



REDEEMED

Sermon Growth Guide

March 6, 2022

Redeemed - From Saving Ourselves

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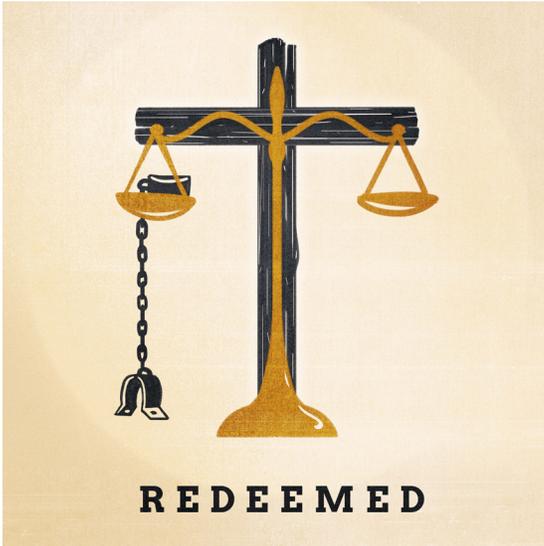
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Romans 3:19-28

Key Verse: Romans 3:24 “and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus.”

Big Idea: You cannot attain your own, self-made righteousness...Jesus paid the ransom and bought your freedom from trying to save yourself.



Foundations

Religious sociologists have described the beliefs of American teenagers as moral, therapeutic deism (MTD). Briefly, this form of belief states that God wants us to be good, nice and fair and if we are, we will go to heaven when we die. Theologically, MTD is more of a helium-filled balloon than a solid rock. Why worry about the God's Law when you just have to be good, nice and fair.

But it takes a lot of work to define what good, nice and fair are. And no matter the definition, it is hard to live that way. MTD was supposed to be easier than God's Law, but we discover that anytime we try to make ourselves good, it doesn't work; it wears us out; and, quite frankly, it probably annoys those around us.

The source of our trouble is our human rebellion against God, in which we have traded a joyful relationship with our creator for a confusing and desperate self-focused way of living. We are in bondage to ourselves. We live in darkness because we walked away from the Light. And we are spiritually dead because we cut ourselves off from the Life. Clearly, if we are chained in darkness, it is impossible to save ourselves. What are we to do?

Understanding God's Word

The Apostle Paul makes it very clear that God expects righteous living from us. Paul also makes it clear that it is impossible for us to live that way. And not only can we not live up to God's requirements, we can't even live up to our own standards—for as soon as you criticize someone for doing something offensive, you soon find yourself doing the same thing.

Paul tells us how we are redeemed, brought back to life, and renewed in our relationship with God. In 3:22 he writes: “This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe.” The righteousness that God requires is given to us! Another way to interpret this verse is to say that we are given our righteousness through the faithfulness of Jesus. Because Jesus was faithfully obedient to God the Father, the penalty for our sin was paid.

Applying God's Word

God gives us Christ's righteousness and Christ takes on our sin. This is called The Great Exchange. In what ways has God's grace in Jesus changed your life?

Witnessing God's Word

How would being set free from the bondage of trying to save yourself impact those around you?

So, I need to apologize about something I said last week. I received word from our finance office that we can in fact receive non-fungible token digital images of other peoples' basketball shoes as a tithe. If you have one, just place it in the offering plate as it goes by. No? OK, just slip it into an envelope and put a stamp... No? Well, if it is already framed, I suppose just bring it in downstairs and we will... No? I don't know. But if you are heavily invested in NFTs please accept my apology. I did not mean to disparage or insult our future cryptocurrency financial overlords. My point was, sometimes it seems like people are spending money on stuff when they are not really sure what it is. The first time I was asked if I was buying Bitcoin, I think it was around \$500 or \$600. Maybe I should have said yes! I like to know what I'm buying with what I pay. The theme of our series as we walk toward Easter together this year is this: Jesus knew what He was buying with what He paid. Jesus paid a price. Jesus paid it all. Jesus knew what He was buying with what He paid. Do we? There are many ways to talk about what Jesus did on the cross. One of those themes is redemption. Redemption is the language of the marketplace. What are you buying with what you paid? Jesus paid so that we could be **Redeemed**.

The book of Romans is Paul's full summary and full explanation of the gospel, the saving work of Jesus Christ, sent in the form of a letter to a group who had heard and understood very little of it. He's trying to explain the whole theology in one post. It talks about the love of God, the Creator of all things, who loves us and desires to be in a healthy relationship with us. Then it comes to one of the most famous verses in the Bible. Not a happy one, but a

well-known one. If you ever heard of the Walk through Romans, this is one of the first stops. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). That's not a guilt trip. That's not shaming or hate. It's a diagnosis. It's an accurate assessment. And it is bad news. But here is good news. "And all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus" (Romans 3:24). And there's our word. Redemption. Redeemed. Deliverance. In formal definition, this is a word for liberation procured through the payment of a ransom. The roots of the word mean "loosing," "unbinding." Taking off the chains or the ligatures or the ropes. Unloosed. Freed. Redeemed. From what? Today I want you to see, you are freed from saving yourself.

