

Take a moment to imagine yourself in a hostage situation. Your captors demand a ransom to let you go free. What could you give? How much money do you have in your bank account? Do you own any valuable jewelry or pieces of art? A criminal would be interested in something you have. Gold and silver would be attractive to him. We've all been held captive by something that won't accept gold or silver. We were held captive by our sinful ways, ways that we have all inherited at our births. God paid a huge price for you and me, and he used something more valuable than gold! We have a salvation that was of God and by God, but for the people. We have an unbelievable salvation.

You're probably familiar with the idea of calling God "father." Jesus did it all the time, and tells us to do it too. When we use that word "Father" to describe God, it's supposed to bring the best kind of relationship to mind. I hope that you all had the best father ever. He always knew what to do. He was always there for you, he always treated you, your mother, and your siblings with love and respect. Yet...even the dads that earn a number one dad shirt every Father's Day can let us down. Sadly, many children don't have the best relationship with their fathers, if they have one at all. Maybe it's a better idea to compare fathers to God and his qualities than to compare God to fathers now. It would be great if father's can be as awesome as God, but some things only God can do. Only God can be a perfectly impartial judge.

If you go to court, you hope you have a judge that weighs all the evidence and doesn't have any bias against you or against any group or demographic that you are a part of. An impartial judge is the best we can hope for, but if we are clearly guilty it won't change the end result. Guilty is guilty. There is a reason to have respect for a perfect father, who is impartial when he looks at us. We could be living in fear of judging God.

Our situation isn't any different from any other person's. We all have, as Peter calls it, "an empty way of life handed down to us by our ancestors." If you are a big fan on genealogy like I am, you know how easy it is to burn countless hours of your time doing online research, visiting libraries and historical societies, going through dusty family photo albums, and wishing that your grandma wrote more stuff down before she went. If you're lucky, maybe you inherited some interesting heirloom or some valuable property. More likely you discover some skeletons in your family broom closets. Great-Uncle Bruno isn't listed with his family in the 1930 census because he was in a state prison for robbing his brother's jewelry store. Maybe somewhere in the tree there is less than 9 months between your ancestors marriage and the birth of their first child. Or perhaps your step-great-great-grandmother cheated your great grandma out of an inheritance of a San Francisco furniture company. I don't have to make up examples because it is so easy to find "empty ways of life" in the family tree.

But you and I don't have to go back a hundred years to find "empty ways of life." If you ever hear someone say "I've turned into my mother!" or "Sorry, that was my father speaking." it usually isn't a good thing! We all have inherited corrupted bodies and sin from all of our ancestors, from the ancient past to the ones that you might be sitting with right now. It makes itself known any time sin raises its ugly head. We all should fear any judge that looks impartially at our lives. We need redemption from our empty, and worthless ways of life.

The good news is, we don't have to live in constant fear! God is both an impartial judge, and a loving and merciful creator and savior! God always had a plan to redeem all people from sin, so all are brought back to him. In fact, Peter tells us, Jesus himself was chosen before the creation of the world! That's mind-blowing! That's unbelievable! This redemption comes from God!

But what makes Jesus so special? Why did Jesus have to be chosen before creation? Why weren't his ways empty like the rest of us? Because Jesus is entirely different. He is without any blemish or defect. His ways were not empty. He was chosen before creation to be without sin. We know what happened! God told his people that he would send a Savior, a Messiah. He revealed more and more about Jesus until the time came that he be born! He was God made manifest, God himself came here as a man to offer his life for us. This makes him and his blood worth more than anything we could possibly

offer. A captor might be interested in gold or silver, but even these things can get lost, lose value, or even be destroyed. Nothing can remove or replace the precious blood of Jesus which he gave to redeem all of us, to bring us back to our father.

This ransom that Jesus gave for us was a great exchange! Sound familiar? If you have gone through Bible 101 this was one of the first things we talked about! It's still here! It's still absolutely relevant. If you ever wondered where that exchange was talked about even more in the Bible, you can find one spot right here in first Peter. It's all laid out for us. God demands a life without sin and with perfect obedience to the law. That equals eternal life. What God sees when he looks at us is a life with sin and without perfect obedience to the law...which equals death. Yes, God knew this would happen, but he didn't rush and scramble to find a bandaid for us when this happened. He had a perfect solution since before creation. He gave us his Son with his precious blood, worth more than gold or silver. Jesus lived a perfect life without sin, with perfect obedience to the law. When he gave himself up for us, he gave us our righteousness and took away our sin. We have been ransomed! Salvation of God, by God, for us!

Taking a step back it seems so amazing it would seem unbelievable. If it weren't wonderful enough, God didn't just take away the guilt of sin, he took away its once permanent effect. He took away death itself. Jesus was raised from death as we will be too. Taking a step back that seems unbelievable. Apart from a few rather special and isolated times in the Bible, no one has ever been raised from the dead! Human experience, human reason, human science would all tell us that the resurrection is absolutely ridiculous, impossible, and unbelievable.

From that perspective it certainly seems so. What's even more astounding is that God chose to use this very unbelievable thing: the resurrection, to lead us to believe in him. It would be one thing if God performed a resurrection or two every Easter to keep the buzz going, but he doesn't. We believe through Jesus' resurrection and no one else's. By having us believe the unbelievable, God only illustrates all the more the comfort of his power and his work in you through his word. It is the message of Christ that dwells in us and grows our faith.

We have an unbelievable ransom. Our Father, if he would judge us impartially, would find us guilty of sin. Sin that everyone would be guilty of, everyone gets it, whether rich or poor, from their ancestors. But the judge that demands justice and satisfaction offers the ransom himself! The judge planned all along to give us a not guilty verdict and the rewards and rights as his children! Not only that, our Father uses the unbelievable to lead us to believe and therefore have life and resurrection in Jesus. Amen.

1. What things would you use for ransom if you were taken hostage?
 2. What makes a great dad?
 3. Why should we compare dads to God, instead of the other way around?
 4. When does having an unbiased judge help, when doesn't it?
 5. What do we get from our ancestors?
 6. What was God's mind-blowing plan?
 7. What made Jesus so special?
 8. What was the great exchange made with Jesus' blood?
 9. What unbelievable thing does God do for us to lead us to believe in him?
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1. Why is the illustration of a hostage and a ransom so appropriate?
 2. Of all the human relationships from which to draw, list several reasons why we use the term "Father" to refer to the first person of the Trinity?
 3. Share some of the skeletons hanging from your family tree (you can be as vague as necessary, but try to use something from sometime in the more distant past :)

4. What's the "great exchange?" Do you know how to illustrate it? How can/have you use(d) it in evangelism situations?