

“My Rock and My Redeemer”

In a report about 10 Incredible Real-Life Stories of Redemption, Sārah Nour wrote, “Growing up in inner-city South Philadelphia, Frank Meeink was recruited into a skinhead gang at age 13. **Soon, he was touring the US as a neo-Nazi recruiter, even broadcasting a call for new members on his cable-access TV show, The Reich, in Illinois.**”

The story explained, “At 18, Meeink was convicted of kidnapping rival gang members at gunpoint and filming their beatings and torture.” **“During his three years behind bars, Meeink befriended inmates of different races and even joined a prison football league with African-American teammates.”**

The report continued, “Although he tried rejoining his skinhead group after his release, Meeink realized that he’d changed too much to go back to that life.” **“So when a Jewish doctor offered to remove his neo-Nazi tattoos, he agreed.”**

The article stated, “Since then, Meeink has become a motivational speaker and released a memoir called *Autobiography of a Recovering Skinhead*. He also coaches children’s hockey, which he uses to foster racial tolerance and keep inner-city children out of gangs. Meeink has worked with South African activist Desmond Tutu and spoken on behalf of the Anti-Defamation League, a group that combats anti-Semitism. His life was the basis for the 1998 film *American History X*.” (“10 Incredible Real-Life Stories of Redemption” by Sārah Nour posted on listverse.com)

Meeink’s story is one of redemption – the redemption of his life! **That report of his transformation did not indicate he had a religious conversion, although, it shared how a Jewish doctor’s offer to help him remove his neo-Nazi tattoos facilitated his decision to leave the skinhead community.**

On this last Sunday of the “My God Is a Rock” Worship Series, we are focusing on our Rock – God and God’s Son, Jesus Christ, being our Redeemer. Redemption is not a term we use in everyday conversation is it? I remember, as a child, going with my mother to the S&H Stamp Redemption Center. However, God being our Redeemer does not refer to our Divine Parent purchasing us or our lives with S&H Stamps!

If you grew up in a church or if you have been immersed in our society’s assertions about the Christian Faith, then you may have a vague understanding that somehow, God has bought us from the powers of sin and death through a new currency – the blood of Jesus Christ. If you have accepted that understanding of Redemption, have you ever thought about why God had to pay something or someone for our lives, so we are redeemed? If you have heard an answer to that question, then I suspect, the answer went something like, “God’s Wrath – Anger against – Hate of all human beings is because our sins keep us from being able to be in a Relationship with our Divine Parent – from being able to live with God in Heaven when we die. God demanded a sacrifice – a blood offering to pacify the Almighty’s Anger and Hatred, so we can purchase our Forgiveness.” It had to be very special blood to pay the debt – the most precious blood of all – of God’s Son. Further, some have claimed the fact of Jesus’ Death is not sufficient – for one has to believe in him being the Son of God and ask him to forgive you and to come into your life before his shed blood will obtain your salvation – forgiveness. Unfortunately, portions of the New Testament use similar terminology to all of that, which tends to be interpreted by folks as validation of the Public Religion’s definition and dogma about Redemption, Forgiveness, and Salvation. However, very few people have received a bill from God for the blood of Christ, so they have not been convinced to believe in him in order that they will be forgiven by God. **Further, very few people have the experience of Redemption and, so, their lives are not changed or transformed.**

Friends, we do not need to despair! Let me suggest a different way to recognize what Redemption is and how important it is for all of us and for everyone else. First, it is important to understand Biblical Judaism had two basic approaches to how they understood their relationship with God. The Priestly Tradition, which gave rise to the Legalistic Pharisee position, and the Yahwist Tradition, which gave rise to the Prophetic position. The

Legalistic Pharisaic movement would support the Public Religion's view of Redemption because it required everyone obey all of the laws and ordinances to prevent becoming a sinner. Yes, one would periodically sin but then one was to buy God's Forgiveness by making the appropriate sacrifice – sometimes of an animal – a blood sacrifice.

On the other hand, the Prophetic movement perceived that God's Love for humanity led the Divine Parent to seek ways to lead people out of their unfaithfulness to their Relationship with God – their state of sin back to faithfulness to their Relationship with the Almighty. Jesus was aligned with the Prophetic approach and was frequently in conflict with the Pharisaic way.

To help explain a different way of understanding Redemption than that of the Pharisaic Tradition, let's recall some Scriptures. Many of us have memorized John 3:16. Jesus said those words to Nicodemus, a member of the Jerusalem Jewish Council – the Sanhedrin. Our Savior spoke those words out of the context of the Yahwist – Prophetic Tradition. **Specifically, he referred to the Yahwist story of Moses saving the Israelites from dying of snake bites.** The people had been unfaithful to their Relationship with God and suffered the consequences of being vulnerable to snake bites. When the people realized their sin – that failure to be faithful to God was destroying them, they returned to God. God forgave them and through means of them looking at a bronze snake on a pole they were healed.

Jesus said to Nicodemus in verses 14-18a, “As Moses lifted up the bronze snake on a pole in the desert, in the same way the Son of Man must be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life. For God Agape Loved the world so much that He gave His Only Son, so that everyone who believes in him may not die but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to be its Judge, but to be its Savior. Those who believe in the Son are not judged”.

Jesus explained this to Nicodemus long before his Death – his bleeding for us. God Sent the Son of God – Jesus, the Christ, out of love for everyone – not out of hatred or anger! Jesus was sent to Save us from our self-destruction – not to Judge us! Jesus was sent to convince us of God's Agape Love, Forgiveness, and Grace for us – that our Divine Parent wants us to live in the New Relationship with God and the New Life in Christ. The shed blood of Jesus, his Death, and Resurrection are all part of God's Proof to us of the Divine's Commitment to our New Relationship – that our Divine Parent has already Forgiven our unfaithfulness. **The sacrifice of God's Son was not to pay our Angry and Wrathful God the price of our Redemption but the Proof of our Divine Parent's Love for us, so we Trust and Faith in God's Agape Love, Forgiveness, Grace, Invitation, and Welcome and Accept and Live in the New Relationship with God – the New Life in Christ – that we be Redeemed!** Our Redemption is the Transformed Life, as the former skinhead's life was radically changed.

Peter called us to live this Redeemed Life as he wrote in verses 4-5 and 9-10 of our Scripture, “Come to the Lord, the Living Stone rejected by people as worthless but chosen by God as valuable. Come as living stones, and let yourselves be used in building the spiritual temple, where you will serve as holy priests to offer spiritual and acceptable sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ. ... But you are the chosen race, the King's priests, the holy nation, God's Own People, chosen to proclaim the wonderful acts of God, Who called you out of darkness into His Own Marvelous Light. At one time you were not God's People, but now you are His People; at one time you did not know God's Mercy, but now you have received His Mercy.” God has Redeemed us – God is Our Rock and Our Redeemer! We are God's People because of our Divine Parent's Agape Love and Mercy. We are called to proclaim this Marvelous Good News to others, who also need and want to be Redeemed – to be transformed from living self-destructive lives of selfishness and animosity toward others. **We are called to share this with all who yearn to join in the New Relationship with God and New Life in Christ, which our Divine Parent gives us because of God's Agape Love for us!**

As this Worship Series comes to a close, think about the way you have experienced God's Enduring Agape Love and Grace in your life and how you can bring that Love and Grace into the community and the world. Amen.