"Now we know that whatever the law says, it says to those who are under the law, so that every mouth may be silenced and the whole world held accountable to God. Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin" (Romans 3:19–20). What is the law? God has declared what is right and wrong in his sight through his revealed Word. The Ten Commandments, the Torah, the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, they reveal what is right and wrong in God's sight. The Law. Under the law, the whole world is held accountable to God. So what does that do for us? Well, we know what God requires. We know what holiness is. We know what righteousness is. And if we are to be in relationship with God, who is holy and righteous, we know what we must do. We must keep the law. But this says "no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law." What? Why? If we know what to do,



why can't anyone do it? Because of sin. "...through the law we become conscious of our sin...for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." We have not been able to keep the law. We are not able to do what is right in every instance. Now, let's be clear, God is not mad at us for this. God does not hate you because you are imperfect and make mistakes. God loves you. God gets upset at the ravages of sin, the effects, the pain that sin causes. But as for us, God's reaction to our sin is compassion. He sees us stuck. He sees us mired in the muck of our sin. And He is moved to help.

"Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law; rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin" (Romans 3:20). Imagine the law as a ladder, a way to climb up into heaven. We see that ladder and we think, "I'm going to climb on up there." We would love to start climbing. But we are stuck. We look down and find our feet stuck in mud and muck. We can't move. So what does the law do for us? It shows us a way we can't go. By the law we are conscious of our sin. Seeing the law and what God requires only makes us despair that we are so stuck, so mired, so bogged down in our mistakes, our vices, our bad habits, our unrighteousness, and our rebellious spirits. Every way, every religion in the world, every pattern for fulfillment or personal development or health, every one of them says, "Do this. Walk in this way. Perform this pattern of life and you will be well, you will be whole, you will be satisfied. Saved." Only Christianity says, "Here is the way. Here is the pattern. Here is what is required, and you can't do it." Our hope is not in the way. Our hope is in the One. We need a Savior. The One who is the way.

When I was in Oxford, I had the honor of instructing a dozen seminarians on preaching. I went once to hear one of my students named John preach at a beautiful stone church up in the Cotswolds, where Winston Churchill is buried, actually. My friend was preaching on Psalm 24. "Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place?" (Psalms 24:3). God is very holy, he said. Who can stand in His presence? Who can approach His mountain? "The one who has clean hands and a pure heart, who does not trust in an idol or swear by a false god" (Psalms 24:4). So, he said, we must have clean hands. Clean hands. Think of all the things you have done with your hands. Are they clean? God wants us to have clean hands. He wants us to be pure of heart. Pure hearts. No mixed motives. No selfish intentions. He wants us to put away our idols. We can't have other things we love more than God or seek for happiness before God. "So, do that!" he said. Have clean hands and a pure heart and worship the Lord your God alone. Amen. We got together to talk about it the next week. I said, "John, do you have clean hands?" No. "How about your heart? Pure?" Not a bit! "Right." What do you think it means at the end of the Psalm: "Lift up your heads, you gates; be lifted up, you ancient doors, that the King of glory may come in" (Psalms 24:7). Who is that King of Glory? Who is the King of Glory? John slapped his forehead like this. "Ahh! It's Jesus!!" "John," I said, "You have one more time preaching there, don't you?" Yes. "Next time, when you go back, would you tell them about Jesus?"

It is one thing to see the holy hill. It is one thing to know what God requires. It is one thing to have the way mapped out before you to save yourself. But it only makes us thirst



and long for the only One who can save us, the only One who can go up the mountain, the only One who can bring us salvation and redeem us. Jesus. “This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. 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. God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith” (Romans 3:22–25). We don’t need the way; we need the One. The One who shed His blood for us.

We want to save ourselves. We try to fix and redeem ourselves. In this world marred by sin, we are all desperate to find our way to wholeness and righteousness. People in our times are not much interested in getting into heaven. That is not a common concern. It should be. We should have a thought every now and then for what happens after we die. People seem to believe there is nothing after you die, so live it up while you can. Or that whatever is going on after that last breath, I should be OK. I’m not that bad. I should wind up in the good place. No, people don’t ask as much, “What must I do to get into heaven?” But they do ask, “What must I do to be righteous?” People want to be righteous. We are declaring one another righteous and unrighteous every minute. People are publicly judged; condemned in the public square. Some have called it the rise of the new puritanical age. You are judged right or wrong in a heartbeat. You tweeted that? You reposted that hashtag? Or, even more, “You failed to post that hashtag? You are immoral. You are unrighteous. I cannot and will not listen to you or even

acknowledge your existence from this day forward!” People want to be righteous. But even to know what is right doesn’t mean you can do what is right, let alone what is right in the eyes of God. And can you really prove yourself righteous?

The whole world wants to be righteous. Everyone wants to justify themselves. Vladimir Putin wants to earn the righteousness of the great Russian who expanded the empire. Count me among Ivan the Terrible. Name me with Peter the Great. Another Tzar who gained the glory of the Russian Empire. Volodymyr Selenzkyy on the other hand would prove his righteousness as the defender of his nation, the savior of his people. I’m not having a hard time figuring out which one I side with, but neither will ultimately prove himself righteous. Neither will justify himself. We need a Savior for that. Have you ever taken a pinch of icing off a birthday cake and tried to smear the remaining icing to cover it up? Asking for a friend. It doesn’t work, does it? The more you wipe and smear and spread, the worse it becomes! We cannot save ourselves. We cannot ascend that holy mountain. We cannot attain our own, self-made righteousness. We can’t. You don’t have to. A price has been paid for you. You don’t have to prove your own righteousness. You don’t have to save yourself. Jesus paid the ransom price. What did Jesus buy with what Jesus paid? He bought your freedom from saving yourself. Only trust, only believe, only put your faith in Him.

