

The Redemption of a Donkey

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The Lord said to Moses, 2 “Consecrate to me every firstborn male. The first offspring of every womb among the Israelites belongs to me, whether human or animal.” Ex 13:1-2

“But you must not redeem the firstborn of a cow, a sheep or a goat; they are holy. Splash their blood against the altar and burn their fat as a food offering, an aroma pleasing to the Lord.” Num 18:17

[Y]ou are to give over to the Lord the first offspring of every womb. All the firstborn males of your livestock belong to the Lord. 13 Redeem with a lamb every firstborn donkey, but if you do not redeem it, break its neck. Redeem every firstborn among your sons. Ex 13:12-13

Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer [Ps 19:14].

A cowboy was out on the range mending fences when he happened to lose his Bible.

Three weeks later, a donkey walked up to him with the cowboy’s Bible in its mouth. As he took the Bible from the donkey’s mouth, the cowboy cried out, “It’s a miracle!”

“Not really,” said the donkey, “your name is printed on the cover.”

There was a man at a movie theater who noticed what looked like a donkey sitting in front of him. “Are you a donkey?” he asked.

“Yes,” said the donkey.

The man asked, “What are you doing at the movies?”

The donkey said, “Well, I liked the book.”

Donkeys aren’t the most illustrious subject mentioned in the Bible and you’ve probably never heard a sermon preached about this lowly animal.

Donkey jokes aside, the verses I just read are very interesting. In them, God is stating the law of the firstborn, that every firstborn male must be dedicated to God. Now, this is no reflection on the females. I believe that God focused on the firstborn males because they were to act as a type and shadow of His Son (but more on that later).

The firstborn of every *clean* animal—sheep, oxen, and cows—had to be offered to God as a sacrifice. When it was a month old, it would be killed, its blood sprinkled on the altar, and its fat burned as a sweet smelling fragrance to God.

The firstborn of *unclean* animals were affected by this law, too, **but** because they couldn’t be offered as a sacrifice, the law demanded that a ransom of money be paid.

¹ This is a sermon that I downloaded from The Jesus Church (formerly Medina Valley Christian Worship), and edited heavily. Although the original doesn’t state who wrote it, it was probably R. Jeremiah Sibley, the pastor of The Jesus Church., to whom I am grateful for making it publicly available.

...[Y]ou must redeem every firstborn son and every firstborn male of unclean animals. 16 When they are a month old, you must redeem them at the redemption price set at five shekels of silver, according to the sanctuary shekel.... Num 18:15-16

That was the law for *most* unclean animals. Apparently donkeys were an exception to the rule. Actually, firstborn donkeys *and human beings* were the exceptions to the rule, and that's curious. Why would God link donkeys and human beings together like this in the law of redemption? The law is repeated again in Ex 34:20:

“Redeem the firstborn donkey with a lamb, but if you do not redeem it, break its neck. Redeem all your firstborn sons.”

Notice that God didn't make the redemption of firstborn sons optional! No option to break the child's neck, as much as that may disappoint the parents of teenagers!

Since the donkey was an unclean animal, it couldn't be offered to God as a sacrifice, but redeeming it was different than all of the other unclean animals because God would not accept *money* for it.

If the donkey was to be redeemed, a *lamb* had to be killed in its place. If the owner decided that the donkey wasn't worth the price of a lamb, then he was required to break the donkey's neck.

Why is this law in the Bible? And why in the world does God elevate the lowly donkey to the level of humanity—speaking of them in the same breath in this law of redemption? And why does God make the donkey the exception of the unclean animals and require a *lamb* for its redemption?

It would appear that God was teaching His people an important lesson regarding our need for a Redeemer. Simply put and spiritually speaking, *we—you and I—are that donkey in the law*—unclean and unholy on our own—not acceptable to God or pleasing to Him. In our natural state, we're not *able* to be offered to God, yet we need redemption.

Our sins demand death—that our necks be broken both physically and spiritually—but Almighty God provided a Lamb for us in His Son, Jesus Christ. As Abraham said, “God Himself will provide the lamb” (Gen 22:8).

