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West Valley Presbyterian Church
“Redeemer”

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Today we move into a new sermon series. This is our **AKA series**. **AKA stands for “also known as”** and in this series we are going to be talking about names for God. God is known by many names in scripture.

In the ancient world names were much more important than they are today. Names revealed the identity of the person; they were indicative of their nature, destiny and gifts.

In scripture, God is known by many names because it is impossible to fully know God’s identity by simply one name – or one label given to describe him. So we are going to be exploring what kind of God we worship when we come here on Sunday mornings for the next eight weeks, by looking at the various ways God is described to us in scripture. We are going to be delving a little more into God’s nature as we ask and explore Who is this God that I worship? What are his characteristics and how can I know him?... What are his characteristics that that I can be sure of, and that I can stake my life on?

Somebody asked a theologian by the name of R.C. Sproul one time, **“What’s the greatest spiritual need in the world today?”** Sproul’s response was,

“The greatest need in people’s lives is to understand the true identity of God.” Because a lot of people reject faith, or they think they reject faith, when they really don’t understand the nature of the God they *think* they’re rejecting.

Then there was a follow-up question, **“What’s the greatest spiritual need in the lives of church people...of believers?”** Sproul said, **“To understand the true identity of God.”** Because, if believers really understood who our God is...what’s in His heart...how competent He is...what His character is like...it would change their lives.

Now today we are focusing on the name Redeemer. Jesus is called a Redeemer in Scripture. We sing “Jesus...name above all names...and then in a bit we sing “blessed Redeemer”

What do we mean when we say “redeemer”? What is that word all about?

Well before we go there I want to ask you something and this will date all of us terribly...but turn to the person next to you, and I want you to take a guess at something. Back in the 1960s, what do you think was the largest, single publication available in the U.S. in the decade of the 1960s? Just talk a bit among yourselves and take a guess. Book, magazine, published product – what was the biggest publication of the 1960s...

It wasn't a book; it wasn't a magazine. It was actually a catalog...a catalog published by a company called...

Sperry and Hutchinson, better known as S & H. Ever hear of S & H green stamps?

I had no idea S & H green stamps were so big.

When I was about five years old I remember my mother putting scads of these stamps into little books.

I think she gave them to me to lick, and my tongue was like rubber after it was all over. That’s probably why I remember this.

And then she would take out that big publication item – the S&H green stamp catalogue and decide what item she wanted...I think one time she really wanted a toaster oven...but I remember her saying to me,

“I only need three more books of stamps...then we can go to the redemption center, and I can trade in these books for whatever I really want in this catalogue. And sometimes she and I would pour over that catalogue determining what item did we really need or want, over others. I guess there was a school at the time in Erie Pennsylvania that saved over 5.3 million stamps and bought two gorillas for a local zoo.

This whole redemption idea sounded very exciting to me. These little green stamps were powerful things. So I wrote a letter to my grandmother who lived on the other side of the country and I put an S&H green stamp on the envelope because I figured with all the power these little stamps held, it was bound to get there twice as fast.

I remember her calling and laughing out loud – They actually delivered it! I got the letter...she cried. Of course, I thought. These are S&H green stamps...they are powerful things...and I guess there's still a redemption center online somewhere in case you find some old ones in a drawer somewhere...theres still hope. You can redeem them.

So when we talk about Jesus as a Redeemer, one way to think about it is that **God has his own S & H catalogue** so to speak – **Salvation & Humanity...** And in that catalogue are the faces of humanity. Each person that has ever lived from the beginning of time. And what God does is he goes through that catalogue and sees your face, and he sees my face and he says , “I want that one,” and “I want this one.” *Every face of every person that has ever lived God longs for and chooses as if they were the only one.*

God's longing and desire from the beginning of time is that he be able to relate to us – his creation - in a close, intimate way that is based in love. And his longing has always been that we as his people would respond to his love in a way that would bring us closer to him. But the history of the world and of creation is that we have done the opposite..

I was listening to the words of the old hymn Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing... Chris Rice sings this hymn in a great way...if you want the old hymns to come to life a bit because there is deep theology in the hymns try listening to Chris Rice...he plays them on guitar and does a really nice job...the old hymn “Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing” has some words in it that say...

Prone to wander, Lord I feel it
Prone to leave the God I love...and another part that says

Let Thy goodness like a fetter
Bind my wandering heart to thee

All through history we have been a people that have wandered away from God. We are prone to it. And because we don't really know who God is anymore, to talk about God's goodness is a bit of an abstraction for us.

