

Malcolm's Monday Musings : 1 May 2023

Greetings.

With an eye to the imminent Coronation of King Charles III and Queen Camilla (Saturday, 6 May) at Westminster Abbey, our SCRIPTURE reading for today is taken from chapter 19 of the Book of Revelation:

I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse! The one sitting on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war.

His eyes are like a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems, and He has a name written that no one knows but Himself.

He is clothed in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which He is called is The Word of God ... From His mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron. He will tread the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God the Almighty.

On His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords'.

Revelation 19. 11-16 (*English Standard version*)

The 'great red dragon' may have 'seven diadems' (Rev. 12. 3) and the 'beast out of the sea' may have 'ten diadems' (Rev. 13. 1) but there is no numbering the 'diadems' (crowns) worn by 'the King of kings'!

Bright with all His crowns of glory,
See the royal Victor's brow;
Once for sinners marred and gory,
See the Lamb exalted now.

(Edward Denny)

Men have bestowed upon several earthly rulers throughout history the title 'the Great' on account of their achievements; by way of example, think 'Cyrus the Great', Alexander the Great', 'Herod the Great' and (more recently) 'Alfred the Great' and 'Peter the Great'.

But earthly rulers come and go. Tell me, where, pray, are Cyrus, Alexander, Herod, Alfred and Peter now?

But to the One who is truly 'Great' (Luke 1. 32), God says, 'you are the same, *and your years will have no end*' (Heb. 1. 12). He is 'Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and today, *and for ever*' (Heb. 13. 8).

I set out below an updated version of a short magazine article, 'Bought with a Price', that I penned almost 40 years ago.

Happy reading.

Yours in our Lord Jesus,

Malcolm

'Bought with a Price'.

The expression 'bought with a price' occurs twice in Paul's first canonical letter to the Corinthians:

(i) 'Ye are not your own ... For ye are bought with a price' (1 Cor. 6. 19-20).

(ii) 'Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men' (1 Cor. 7. 23).

It is generally agreed that the phrase has as its background the procedure for selling slaves.

Although the formula may well have been used to describe the purchase of slaves in general, it was certainly used in connection with one particular form of slave release. This was the ancient practice of "sacred manumission".

The practice can be summarised as follows. A slave would scrape together such small sums of money as he was able. As, little by little, he saved these small amounts, he would deposit them in his name in the temple of one of the Greek deities. This would have been a temple of Athene, Serapis, Asclepius, Apollo or some other such god or goddess.

It would normally take the slave many years to amass sufficient money to equal the purchase price of his freedom. But, when the requisite sum was reached, he and his master would go to the temple where the money had been deposited. At the temple, the priest would pay to the master the purchase price of the slave's freedom.

This would be done in the name of the relevant deity, who was deemed, thereby, to have bought the slave for himself or herself. The master had theoretically sold his slave to the god or goddess. From that moment onwards the slave became (at least, notionally) the property of the deity in question. He was, thereafter, free from bondage to any man and, in particular, from bondage to his former master.

This ritual transaction would be conducted in the presence of witnesses, and would often be recorded permanently in the form of a stone inscription. Many Greek inscriptions have been discovered which give details of such transactions. There is, for instance, an inscription dated 200-199 B.C. on the wall of the temple of Apollo at Delphi, which reads:

'Apollo the Pythian bought from Sosibius of Amphissa, for freedom, a female slave, whose name is Nicaea, by race a Roman, with a price of three minae of silver and a half-mina. Former seller according to the law: Eumnastus of Amphissa. The price he has received. The purchase, however, Nicaea has committed to Apollo, for freedom'.¹

Once the purchase price was paid over, Nicaea became the property of Apollo and was, henceforth, free from all men. The purchase by Apollo was, of course, a mere fiction: Nicaea had, in reality, bought her own freedom. Apollo's name appeared in the transaction only to provide a sound, legal basis for her new freedom. His name served to protect the girl from any future demands that she be taken back into slavery.

There are several interesting points which emerge from inscriptions of the kind quoted above.

The recurring phrase 'for freedom²' should be noted. This very expression occurs in Paul's epistle to the Galatians: 'For you were called for freedom,³ brethren'.⁴

Mr Vine notes, 'Not to bring us into another form of bondage did Christ liberate us from that in which we were born, but in order to make us free from bondage'.⁵ The bondage in view was (i) that to the law (for the Jews) and (ii) that to idols (for the Gentiles⁶), with particular emphasis on the former.

Again, in numerous inscriptions the nature of the newly obtained liberty was highlighted by the statement that the freed man was thereafter able to 'do the things that he will'.⁷ Paul may well have had this in mind when he pointed out that the effect of the power struggle within the believer (between the flesh and the Spirit) is 'that you do not the things that you will'.⁸

Our present concern, however, lies with the expression, '**bought ... with a price**'.

I recognise that, in the Delphi inscription quoted above, the Greek word translated 'bought' differs from that which is used in 1 Corinthians.⁹ But I note that the verb which Paul uses in 1 Corinthians¹⁰ occurs elsewhere in secular writings to describe the purchase of slaves. For example, it appears with this meaning in the will of Attalus III, dated 133 B.C.¹¹

As far as the Bible is concerned, the formula 'bought with a price' occurs only in one of Paul's letters to the Corinthians. This may well be significant.

The city of Corinth boasted a grand temple of Apollo, the ruins of which can still be seen today. Overlooking the city was the lofty hill of the Acrocorinthus. A famous temple of the Armed Aphrodite was situated on its summit.¹² To the north-west could be clearly seen the snow covered peak of Mount Parnassus, rising 8,000 feet above sea level. Within the circuit of Parnassus lay many shrines at which Apollo, Serapis or Asclepius were deemed to buy slaves for freedom.¹³ How vividly, therefore, would the words 'bought with a price' bring home to the Christians at Corinth the meaning of their freedom in Christ.