When John the Baptist saw Jesus, the first words out of his mouth were “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). When the Lamb of God laid down His life on the cross, it was for the redemption of humanity—a humanity that, like the donkey, was unfit, unpleasing, and unable to be redeemed in any other way. Thank God that the Lamb of God paid the price to redeem us from sin and its inevitable wages! The redemption of the donkey, it turns out, has a very personal application to you and me today!

There are plenty of other redemption metaphors, types and shadows in the law. Why do we need another one, and why one with a donkey? I think *God chose this symbol and law to illustrate to us how much He loves us and how much He values you and me.*

For the man to whom a firstborn donkey was born, there was a choice that loomed in his life: “Is this young donkey valuable enough to me to warrant the loss of a very valuable lamb?” And a decision had to be made. The choice was between letting the donkey live, or letting the lamb live, and which of them was of the greatest value to the man.

Now consider that principle in light of the donkey representing you and me in our sinful state and the lamb representing the Lamb of God who provided redemption.

I'm not trying to use the donkey to refer to you and me in order to insult or speak down to anybody—if I'd wanted to do that I would have read our text from the King James Version—but as I survey this congregation and as I even look at myself, I have to admit that I don't think any of us is more important or worth more than Jesus Christ.

In fact, when compared to the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords, the donkey is a good representation of our worth because compared to He who is—perfect in every way—our human nature and imperfect life are very donkey-like!

Don't be offended by the comparison, but fully grasp what I'm trying to get across to you. Compared to His righteousness, our righteousness is as filthy rags! Compared to His glory, our personal glory is foolishness and ridiculous! He is great and greatly to be praised and to be chosen over anybody else, and if it ever came down to me having to choose between you and Him, I'm afraid your neck would be hurting! Because nothing compares to the value of Jesus Christ!

Yet consider that when the *God of Glory* had to make that choice, whether to let the Lamb live or the donkey, He chose for the Lamb to die and for the donkey to live! You and I—even while we were yet sinners and while we were in the lowest of spiritual states—were thought valuable enough by God for the Lamb of God to be slain.

Think of the perfect and sinless Jesus—the Man who had only done good, had only brought healing and hope—suffering on the cross of Calvary and enduring the wrath of God as if He were the guilty one, and then grasp that all that was God's idea, and the idea was that you and I might be redeemed! It was about God thinking that you and I were valuable enough and important enough to Him that the Lamb would die instead!

One of the greatest traps of this world is this society trying to label people as insignificant. In our culture, if you are not rich, extraordinarily good looking, overly talented, or famous, then this world says that you are not worth noticing. People live making key decisions of their life based on feelings of unimportance and a lack of self-worth. People commit suicide because they think that there's no point to their life. Destructive behavior—whether it's substance abuse, criminal acts, or immorality—stems from people viewing themselves as the lowest of lows. To use the Scriptural metaphor, they act like donkeys because they view themselves as donkeys—just the lowest of the low and with no lot in life really worth striving for or living up to. They live down to their own view of themselves, so they roll in the mud pit of sin and live their life at the lowest possible level.

But the redemption of the donkey should call out to you a lesson of what God thinks of you! Because even the lowest of human beings at the bottom of this world's societal strata was thought valuable enough for the Lamb of God to die in their place!

When God looked at the Man, Christ Jesus, and then looked at you in your sin, something caused God to love you and to choose to let you have the opportunity to live forever by choosing to let Christ die instead! The cross and Calvary scream out against the emptiness and foolish teachings of this world that certain people are worthless and pointless.

Hear the lesson of the redemption of the donkey: The owner of us all chose to kill the Lamb! You may be but a lowly donkey in this world's eyes, and you may not have it all together, and you may battle feelings of insecurity and a lack of self worth, but all of *that* comes from this world's sinful and ungodly priorities. In His presence—in the kingdom of God—you are worth more than anything else, even Jesus Christ Himself! Because God thought enough of you to redeem you!

