

# **RETURN TO ME, FOR I HAVE REDEEMED YOU**

**Luis Bueno**



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Man is a spiritual being, and deep within each of us lies the feeling that our existence must have a more transcendent meaning than simply being born, growing, reproducing and dying.

Indeed, that was not the will of our Creator. In his great love, he created our first parents as perfect beings, in his image and likeness, capable of relating to God himself, and for this he endowed them with a unique and singular characteristic that he possessed, and that is the freedom of choice. This wonderful companionship between a God who “ is love ” and his creatures could never be expressed on the ground of fear or of obligatory and inevitable fidelity, so God endowed man with the beauty of free will, of being able to choose freely, even capable of rebelling against his Creator, as he did on that unfortunate day when he chose to distrust God in order to listen to the cunning suggestions that led him to covet a chimerical autonomous existence independent of God, “ the only one who possesses immortality ” ( 1 Tim 6:16 ).

The result was suffering and death, something that was not part of God's original plan for man, and which is painful and common to us, filling our existence with shadows and unknowns.

Cain, the first son of Adam and Eve, was already a real murderer. The human race seemed condemned to kill and die, condemned to a fleeting and miserable existence. But God did not abandon it to its fate, and as we read in Genesis 3:9, he went in search of it.

Here we have the essence of the drama of our world: man, in a totally unjustifiable way, chooses to rebel against his Creator. God still loves him and goes to meet him, but the human being who had previously delighted in conversing with God face to face now perceives him as a hostile and unwelcome visitor.

Man hides from God; he feels shame and guilt, which seem to deepen even further the abyss that separates him from his Creator. When he finally agrees to dialogue with God, it is not to acknowledge his guilt and ask for help, but to accuse his companion, the serpent, and God himself of the terrible plundering he has suffered.

Unfortunately, this is still the condition of many people today. We do not need to explain to anyone what shame, guilt and fear mean: they are part of the bitter experience that is common to all of us. And in a certain sense this is a great problem for God too, since he continues to love man as much or more than before. The new situation of his creature causes him immense pain, greater than that felt by a father for his wounded or sick child. In his loving character, he would give everything to rescue him, and he does indeed go in search of him. But here is the drama: this sick creature now perceives him as his enemy, and he flees from him. That sad choice of man did not leave him as he was: where before there reigned trust, happiness and love, now there seems to be only a response of mistrust, fear and discomfort. Where before there was abundant life,

now the principle of death begins to act. A rupture has occurred that is totally unilateral, but profound.

Such is the result of rebellion against God, what the Bible calls sin. Man, in this condition, is incapable of going back to seek his Creator. It is impossible for him. But God knows this, loves him, and goes to seek him, even if he must pay an immense price for it that man will never be able to fully understand.

The essence of all pagan religions is that man must strive to find God. This is why ancient civilizations preferred to erect their places of worship on high ground, often on the summits of iconic mountains. In their modern forms, elevation or “enlightenment” is promoted by fostering and exalting the “good” within man. This mentality is also the foundation of penances and sacrifices. Popular belief largely presents God as a truly angry tyrant who must be sought out, offering Him—at the very least—evidence of our intentions to amend. But the Bible presents us with the harsh truth that on our own we are incapable of even that.

In the language of the Old Testament, we read that “ the whole head is sick, and the whole heart is sick. From the sole of the foot even to the head there is no soundness in it, but bruises, and swellings, and putrefying sores ” ( Isa 1:5-6 ). Jesus Christ Himself described the quality of the inner man: “ From within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, vice, envy, gossip, pride, foolishness... ” ( Mark 7:21-23 ). So, for help, it is not within

ourselves that we must look. The Nazi Holocaust, the Inquisition, wars, injustice, and violence in all its forms are vibrant examples of the result of expressing the “good” that is within man. But the Bible brings us “good news of great joy” ( Luke 2:10 ). So good that few have come to understand their wonderful meaning. So extraordinary that few have believed them.

You can read the sacred record from beginning to end, and you will not find a parable in which a lost sheep has to go in search of its Shepherd. What we find instead is a beautiful parable in which the Good Shepherd goes in search of the lost sheep. Not only that, but “he seeks until he finds it” ( Luke 15:4 ). “The Son of Man [Jesus Christ] came to seek and to save that which was lost” ( Luke 19:10 ). We are not given to know how, but the fact is that God is seeking you as earnestly and lovingly as if you alone existed on the earth. The apostle John said of Christ that “he was the true light which lighteth every man that cometh into the world” ( John 1:9 ).

God knows our situation well, and that is why the divine remedy for our restoration does not consist in providing us with a long list of obligations to fulfill, but in something much more sublime: He gives Himself in His Son Jesus Christ . “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life” ( John 3:16 ). “God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing its sins to it” ( 2 Cor 5:19 ).

What more could I do? What more could I give? God has done everything necessary for us to know that He is not our enemy, but our loving Father, our Redeemer. A mother's love for her child is but a pale reflection of God's unconditional love for us, His children by creation and adoption. God tells us, through the prophet Isaiah: "Can a woman forget her child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Though they forget, yet I will not forget you" ( Isa 49:15 ).

