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Grace and peace be yours in abundance through the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.
Isaiah 52:1-6

Awake, awake, O Zion, clothe yourself with strength. Put on your garments of splendor, O Jerusalem, the holy city. The uncircumcised and defiled will not enter you again. Shake off your dust; rise up, sit enthroned, O Jerusalem. Free yourself from the chains on your neck, O captive Daughter of Zion. For this is what the LORD says: "You were sold for nothing, and without money you will be redeemed." For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: "At first my people went down to Egypt to live; lately, Assyria has oppressed them. "And now what do I have here?" declares the LORD. "For my people have been taken away for nothing, and those who rule them mock," declares the LORD. "And all day long my name is constantly blasphemed. Therefore my people will know my name; therefore in that day they will know that it is I who foretold it. Yes, it is I."

Lord God, we must confess that with no regard for you we have sold ourselves into the bondage of sin, death and damnation. Fill us with joy this day in your good news, that you have redeemed us, bought us back and made us your saints. Lead us to see that we have done nothing, nor can we do anything to pay for this deliverance. Rather show us how totally you have loved us; how totally you have saved us! Lord God, holy Father, sanctify us by your truth; your word is truth. Amen.

Dear fellow redeemed, bought back, without money, but with something far more precious, the holy blood of Christ;

When we make investments, we hope to gain something in return. Financially speaking, one of the worst investments one can make is to buy a dog. Now, let me assure you, I love my dog, though sometimes I wonder why. Here's what happens. You go to the dog pound and find this poor cute little puppy in a cage. So you adopt it, pay whatever fees, pay to have it spayed or neutered. Then you get it home and ask yourself, "And now what do I have here?" A dog! So you pay more for it. You buy food, a collar and leash, and all the doggie accessories. You pay even more for it when you take it to the vet, find out all the things that are wrong with it, and get the shots and medications. You wonder, "How many times am I going to have to pay for this dog?" It whines and keeps you awake at night. You have to take it outside seven times a day. It does horrible things to your carpeting and chews up your furniture and shoes. The cute little puppy grows up into something larger than you expected and terrorizes any guests who dare to come to your home. If the dog runs away and ends up at the dog pound again, you go down there and pay for the thing another time.

God redeemed us. He bought us back. We were not a profitable asset to God. Far from it – we were a tremendous liability. God redeemed us not just for the few short people-years of this life, but for all eternity. Today let us take a look at what God paid. For this is something money can't buy – your soul. Our verse tells us, "You were sold for nothing, and without money you will be redeemed."

Perhaps you recall how Joseph was sold into slavery in Egypt. His hateful brothers seized him in the field, tore off his fancy coat, and sold him to the Middianite merchants for 20 shekels of silver. They then dipped Joseph's coat in the blood of a goat and presented it to their father, who was led to believe that Joseph had been killed by a wild animal. We're never told what Joseph's brothers did with the 20 shekels of silver, but it's probably safe to say that they didn't give it to God. Even if they had, it wouldn't have begun to pay for Joseph.

Already God had taken a loss in the deal. He had received nothing for Joseph. Joseph ended up in prison, totally helpless to rescue himself, nor was God obligated in any way to help Joseph. But we know how God was with Joseph in Egypt, blessed him, caused all things to work together for good for him, finally making him second in command over Egypt. What easier way could there have been for Joseph to be set free from prison and be made a ruler? He told the meaning of a couple of Pharaoh's dreams. But even he stressed that God alone is the interpreter of dreams. God redeemed Joseph. God did it all – by free grace. Joseph did nothing. Freely he was redeemed!

Joseph's family came down to Egypt during the famine. There God's people grew into a great nation. But they were held hostage by the Egyptians who oppressed them with hard labor. What had the Egyptians paid God for his people? Nothing. Again God had taken a loss in the deal. God had no obligation to come to the rescue of his people? Totally helpless though they were, freely God delivered his people, with a mighty arm and an outstretched hand, raining plagues down upon Egypt, while his people stood there and watched, parting the waters of the Red Sea, so that the people could cross on dry ground, and drowning Pharaoh's army. What did the Israelites do to contribute to this salvation? Nothing! God redeemed them freely by his grace, and brought them back to himself.

Later Assyria oppressed God's people. King Sennacherib captured the cities of Judah and his army laid siege to Jerusalem (2 Kings 19). God's people did not have the strength to defend themselves. Again the Lord had no obligation to deliver his people, but by grace and by grace alone he single-handedly did. During the night, while his people were in their beds sleeping, or lying awake worrying, the angel of the LORD went out and put to death a hundred and eighty-five thousand men in the Assyrian camp, and Sennacherib withdrew. Once again, freely God's people were redeemed!

In the book of Isaiah, the Lord warned his people that they would be taken captive by the ruthless Babylonians under wicked King Nebuchadnezzar. Babylon would trample on Jerusalem and carry the people away as captives. Was it because the Babylonians had paid God off for his people? No! God told the people why it was -- because they had sold themselves to sin, idolatry and wickedness. Had God's people given him anything? No! They had sold themselves for nothing! God could look and say, "And now what do I have here?" declares the LORD. "For my people have been taken away for nothing." Surely God was in no way obligated to come to their rescue. He certainly could have just left them there in their bondage. But once again God promised that he would redeem them. He who controls the nations of the earth with his finger would raise up Cyrus, King of Persia, to defeat the Babylonians and set his people

free. Babylon would be forced to let God's people go free without receiving payment for them or from them. Freely by God's grace they would be redeemed.