Are you a donkey that hasn't yet received the love of God in your life? Do you feel the gentle tug of the Holy Spirit on your heart? If so, surrender yourself in prayer right now, and thank God that He has not only called you, but provided the Way for you to be saved. Then, the words of Paul to the Corinthian church will apply also to you:

**Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, that person is a new creature. The old has gone, the new is here!
18 All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ.... 2 Cor 5:17-18**

In our natural, sinful state, we—like the donkey—are unclean, but when we are redeemed, we are not only bought and allowed to live, but God *transforms* us through the new birth experience to cause us to become a “new creature!”

We used to be unclean and as a donkey, unable to be offered upon the altar of God as a sacrifice, but now we are commanded to offer ourselves “as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God” (Rom 12:1).

When you are born again by the power of the Holy Spirit, you are not just a redeemed donkey or a washed donkey, but you become a **sheep**, and thus clean and able to offer yourself up to God Almighty! The unclean becomes the clean; the formerly unacceptable is changed so that it is now something acceptable in God’s sight. ***The Lamb gave His life for the donkey, so that the donkey could be saved, but also so that the donkey could be changed and become like the Lamb!***

If we have truly been redeemed and died to our fleshly nature, then know that, like Samson using the jawbone of a donkey to slay the enemies of Israel, God wants to use your mouth as an instrument to wreak havoc in the enemies’ plans for people’s lives. What used to be just the jawbone of uncleanness can be transformed by the working of the Spirit of God into a great tool for victory and freedom for His people! This is why the Lamb was given—and that is how we were redeemed!

Other donkey jokes (not included in the sermon):

A Preacher went to his church office on Monday morning and discovered a dead donkey in the church yard. He called the police.

Since there did not appear to be any foul play, the police referred the Preacher to the health department.

The health department said since there was no health threat that he should call the sanitation department.

The sanitation manager said he could not pick up the mule without authorization from the mayor.

Now the Preacher knew the mayor and wasn’t eager to call him. The mayor had a bad temper and was generally hard to deal with, but the Preacher finally called him.

The mayor did not disappoint. He immediately began to rant and rave at the pastor and finally said, “Why did you call me anyway? Isn’t it your job to bury the dead?”

The preacher paused for a brief prayer and asked the Lord to direct his response. He was led to say, “Yes, Mayor, it is my job to bury the dead, but I always like to notify the next of kin first!”

A Cajun named Jean Paul moved to Texas and bought a donkey from an old farmer for \$100.00. The farmer agreed to deliver the donkey the next day.

The next day the farmer drove up and said, “Sorry, but I got some bad news. The donkey died on the trip here.”

“Well then, just give me my money back.”

“Cain't do that. I went and spent it already.”

“OK then, just unload the donkey.”

“What ya gonna do with him?”

“I'm going to raffle him off.”

“Ya cain't raffle off a dead donkey!”

“Sure I can. I just won't tell anyone he's dead.”

A month later the farmer met up with the Cajun and asked, “What happened with the dead donkey?”

“I raffled him off. I sold 500 tickets at \$2.00 apiece and made a nice profit.”

“Didn't no one complain?”

“Just the guy who won. So I gave him his \$2.00 back.”

Not for the sermon, but I couldn't resist including it here:

Once upon a time there was a king who wanted to go fishing. He called the royal weather forecaster and inquired as to the weather forecast for the next few hours. The weatherman assured him that there was no chance of rain in the coming days.

So the king left to go fishing.

On the way he met a farmer on a donkey. Upon seeing the king, the farmer said, "Your Majesty, you should return to the palace at once because in just a short time I expect a huge amount of rain to fall in this area".

The king replied: “I hold the palace meteorologist in high regard. He is an extensively educated and experienced professional, and I pay him very high wages. He gave me a very different forecast. I trust him and I will continue on my way.” So he did.

However, a short time later a torrential rain fell from the sky, and the King was totally soaked.

Furious, he returned to the palace and gave the order to fire the weatherman at once! Then he summoned the farmer and offered him the prestigious and high paying job of royal forecaster.

The farmer said, "Your Majesty, I don't know nothin' 'bout forecastin'. I gets my information from my donkey. If I see my donkey's ears drooping, it means with certainty that it's gonna rain." So instead, the King hired the donkey on the spot.

And thus began the age-old practice of hiring asses to work in the government and occupy its highest and most influential positions.