

WEEK TWENTY-SIX
DAY TWO

who redeems your life from the pit,
who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,
Psalm 103:4

who redeems

גָּאַל *ga'al*

– to redeem

your life

חַי *chay*

– living, alive

from the pit

שַׁחַת *shachath*

– pit, destruction, grave

who crowns

עָטַר *`atar*

– to encircle (for protection);
especially to crown

you with steadfast love

חֶסֶד *checed*

– kindness, favor, lovingkindness,
mercy

and mercy

רַחֵם *racham*

– compassion, the womb (as
cherishing the fetus), tender love,
mercy

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This description of God by David is one that I can easily relate to—and I imagine you can, too—because at one time or another all of us have fallen into or been in a spiritual pit that is so dark and deep that it is impossible to get out of it without help. The Hebrew word for “pit” in this verse means a trap, a ditch, or a grave, a place where corruption and destruction take place. When I hear the word “pit,” three stories immediately come to my mind. The first is from one of my family’s favorite movies, “The Princess Bride,” when wicked King Humperdink takes the story’s hero Wesley into “the pit of despair,” a torture chamber that one enters through a trap door in a tree. Wesley is tortured mercilessly in this pit until his friends come searching for him and rescue him from what otherwise would have been certain death.

Secondly, I think of Joseph being thrown into a pit by his jealous brothers who wanted him dead because he was a “dreamer” that their father favored over them. Had they left him in the pit, it most definitely would have become his grave. They eventually rescued Joseph out of the pit, but only because they realized they could sell him into slavery to a caravan of Ishmaelite traders who were passing by, and he was worth more to them alive than dead.

The third story is my own. In my 20s and early 30s, I pursued my own worldly desires and ambitions, which led me far off course from God’s pathway of holiness. I fell smack dab into a trap that took me into a pit that Satan had designed for my destruction. It wasn’t until I realized that I was in a pit too deep for me to get out of on my own that I cried out to the Lord to rescue me.

I’m thankful to report that, in each of the stories above, the person in the pit was rescued and ultimately delivered from what would have been certain death into a life of exceeding abundance!

God redeems our life from the pit. The Hebrew word for redeem is rooted in the biblical custom of a “kinsman redeemer,” a close relative who would “redeem” or “buy back” a relative’s property or marry his widow if the need arose. The biblical account of Ruth who was redeemed by her kinsman Boaz is the most famous example in the Old Testament of what it means to be a “redeemer.” Boaz paid the price to ransom Ruth, and in doing so he gave her a new life. He took her from the “pit” of widowhood, poverty, and no hope of having children and “bought” her a whole new life where she received stature in her community, wealth, she bore children, and had the greatest honor of all—becoming part of Jesus’ very lineage!

Similarly, we all were born in a pit due to our sin nature—a pit we could never escape on our own, and therefore we all were destined to experience death and destruction. And that is where we would have remained, forever in a dark pit, destined for eternal

destruction...BUT for God! For God, Who is lavish in His loving kindness toward us, sent His Beloved Son to rescue us from the pit and to “buy us back” from Satan, the “pit boss.” The price He had to pay for our redemption was His own precious blood! He is our “Kinsman Redeemer” Who has given us a whole new life in Him! He has taken us into His family and made us His own. In place of hopelessness, guilt, fear, shame, and every form and consequence of sin, God has “crowned us” with loving kindness and tender mercies! The root for the Hebrew word for “crown” means to encircle for the purpose of protection or attack. When you put your trust in God, you will find that He is your refuge and strength, “a very present help in times of trouble” (Psalm 46:1). He alone can protect you from the lies and schemes of Satan so you can avoid going back into “the pit of despair.” He is able to protect you because He is all-powerful and with you every minute of every hour of every day; He will never leave you or forsake you (Deuteronomy 31:6; Hebrews 13:5)!

The Lord is full of lavish, loving kindness toward His children! The Hebrew root for the words “tender mercies” means the way a fetus is cherished, given tender care, and protected inside the womb. God cherishes you and me, and He keeps vigil over us to give us continual, tender care. As a mother would give her life without hesitation for the life of her child, you can know that Jesus gave His life to purchase abundant as well as eternal life for you. If He redeemed you with His very life, is there anything good that He will withhold from you (Romans 8:32)?

