

“23 and the Real Me”

I Kings 1:28-31

Series: Starting Over Week 4. Redeem Your Regrets

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Eagles fever is running high this week. As you can imagine, Super Bowl tickets are in high demand and price are through the roof. Someone shared this post with me.

My friend has 2 tickets for the 2018 Super Bowl. He paid \$2,300 a piece for them, but he didn't realize when he bought them, it was going to be the same day as his wedding. If you are interested, he is looking for someone to take his place.

It's at St. Andrew's Cathedral, Philadelphia at 3 pm. Her name is Elizabeth, (Ellie) she is 5'4" about 115 lbs., good cook too. She'll be the one in the white dress.

I think that story has regret written all over it.

Let me tell you about another 23 – not \$2,300 Super Bowl Tickets but *23 and Me*. For years we've been telling kids: “Don't spit. Spitting is gross.” Then along comes *23 and Me* and suddenly everyone is spitting into these tubes. For those of you who don't know, *23 and Me* is a genetic testing kit which analyzes your spit and reveals the ethnic origin of your forbearers. The name comes from the 23 pairs of chromosomes in your cells. In 2008 Time Magazine named *23 and Me* the Invention of the Year. For some there's not much of a surprise. My wife's family turned out to be exactly what they thought: Swedish and German. Others receive a really rude awakening. I heard one person learned his ancestors were Neanderthals.

Your chromosomes play a huge role in making you who you are. But they don't determine everything. In this series *Starting Over* we are exploring another factor that controls our lives: regrets. Your 23 chromosome pairs may influence the way you look on the outside but regrets tend to control how you feel on the inside, the real me. This series is stirring up a lot of conversations. People are opening up and talking about their regrets. We've seen there are **Regrets of Action** – “I wish I didn't do that” – **Regrets of Inaction** – “I wish I did that” – and **Regrets of Reaction** – “I wish that wasn't done to me.” To break out of what we've come to know as “The Sorry Cycle” the first step is to **Recognize Your Regrets**. Don't deny, ignore or hide them. Acknowledge them to God, yourself and someone you trust. Next you **Release Your Regret**. You decide to stop hitting your head against the wall and remove what lies behind your regret. This requires Forgiveness – asking for it and/or offering it – and making amends. David recognizes and releases his regret to God when he cries out for forgiveness:

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. (Psalm 51:1)

As you seek forgiveness, it's essential to build a new structure of support, a new frame of mind by using prayer, worship, Growth Groups and a Guide.

Today we look at the third step in *Starting Over*: **Redeem Your Regrets**. As I said before, 23 chromosome pairs may determine how you appear on the outside to others but they don't necessarily control what you feel on the inside. Let me tell you about another 23 – not 23 chromosomes but 23 gold medals won by swimmer Michael Phelps. He reached that lofty total

in his 5th Olympics at the 2016 Summer Games in Rio. Yet those 23 gold medals don't tell the whole story about what was going inside Michael Phelps.

After the London games in 2012, Phelps' life was spinning totally out of control. Despite his outward success, he was struggling inside. Feeling empty he turned to drugs and alcohol to numb his pain. In September of 2014, Phelps hit bottom. After months of estranged relationships, increasing apathy towards swimming, and substance abuse, Phelps was arrested for his second DUI. He was on the verge of losing everything. In the days after his arrest, he isolated himself and kept drinking. He later admitted: "I had no self-esteem. No self-worth. I thought the world would just be better off without me. I figured that was the best thing to do — just end my life."

Thankfully, Phelps' family and friends convinced him to check into a rehab facility where he discovered he could start over. He took with him a book given by a friend: *The Purpose Driven Life*. It changed his life. Phelps explained in an interview the book "turned me into believing there is a power greater than myself and there is a purpose for me on this planet."

Phelps doesn't regret hitting rock bottom. It became the turning point in his life. "I certainly wouldn't be where I am today, in every aspect of my life, without that." Since that time, he reconnected with his estranged father, married his long-time girlfriend, celebrated the birth of his son, found a new sense of purpose, and experienced a renewed passion for using his God-given talent. For Phelps, what began as a story of regret turned out to be a story of redemption.

God wants to take your story of regret and turn it into a story of redemption. You do not have to be a prisoner of your chromosomes or your regrets. God is our Redeemer. A redeemer is someone who pays a price to set a prisoner or slave free. In the Old Testament, God redeemed the Israelites and set them free from slavery in Egypt

Therefore, say to the Israelites: 'I am the Lord, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgment. (Exodus 6:6)

In the New Testament, God redeems Jews and Gentiles and sets us free from slavery to sin.

There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. (Romans 3:22-24)

That's a very loaded sentence. Let me give you a translation. Every person is imprisoned by sin yet all are declared not guilty and set free by the price Christ freely paid. What price did He give? He gave His life for us on the Cross. So the worst thing we could do – kill God's only Son – is transformed by God to be the best gift of all: our pathway to freedom and salvation. That's Redemption. God is able to take everything from our past, even our worst regrets; our greatest pain and use them for his great good and his great gain. Later in Romans, Paul says,

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." (Romans 8:28)

God can take even your worst mistakes and use them for great good! When you are at your lowest God can bring about the biggest change. He can take you from regret to redemption.

Like Michael Phelps, there's another man who rose from obscurity to national fame: King David. After David seeks forgiveness for his affair with Bathsheba, life is still painful. The sins of the father cause his sons to misbehave and fight one another. One of them, Absalom, even drives David out of Jerusalem. When the army fights and kills Absalom, David weeps for his lost son and his divided family. There seems little hope for redemption.

