

Back in 1996, a movie called “Ransom” was released, starring Mel Gibson. The movie focuses on Gibson's character, Tom Mullen, a rich airline owner, who is shocked when his son is kidnapped. He is willing to pay the two-million-dollar ransom, but the exchange goes wrong. So Tom turns the ransom money into a bounty on the head of the kidnapper. The tagline of the movie is typical of the genre: “Someone is going to pay.” That is exactly what the word “ransom” means. One way or another, someone usually has to pay to get somebody else out of a jam. Someone is kidnapped, someone else pays the ransom for their freedom. Someone ends up in jail, someone else pays to bail them out. Expand this out to touch on our lives with God, the same holds true. The Bible’s clear teaching is that human beings are held in captive by sin; we are tied up in cords of our own making; we are held hostage by our allegiance to a culture of death. We die in this prison unless someone pays our ransom.

Someone has. It was Jesus. Jesus had absolute clarity about his mission. You heard it in today’s Gospel Lesson. Jesus told his followers, flat out, well in advance of his crucifixion, “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.” He knew why he had come. Someone had to pay.

Now it’s important that we realize who is paying and who is receiving payment. Without question, Satan is our enemy, and it’s appropriate to think of him as trying to lure us into bondage. But when Jesus comes to pay our ransom, he’s not coming to pay off the devil. What happened to Satan when Christ died was not payment, but defeat. There was no negotiation with the Evil One.

When Jesus says that he came to give his life as a ransom, the focus is on his own life as the payment; on his own freedom in serving rather than being served, and on the many who will benefit from the payment he makes. But if we ask who received the ransom, the biblical answer would be God. Ephesians 5:2 says that Christ “gave himself up for us...an offering to God.” Hebrews 9: 14 says that Christ “offered himself without blemish to God.” And in a pretty sweeping statement, the apostle Paul writes in Romans that because of the reality of sin, “the whole world is held accountable to God.” (Rom. 3:19)

So, when Jesus gives himself as a ransom for you and me, the Bible says that we are freed from Death Row. Romans 8:1 says, “There is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” That teeny tiny little word “in” has huge importance for you. A person who is “in” Christ Jesus is someone who has been connected into Jesus through baptism. A person who is “in” Christ Jesus is someone trusting in Him, putting all their stock for the future in him. Do you recognize that Jesus paid that ransom for you? This is the essence of saving Christian faith. Jesus did not take on human flesh, suffer indignity and torture and execution to make good people a little bit better. He came to open the door of my prison cell and to bring me out into the light; out into freedom. And it cost him his life.

We must never forget—the ransom price of this release from God’s condemnation is the life of Christ. Not just his life lived, but his life given up in death. Jesus said repeatedly to his disciples, “The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him.” Perhaps one of the reasons Jesus liked to refer to himself as the Son of Man—he does it over 65 times in the Gospels—is that it had the ring of mortality about it. Men can die. That’s why he had to be one. The ransom could only be paid by the Son of Man, because the ransom was a human life given up in death.

And you know, one of the marvels of this is that the price was not coerced from him. Remember, Jesus said, “The Son of Man came not to be served but to serve.” In John’s Gospel He says, “No one takes my life from me, but I lay it down of my own accord.” The price was not forced. The ransom was paid freely. Why did he do it? I think you know why. He loves you. He wants into your life. He wants to cover you with His goodness. In the book of Hebrews, it says that Jesus endured the cross for the joy set before him. What joy could make the cross worth enduring? The joy of you; the joy of forgiving your sins; the joy of taking your fear of death away; the joy of making himself nothing so that you could be something. Just the possibility that you could belong to each other; just the chance that you could live in love with him made going through suffering and crucifixion worth it to Jesus. You will never know a love like that from any other source. Do you realize that you are this loved?