Have you ever found yourself caught in “a trap” that you can now see was laid by Satan to land you into a pit... a place of hopelessness and destruction where you felt you had no chance of escape? Or maybe you feel like you are in a pit right now and that God doesn't care at all about you or your situation. God assures us in Psalm 145:18 that, “The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth” (ESV). Don't believe Satan's lies that God cannot save you or that He won't hear you, for He tells us: “Listen! The LORD's arm is not too weak to save you, nor is his ear too deaf to hear you call” (Isaiah 59:1, NLT). When you call upon Jesus, not only will He deliver you out of the pit, He will place you on the only solid ground—Himself, for He is our Rock as well as our redeemer (Psalm 18:2; Psalm 19:14)! When you put your trust in Jesus your Redeemer, you will come to know Him and be crowned with His loving kindness and tender mercies!

~Julie Van Gorp

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DAY FOUR

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We humans love “rags to riches” stories.

Cinderella, an orphan subjected to a life of servitude, captures the heart of royalty and becomes a princess. Aladdin finds a magic lamp, gets three wishes, and rakes in power and wealth. The outcast, the beggar, the destitute, the unwanted—after a twist of fate, they find themselves on the other side, transformed into something new and, by man’s standards, important.

If we are in Christ, we each have our own “rags to riches” story, but these stories are infinitely deeper and richer and more meaningful than anything folklore or Walt Disney could create.

So, the basics: the “pit” David is talking about symbolizes a separation from God because of sin. Throughout Scripture, the term “pit” is used to refer to Sheol, or the place of the dead, a place of destruction, darkness, and total separation from God. This paints a beautiful picture for us as to what God has done to save us. When an animal falls into a deep pit and no one knows that it’s there, there is little hope of survival. Falling into a pit equates to death.

Our King, in His mercy, decided to rescue us from death to life again through redemption. To “redeem” is to obtain the release or restoration of, as from captivity, by paying a ransom. Our ransom: the death on a cross of the perfect Lamb of God, Jesus Christ.

But not only does He rescue, redeem, and resurrect us from our spiritually dead lives—He makes us royalty. And not just Disney princes and princesses! He makes us heirs with His own Son to His divine kingdom. He “crowns you with steadfast love and mercy,” gifts that represent His most precious qualities. No one can love like He does; no one can be merciful like He is merciful. He bestows these upon us as markers that we are His. We have been bought, redeemed, paid for, and we belong to Him now, under the blood of Jesus Christ.

I would have loved to have been sitting in the room with David as he wrote these words... this man, called the one after God’s own heart, was utterly broken before His Lord and King, having experienced this redemption and transformation firsthand. I bet his pen couldn’t write fast enough as he poured out his praise to the Lord.

I want to be like this. I want to turn every piece of my broken life over to Jesus, the only one who can make it new again, who can turn my dirty rags into beautiful riches.

~ Amber Wilson

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“Out of the depths I cry to you, O LORD!” (Ps. 130:1). Though we have been delivered from the ultimate Pit of Destruction, God’s people encounter smaller “pits” during their lives – depths of grief and pain or silence and emptiness. Sometimes we cry out to the LORD, but sometimes we are too weary and numb to do anything but sit in the darkness. Yet even there, the LORD is our light (Mic. 7:8).

Joseph and Jeremiah and Daniel all experienced types of literal pits during their lifetimes, and while Joseph’s youthful foolishness contributed to his misfortunes, Jeremiah and Daniel’s faithfulness caused their trials. “Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you” (1 Pet. 1:12). For those seeking to know and follow the LORD, pits and depths are often tools of training instead of punishments for misbehavior.

The beautiful reality that unfolds like a ladder into our dark places is that the LORD redeems. As sure as He has delivered His people from the final destruction of sin and death, He will deliver His people from all evil and bring them safely into His heavenly kingdom (2 Tim. 4:18). “There is no pit so deep, that God’s love is not deeper still,” testified World War II prison camp survivor Corrie ten Boom.

The previous verse in Psalm 103 details how the LORD gives us exceedingly abundantly beyond what we deserve: He forgives AND heals. Verse 4 continues revealing God’s unmerited favor, stating that the LORD redeems AND crowns His people. The Sovereign of the universe is merciful and kind. In Psalm 8, David describes God’s kindness toward His creation: “Yet you have made [man] a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor” (v. 5). Later, Isaiah predicts that God’s refined people will be “a crown of beauty in the hand of the LORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God” (Is. 62: 3). He never offers the bare minimum but continually lavishes His grace.

All of our redemption and crowning is for the glory of the One who was highly exalted and on whom was bestowed the name above every name, the One to whom every knee will bow and every tongue confess Him LORD, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2). Yes, He redeems and beautifies His people, but He redeems us FOR something as well as FROM something. He redeems us from sin and evil to His glory and beauty. “In that day the LORD of hosts will be a crown of glory, and a diadem of beauty, to the remnant of his people” (Is. 28:5).

~ Elisabeth Hooker