Yet as David recognizes and releases his regret to God, the Lord redeems his regrets by giving him another son through Bathsheba.

She gave birth to a son, and they named him Solomon. The Lord loved him; and because the Lord loved him, he sent word through Nathan the prophet to name him Jedidiah. (2 Samuel 12:24-25)

David names his son “Solomon” which means “God’s peace.” Then God confirms it by sending Nathan to give Solomon a nickname, “Jedidiah,” which means “God’s beloved.” When David looks into the face of this child, he knows God is redeeming his regrets. He tells Bathsheba:

As surely as the Lord lives, who has delivered me out of every trouble, I will surely carry out this very day what I swore to you by the Lord, the God of Israel: Solomon your son shall be king after me, and he will sit on my throne in my place. (1 Kings 1:29b-30)

Solomon reigns over the Golden Age of Israel. He builds the Temple, expands the kingdom, and brings an era of peace within the kingdom and with the surrounding nations. Ultimately it’s through David and Solomon’s line that Jesus the Savior and Redeemer of the world is born.

God redeems David’s regrets through the birth of Solomon. Redemption is God bringing freedom from slavery, good out of evil, hope out of despair. God wants to take your story of regret and turn it into a story of redemption too.

Here are 4 truths about how God redeems our regrets. **Truth #1: Redemption is Something God Wants To Do.** When we try to break free from our toughest regrets by our own power, redemption rarely happens. God is the one who can redeem every regret. And the good news is God *wants* to do it! When the Jews were in captivity in Babylon God gave this promise:

But now, this is what the Lord says— he who created you, Jacob, he who formed you, Israel: “Do not fear, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. Since you are precious and honored in my sight, and because I love you, I will give people in exchange for you, nations in exchange for your life. (Isaiah 43:1, 4)

Later, God shows His love for us by giving the life of His Son in exchange for us. God wants to redeem you and free you from your regret. We can’t do this on our own. We need God’s power to be redeemed. Count on it. Depend on it. Believe it. Receive it. Redemption is God’s work. Yet we also have a part to play.

Truth #2: Redemption Requires Daily Surrender to God. When faced with regrets and problems, we usually try one of two things: fight or give in. Both are a losing battle. We don’t want to give in. So we apply will power. Yet the more we fight it, the stronger the problem gets. There is a Greek myth which describes a wrestling match between Hercules and Antaeus. Since Antaeus is the son of the earth goddess, he becomes stronger every time his wrestling partner throws him to the ground. Antaeus wins every wrestling match. He is even beating the mighty Hercules until Hercules realizes the solution is to lift Antaeus up to heaven.

The more you fight your problems and regrets, the more powerful they will be. The solution is to surrender them by daily lifting them up to God. Ask Him, “What is your will in this situation? Thy will be done.” This is where your new frame of mind – prayer, worship, groups, guides – help you learn and trust God’s will for your struggles and regrets.

The original Greek word for “**redeem**” means “*to rescue*.” On vacation recently I was snorkeling in the ocean right off the beach. While I focused on what was down below, I didn’t notice the undertow taking me farther from the beach. Then I heard a voice calling my name. It was not God – but my wife. She worried I was too far out to get back on my own power. Now

imagine if I did go out too far and I'm drowning. I'm about to go down for the third time. It's obvious I can't save myself. If I could, I would have done it by now. I need someone to rescue me. When God shows up He reaches into the storm of my life and pulls me out of the water. The only thing I can do in that moment is simply trust Him. The most important thing I can do is to not fight Him and let Him do the rescuing. Just trust and let Him rescue me. Will you trust God to do His good work in you and through you?

Truth #3: Redemption Takes Many Forms. The Prophet Isaiah describes the many ways God is with us in troubles:

When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. (Isaiah 43:2)

Redemption takes on many different forms. *Redemption can be Finding Your Way Back to God.* When a person goes through transition, trial or trauma, when everything they depended on lets them down, when they hit rock bottom, they begin to ask the ultimate questions about life. They turn to God like never before. And when they do, they find God waiting for them with open arms. Redemption can be finding your way back to God for the first time or yet again.

Redemption can be Spiritual Growth. Maybe you know God, but you are still trying to manage everything on your own and it's exhausting. Redemption may pierce your pride so you drop to your knees in humility and let God lead. That's when we grow spiritually!

Redemption can be Redirection. Perhaps your first business start-up failed, but it prepared you for a new job that God is using in an amazing way. Or maybe your work is fine, but you discover your real passion is launching a new ministry or mission here at Woodside.

Redemption can be Blessing Others. I know recovering addicts who become counselors, helping others along in a journey of healing. I know former teenage rebels who are great teachers and coaches. Their regrets have been turned inside out by redemption, and the next generation is being blessed. Redemption can take lots of different forms. Will you let God do His good work in you and through you?

Truth #4: Redemption Requires the Long View. We seek to see things from God's perspective. Again Isaiah says,

Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let them turn to the Lord, and he will have mercy on them, and to our God, for he will freely pardon. "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the Lord. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Isaiah 55:6-9)

There are two kinds of perspective: Now and Eternity. God sees things from the perspective of eternity. He is almost never in as big a hurry as I am. Redemption can be a one-time event but it's often a process and a journey. Don't panic if your regrets don't get redeemed right away. It might take time to dig yourself out of debt, to restore a broken relationship, to recover from a failed business venture, to heal from a horrible accident, to finally get sober and stay that way. It is not over for you or me. Will you let God do His good work in you and through you?