As we look upon Jesus Christ on the cross, it is our privilege to feel the assurance of forgiveness. God does not ask us to do something in order to draw near to him; he asks us to appreciate the way in which he came to seek us out and laid all our enmity, rebellion, shame, all our sin, upon his beloved Son. "The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all" ( Isa 53:6 ). Then he says to us, "Return to me, for I have redeemed you" ( Isa 44:22 ). That is, he first gives us unequivocal evidence of his restoring love, and then invites us to receive and accept it: "Look to me, and be saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God, and there is no other" ( Isa 45:22 ). "You, who were dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made alive with Christ, and He forgave all your sins" ( Col 2:13 ).

Have you ever felt condemned for your sins, as if you must somehow, sooner or later, "pay" for them? The Bible has good news for you: Christ has already paid for them. The debt is paid! On that cross, He received full payment for all your sins. No matter how numerous and serious they may have been, they are not looming over your head unless you choose to despise your crucified Savior,

who already bore them “ in His body on the tree ” for you ( 1 Pet. 2:24 ). The only sin that cannot be forgiven, the only one for which those who are ultimately lost will be lost, is despising and rejecting what Christ has already done for them: “He who believes in Him is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God. And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved the darkness rather than the light” ( John 3:18-19 ).

So, while we firmly believe in the reality of a true church of Christ on earth, we do not here propose to invite you to join any club or organization. We do not propose any creed for you to adhere to. Nor is it our intention to introduce you to our Savior. Our desire is to point you to the One who IS ALREADY YOUR Savior, the “ Savior of the world ” ( 1 John 4:14 ). We desire to point you to your heavenly citizenship, which is already a fact according to God’s plan and provision. You may accept it or despise it, but it is important for you to note that Jesus Christ did not wait to see whether you and I would accept it or not: He died already for us, and He tells us, “ He who believes in Me has eternal life ” ( John 6:47 ). “ There is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus... For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has made me free from the law of sin and death. For what the law could not do in that it was weak through the flesh, God did by sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh ” ( Rom 8:1-3 ).

Now, God's purpose for man has not changed, and according to his original plan, he will seek and save man on the unavoidable condition that man accept him. Only in this way can he save him as a human being, as a free being. If he were to be saved by force, against his will, man would cease to be a man and become an animal, an automaton. What kind of pleasure would he then find in his future existence? What kind of relationship of trust towards his Creator?

In Matthew 1:21 we read: “ You shall call His name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins .” Jesus only saves us from our sins with our consent. It is contrary to His character to force anyone. He wants to restore us as authentic human beings, in full and voluntary exercise of that freedom of choice that He granted us at the beginning, and that after the fall into sin He grants us again as a gift, in Christ ( John 8:32-36 ).

Jesus said, “ If I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men to Myself ” ( John 12:32 ). His kindness leads us to repentance ( Rom 2:4 ). Jesus Christ is not buried in the Middle East, but was resurrected “ for our justification ” and ascended into heaven. We have a representative there, One who is not ashamed to call Himself our brother. “ That same Jesus ” lives today, and is able to “ save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, because He always lives to make intercession for them ” ( Heb 7:25 ). Before He ascended, He promised, “ I am with you always, even to the end of the age ” ( Mat 28:20 ). And, “ I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, to abide with you forever—the Spirit of



truth... I will not leave you orphans; I will come to you ” ( John 14:16-18 ).

The Holy Spirit that He sent convicts us of sin, leads us to the foot of the cross and restores us as we contemplate Jesus Christ, as we receive His word and His life, from the manger to the cross. His blood shed for love of us cleanses us from all sin, makes us abhor our pride, our selfishness, changes our hearts and motivates us to live in gratitude and appreciation for the immense gift of forgiveness and the power of God for a new life.

It motivates us to live as His children, “ for the love of Christ constrains us, because we consider this: that if One died for all, then all are dead; and He died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for Him who for them died and was raised again ” ( 2 Cor 5:14-15 ). As we see that He regards us as though we have never offended Him, we are restored, and we learn to view all others as though they have never offended us, “ ...just as we forgive those who are wronged ” ( Mat 6:12 ).

When we are thus healed, we are effectively receiving His “ atonement ,” “ we are transformed ” by beholding Christ, and the kingdom of God comes to us as His will is done “ on earth as it is in heaven .” Where hatred, shame, and fear once reigned, there is again love, trust, and happiness. “ Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ ” ( Rom 5:1 ).

So the plan of redemption is being fulfilled in us. As a result of that terrible suffering that made Jesus sweat drops of blood and that broke his heart, he finally sees a people who have learned to love him and their fellow men. Christ “will see the fruit of the affliction of his soul, and will be satisfied” (Isa 53:11). The prophet Zephaniah expressed it this way: “The Lord is in your midst, mighty, he will save. He will rejoice over you with joy, he will pacify you with his love, he will rejoice over you with singing” (Zeph 3:17).

That prepares us for heaven, because when we receive Christ, heaven settles in our hearts. “Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Col 1:27). We are prepared to enter “into the joy of our Lord,” and live that wonderful fellowship based on the recognition and appreciation of our God for who he is. And “God is love” (1 John 4:8).

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