israelite families dwelling there of this fate by the Passover sacrifice as a ransom (Exod. 12).

In connection to the Passover and the Exodus, God declares that all the firstborn of Israel are His special possession:

Exodus 13:1, 2 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ² "Consecrate to Me all the firstborn, whatever opens the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and beast; it is Mine."

Exod. 13:13-14 ...And all the firstborn of man among your sons you shall redeem. ¹⁴ So it shall be, when your son asks you in time to come, saying, "What is this?" that you shall say to him, "By strength of hand the LORD brought us out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage."

The ransom, that is, the cost to redeem a firstborn Son, is revealed to be five silver shekels in Numbers 18:16.

3. New Testament application of the firstborn

Like many other Old Testament ordinances, the appointments in connection with the firstborn are types and shadows of a greater and perfect divine possession and redemption in the dispensation of Christ.

- Jesus Christ is declared to be the firstborn over all creation (Col. 1:15).

Rom. 8:29 For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.

- Like Israel, the church of Christ today – His redeemed faithful – are God's firstborn:

Rev 14:4 ...These are the ones who follow the Lamb.... These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb.

- And Jesus Christ Himself is our Passover lamb sacrificed for us (1 Cor. 5:7).

4. The valuation of a human soul

The true worth of a thing is, in the end, determined by what one is willing to pay to possess it.

1 Cor. 6:20 For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's.

The word translated "price" is *TIME* {tee-may'}, meaning: "1) a valuing by which the price is fixed 1a) of the price itself 1b) of the price paid or received for a person or thing bought or sold" (Thayer). Our ransom cost – the price of our redemption – is not evaluated in silver shekels, but in the blood of Christ:

1 Tim. 2:5-6 For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, ⁶ who gave Himself a ransom for all....

Our worth to God is not determined by the good deeds that we perform, but if it were, we would be utterly unworthy. However, to the contrary, our worth to God is determined in love, mercy, and grace by the divine attributes which He bestowed upon us at creation as bearers of His likeness (Jas 3:9). This is brought to light in the parable of the lost son:

Lk. 15:21 And the son said to him, "Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight, and am no longer worthy to be called your son."

Here the word translated "worthy" is *AXIOS* {ax'-ee-os} meaning: "1) weighing, having weight, having the weight of another thing of like value, worth as much" (Thayer). The son de-values himself on his deeds, but God values a soul differently.

Lk. 15:22-24 But the father said to his servants, "Bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet ... for this my son was dead and is alive again."

The value that God places on a human soul is incomprehensible. He puts man, filthy with sin, on one side of the balance and His perfect, first-born, only-begotten Son on the other side and declares it to be equitable. Unfathomable!

5. Our response

Our response to this ought to be absolute humility and reverence – a sense of abject shame and at the same time a sense of the unspeakable glory of the Lord. There is no room for our boasting in this; our only glory is in the cross of Christ alone (Gal 6:14).

Paul indicates that our participation in the Lord's Supper, which the Passover foreshadows, must not be observed in an unworthy [ANAXIOS] manner (1 Cor 11: 27). The Corinthians had profaned the Lord's Supper to the point that it was unrecognizable as such. In their carnal-mindedness, to them, the bread (the Lord's body) and the cup (the Lord's blood) was little more than breakfast food for their stomachs. This is the price of our redemption, and Paul pronounces them guilty of His body and His blood. We dare not follow their example.

Heb. 10:29 Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?