The Corinthian believers knew, however, that their purchase by the Lord Jesus was no mere legal fiction. A real and bitter 'price' had been paid, not by themselves but by Another. This was no pious pretence!

In theory, the freed slave became the property of his patron god or goddess. The Christian becomes, **in reality**, the property of the One who has bought him or her. If you 'are bought with a price', it follows that you 'are not your own'.¹⁴ We can compare the words: (i) which the Lord addressed to Israel of old: 'I have redeemed thee ... thou art mine'¹⁵ and (ii) which the apostle Paul addressed to his fellow passengers on board the ill-fated ship sailing to Italy concerning, 'God, whose I am and whom I serve'.¹⁶

The apostle did not define the 'price'¹⁷ with which we were 'bought'. We can easily identify it, however, as our Lord's: (i) giving of 'Himself',¹⁸ (ii) giving of His 'life'¹⁹ and (iii) shedding of His 'blood'.²⁰ (Note the closely associated ideas of ransom, redemption and purchase in the scripture references.)

In one sense, therefore, the gospel has reversed the proverb, 'The wicked shall be a ransom for the righteous'.²¹ For, in His matchless grace, the Righteous One²² has given Himself to be a ransom for the wicked!²³

The leaders of the Jews were '*glad*'²⁴ to pay the 'price' for Christ's 'blood'²⁵ that they might, as they saw it, save *their* people from the Romans.²⁶

Little did they know but the blood of Christ itself was the 'price' which He would *gladly* pay to save *His* people from their sins!²⁷

Praise Him today!

FOR FURTHER READING:

- (i) '*Light from the Ancient East*' by Adolph Deissmann, 4th edition, pages 319-329.
- (ii) '*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*', Ed. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, Volume I, pages 124-125, and Volume VIII, page 178, note 58.
- (iii) '*Dictionary of New Testament Theology*'; Ed. C. Brown. Volume I, pages 715-721, and Vol. III, page 597.
- (iv) '*New Testament Words*' by William Barclay, pages 191-192; and '*Crucified and Crowned*' by William Barclay, pages 110-111.
- (v) '*Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*' by W. E. Vine; article 'Free', section C. 1.

(Adapted from the '*Young People's and Bible Students' Section*' of the Precious Seed Magazine, 1984, Volume 35, Issue 6, with kind permission.)

Notes

¹ Adolf Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, page 323.

² The Greek expression is ἐπ' ἐλευθερίαι.

³ The Greek expression is ἐπ' ἐλευθερία.

⁴ Gal. 5. 13 (literal translation). Compare also, 'For freedom (τῇ ἐλευθερίᾳ) Christ has freed (ἠλευθέρωσε) us', Gal. 5. 1 (literal translation).

⁵ W. E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, article 'Free', section C. 1.

⁶ Gal. 4. 8.

⁷ 'In numerous records of manumission, the nature of the newly obtained liberty is illustrated by the enfranchised person's being expressly allowed henceforth to "do the things that he will"', Adolph Deissmann, *ibid.*, page 324.

⁸ Gal. 5. 17 (literal translation).

⁹ In both 1 Cor. 6. 20 and 1 Cor. 7. 23.

¹⁰ The Greek word is ἀγοράζω.

¹¹ Adolf Deissmann, *ibid.*, page 324, footnote 1.

¹² 'On the summit of the Acrocorinthus is a temple of Aphrodite. The images are Aphrodite armed ...', Pausanias, *Description of Greece*, Volume 1, page 271.

¹³ Adolf Deissmann, *ibid.*, page 329. See also J. A. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, page 33.

¹⁴ 1 Cor. 6. 19-20.

¹⁵ Isa. 43. 1.

¹⁶ Acts 27. 23.

¹⁷ The Greek word is τιμή.

¹⁸ 1 Tim. 2. 6; Tit. 2. 14.

¹⁹ Matt. 20. 28; Mark 10. 45.

²⁰ Eph. 1. 7; 1 Pet. 1. 18, 19; Rev. 5. 9 (where the word rendered 'redeemed' in the King James Version—ἀγοράζω, the word used in 1 Cor. 6. 20 and 1 Cor. 7. 23—should be translated 'bought'. For the distinction between 'redemption' and 'purchase', see C. E. Hocking, *Redemption*, Treasury of Bible Doctrine, PSP, pages 324-326).

²¹ Prov. 21. 18. Compare, 'the righteous is delivered out of trouble, and the wicked cometh *in his stead*', Prov. 11. 8, of which the reversal in the experiences of Mordecai and Haman provides a classic example, Esther 6. 6-12; 7. 10.

²² Acts 3. 14; 7. 52; 22. 14; cf. Zech. 9. 9; Matt. 27. 19, 24; 1 Pet. 3. 18; 1 John 2. 1.

²³ "Were it not great love for a king's son to pay a great sum of money to redeem a captive? But that he should be content to be a prisoner in his stead, and die for his ransom; this were matter of wonder. Jesus Christ has done all this; *He has written His love in characters of blood*. It had been much for Christ to speak a good word to His Father for us, but He knew that was not enough to redeem us. *Though a word speaking made a world, yet it would not redeem a sinner*', Thomas Watson, *A Body of Divinity*, page 212.

²⁴ Mark 14. 11.

²⁵ Matt. 26. 14, 15 and Matt. 27. 6, 9 (where the Greek word translated 'price' is τιμή, the word of 1 Cor. 6. 20 and 1 Cor. 7. 23).

²⁶ John 11. 47-50.

²⁷ Matt. 1. 21.