We can't really get our minds around what that means. But its supposed to be God's goodness, and our awareness of his goodness, our awareness of his

passionate uncompromising love for us...that binds us to him...not guilt, obligation, or wanting to get something from God. Not being right...or following a religious routine that doesn't translate into everyday life. Its Gods goodness that is supposed to cause me to be transformed... to be completely taken with him...completely dedicated to him...completely given over to him.

But as a people we have always doubted God's goodness. We are prone to wander from that truth.

And it all started back in Genesis.

God creates a human being, and then He gives a command. **"And the Lord commanded the man, 'You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it, you will certainly die.'"**

Now a lot of people misunderstand this. The idea in this story is not that if the man eats from the tree, he will gain moral discernment...know right from wrong.

The idea in this story is that in eating from the tree, the man would be saying, **"I can now decide** what is good and evil quite apart from God. I don't need to worry about making my life fit in with the way things are designed to be. I can be my own god."

That's really what's at stake. **"I can be my own god."** God is quite graciously here allowing the man to be able to choose...Do you want to live in community with Me?

Do you want Me to be your God, or do you want to be your own god?

Then the tempter,
...symbolized...by this serpent, comes to the woman.

What he does is plant doubts in her mind that God can actually be trusted. What he says is, **"Did God really say you can't eat from any tree in the garden?"**

Now did God actually say that they couldn't eat from any tree? No, it was just one tree. This was an intentional misquote on the part of the serpent; ***temptation always distorts the truth...***

In temptation I'm tempted to think...I cannot trust that God has my best interests at heart, so I'm going to have to look out for my own self. It would not be safe or wise for me to

abandon my well-being to God. In essence, I know more than God. I am a better judge of what is good for me than God is. I need to take matters into my own hands.

Eventually the woman gives in, eats from this tree, and she gives, "**...some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened.**" Again this is the way temptation works.

There is a value...there is something I believe...and I'm tempted to violate it. That temptation looks so good, so sweet ahead of time. Then I do, and then the guilt and the shame come in.

In the fall, something happens to human nature.

What happens to the human heart is it's not working well anymore because its now separated from God. Like glass is predisposed to shatter, like nitroglycerin is predisposed to explode, I am predisposed to do something wrong.

"Prone to wander, Lord I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love."

When I think it's necessary for me to get what I want to get or avoid what I need to avoid. I will lie, gossip, cheat, slander, lust, covet, and hate, and I can't fix this "prone to wander" problem in me.

So, here's what's going on in Genesis. God creates everything perfect... makes a human being in His own image...and they decide they would rather be their own god. Then their eyes are opened, and this alienation from God sets in. In fact, God comes in chapter 3, verse 8, and says, "**Adam, where are you?**"

Why does He ask Adam a question?

Well, He's inviting the man to interact with Him. He's inviting the man to come clean.

"Adam, where are you?" Adam says, "I heard You, but I was afraid."

There had never before been fear in human existence. It used to be God would come and walk with the man. "**I heard You in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid.**" God says, "**Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree...?**" Adam

reflects on the importance of taking personal responsibility for his actions. He summons up his courage, and he said, "**It was the woman...**" Not just the woman... "**It was the woman You gave me.**" Whose idea was that woman? Was it my idea? No, it wasn't me! Back when it was just me and the animals, everything was okay. No more of this bone-of-my-bone, flesh-of-my-flesh business. "**It was the woman You gave me.**" Now blaming enters human history, along with the shame, guilt and fear. Its all there in this story.

And this is the beginning of our separation from God. Even in the midst of this there is Grace. God sews animal skins for Adam and Eve to cover their shame in being naked. It is a hint that one day our shame will be covered completely at the cross when we accept God's forgiveness. And then there's this marvelous promise God gives in Genesis which again is a look toward the future...even then God had in mind that there would be a redeemer...

And the whole Old Testament is about God trying to reconnect with his people, and their consistent wandering, rebellion, and unwillingness to make God their God...instead of themselves. Their consistent inability to trust in God's goodness over and above their own goodness. Their constant belief that they are more powerful, competent, and able to handle life on their own, without him. It breaks the Divine heart. God says "I love you" in countless ways through the scripture. "Trust me" I want to provide for you. I want to bring you victory. I want to shelter you and protect; comfort you and guide you. Here's some commandments to live by. Here's how to worship, here's how to remember and celebrate; here's how to live and stay connected to me.. Let me be your God. Give it up..trying to be God on your own. Surrender. Lean back and let me hold you and guide you. Let me do what I long to do...to care for you as every parent longs and wants to take care of their own children – I want to be your God.

But it wasn't getting through...it didn't compute...we were too scared, confused, and more and more prone to wander and self destruct as with each generation we got further and further from God...

And God, looking through the catalogue of humanity...all of the faces of his children...all of the lives...the stories...the struggles...says "But I want this one...and this one..." and his heart ached for his people...they kept wandering and they were lost...