So God calls to his people: "Awake, awake, O Zion, clothe yourself with strength. Put on your garments of splendor, O Jerusalem, the holy city. The uncircumcised and defiled will not enter you again. Shake off your dust; rise up, sit enthroned, O Jerusalem. Free yourself from the chains on your neck, O captive Daughter of Zion." From the sleep of destruction, devastation and despair, awaken to a new day. A complete reversal is at hand. Shake off the dust of captivity and arise to sit on a throne clothed in garments of splendor. Wake up to a glorious and new future, a perfect life where sin and the enemies of God's people can not penetrate.

"For this is what the LORD says: 'you were sold for nothing, and without money you will be redeemed.' For this is what the Sovereign LORD says: 'At first my people went down to Egypt to live; lately, Assyria has oppressed them. And now what do I have here?' declares the LORD. 'For my people have been taken away for nothing, and those who rule them mock,' declares the LORD. 'and all day long my name is constantly blasphemed. Therefore my people will know my name; therefore in that day they will know that it is I who foretold it. Yes, it is I.'"

The LORD is doing a lot of declaring here! "You were sold for nothing, and without money you will be redeemed." Just how many times would God have to redeem his people? The Old Testament is full of examples, and they are all but a small foretaste of the greater redemption that God would carry out for all people, for all the world, for all eternity – yes, also for you and for me.

After 70 years of captivity in Babylon, God's people did rejoice as they returned to Jerusalem to rebuild it and to reestablish their homeland. But there is more to this than the return of these people to their homeland. This was the land to which, and these were the people through which God had promised to send the Savior of the world. Later on this chapter says, "Burst into songs of joy together, you ruins of Jerusalem, for the LORD has comforted his people, he has redeemed Jerusalem. The LORD will lay bare his holy arm in the sight of all the nations, and all the ends of the earth will see the salvation of our God." [9,10]

And the next chapter, the familiar Isaiah 53, 700 years before Jesus was born, promises the Savior and pictures that Suffering Servant: "He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away. And who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken..."

Jesus was sold by Judas for 30 pieces of silver into the total captivity, bondage, suffering, death and hell that we all deserve. But as Judas found out, Jesus was not his to sell. Jesus was the perfect Son of God, freely given, by grace alone, for your redemption and mine. We were in a far greater captivity than the Israelites in Babylon. Having sold ourselves to sin we were slaves of the devil, hopelessly, helplessly heading toward hell.

God did not owe anyone anything for us. He could have left us in bondage. But instead, by pure grace he freely chose to redeem us.

Though it is impossible, humans always want to earn God's good blessings. That's our prideful nature. When they cannot earn, they want at least to help contribute. But they cannot do that either. So they think that God must have acted to save them because of some good thing they might do in the future. But that is not grace. When people look for some reason within themselves, they still obligate God to act by something they do.

But this is what the LORD says: "You were sold for nothing, and without money you will be redeemed." God is under no obligation. Totally on his own he chooses to save us helpless sinners single-handedly, freely, by his grace alone. No amount of money could begin to purchase our redemption. No amount of good deeds on our part could contribute. As Psalm 49 says, "The ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough."

1 Peter 1:17-21 explains: "For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your forefathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect. He was chosen before the creation of the world, but was revealed in these last times for your sake. Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God."

Luther says in his explanation of the second article of the Apostle's Creed: "He has redeemed me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver but with his holy, precious blood and with his innocent suffering and death. All this he did that I should be his own, and live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as he has risen from death and lives and rules eternally. This is most certainly true."

A little slave girl was once put up on the auction block. This forlorn little slave wore a world of hurt on her face as the bidding for her ownership proceeded. Finally the highest bidder was awarded the sale, and she was brought before her new owner. Gently, he lifted her dejected head by the chin and said, "Little girl, you are free. I bought you in order to free you. You may go and do whatever you wish." When the truth sank in, she said, "Oh, master, I wish to do whatever you want for the rest of my life." So Jesus paid for us forlorn slaves and has said, "You are free." Out of humble gratitude and love may we reply, "Master, I wish to do whatever you want for the rest of my life."

Dear friends, we are encouraged to awaken from the captivity of sin and death, and rejoice that a new day has dawned. Still the final fulfillment lies ahead for us. Heaven, the new Jerusalem awaits. There are saints, triumphant, there now – saints triumphant not because of what they have done, but because of what their Savior did. Without money they were redeemed. And we are saints already, God's holy people, clothed in Christ's righteousness. And we will be saints triumphant in heaven one day, because Jesus has redeemed us and we are his through faith. What we could never do, what no amount of money could ever buy, our God has done for us, paid for in the blood of his own Son. So much has he loved us! So much has he paid to redeem us!

Amen.

Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever. Amen.