There's a Chinese proverb that says...

"Tell me and I'll forget; show me and I may remember; involve me and I'll understand."

So God involves us in who he is by becoming like us in Jesus Christ... becoming a human being. A huge magnificent descent on the part of God...

As much as if you had to communicate to a bunch of ants...you couldn't do it as a human – lording it over them - ...you have become an ant and do that weird communication thing they do with their feelers in order to figure out how to que up and which direction to go in and out of the ant hill and all of that....I don't love ants enough to become an ant to tell them how to avoid the RAID can...

But God loved humanity enough to do just that...

He comes to our messed up sinful planet and lives with us and involves us in dialogue, and he has meals with us, and he heals what's wrong with us, and he engages with us in the everyday...he walks with us and he is a friend, a teacher, filled with the Holy Spirit – he involves us with him in the life and purpose of God –

There was once a great Polish concert pianist, Jan Paderewski. The way the story goes, he's doing a concert at a big concert hall one time. Mom had brought a little nine-year-old kid. She was trying to get the kid excited in piano lessons. The kid thought the piano looked pretty cool on the stage, so when the mother wasn't paying attention, the kid actually slipped up, walked up on stage, sat down at the bench, and started to play Chopsticks at the piano. This bothered everybody who had come to hear a concert because Chopsticks is kind of an irritating song, and they were waiting for Paderewski to come out and play. They were

wondering...What's wrong with this kid's parents? Everybody is wondering...What's Paderewski going to do? How is the maestro going to respond when somebody is messing up his concert by playing "Chopsticks"?

Much to their surprise, Paderewski himself comes walking out onto the stage. Instead of getting mad, Paderewski goes up to the piano, puts both arms around the kid on the keyboard, and starts to improvise so they are now playing a duet together.

The way the story goes, Paderewski while playing was whispering into the kid's ear the whole time they were playing together, "I'll get you for this, kid." No, he was actually whispering, "Just keep going. Just don't quit. You keep playing, and I'll keep playing, and we're going to do something everybody will always remember." By the time the night was over, Paderewski had played all these great pieces from a concert repertoire. The highlight...the moment nobody would ever forget... was the duet playing Chopsticks with a nine-year-old kid, where the maestro takes this mess and turns it into something unforgettable...a masterpiece.

God involved us in who he was by living with us for 33 years...as a human being in Jesus Christ

We'd been playing chopsticks with our lives for too long- separate, alienated from god – a kind of strident, stressful, irritating march of incompetence... doing things our way. God says "Let me get in there. Let me redeem this situation. I'll take what you've done and what you are doing and turn into a masterpiece if you will let me." Let me put my arms around you, and use the mess you have made and redeem it, and turn it into something masterful.

And the final movement of God - an act of utter act grace and mercy

God gives his life...in exchange for our lives.

He turns himself in...so to speak

To buy us back...to redeem us...he becomes sin for us (says one scripture) so that

Every face in God's S & H catalogue – Salvation and Humanity catalogue - can be redeemed

Bought back...he trades himself in for our salvation...on the cross

Another word for salvation is "healing" – you can use these two words interchangeably all through scripture

And what would heal us more than to be in right relationship to God?

That's why we call Jesus "Redeemer";

The greatest redemption center is right here at the base of the cross
God says now to you today...what He has been saying to the human race for
so long,

"Why don't you just come on in to the redemption center? Why don't you
trade that old guilt...it's

not getting you anywhere...for my forgiveness?

Why don't you trade your old sinful life, which will
never get you what you want, for a life reconciled to God?

Why don't you trade your regret for some hope?

Why don't you trade your despair for some faith? Why don't you trade that
human inadequacy for some power God will give you?"

There is a redeemer....you've been bought with a price...the very life of
Christ

Our God is a redeeming God who takes messes in people's lives and things
that are shattered and hearts that are broken and stuff that nobody can fix.

God says, "You bring it to Me. You bring it

to the redemption center, and I'll redeem it. I paid a price for you with my
life; that's who I have been from all eternity, and I'm

still in the redeeming business." That's the nature of our God...that's our
Redeemer.

As we come to this table today, we see the elements here of bread and juice
representing Christ's atonement. We say **atonement meaning "at-one-
ment"**...Jesus' sacrifice brings us back to God...because he has redeemed
us. ...Let us pray now to that One who has sought a relationship with us
from the beginning of time, and who is present to us in these elements that
represent his pursuit of us...a pursuit so passionate and filled with longing
for you that he gave his life to redeem you. Jesus said..."Greater love has
no one than this; that a man lay down his life for his friends." Let us pray.