

INTRODUCTION

“What does the world need now?” Different people may come up with various answers. Economists may think that the world needs more jobs because of poverty and unemployment. Environmentalists will say that the world needs more natural resources because of population growth and pollution. Educators will tell us that the world needs more learning opportunities to ensure people of a better future. What would be your answer to the question? In 1965 there was a popular song by the title “What the World Needs Now is Love.” Part of the lyrics read “What the world needs now is love, sweet love. It’s the only thing that there’s just too little of. What the world needs now is love, sweet love. No not just for some, but for everyone.” There is so much hatred, separation and abandonment everywhere. Even Christians may agree that love is the answer. Many contemporary gospel songs sing about love. But is love the ultimate solution? The apostle Paul might respond that our problem is not no love, but no hope. What the world needs now is Jesus. In Romans chapter 3 Paul told us a universal problem we are born with. Even your AWANA kids can recite **verse 23**: For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. “All” means everyone – past, present and future generations, regardless of our age or social status. We are created after God’s image and so we are supposed to reflect God’s glory. But we fail to do so because we are all born-sinners. We are like a celebrity’s child who is caught in the act of some criminal activity. We bring shame to our parents. But our Heavenly Father is merciful. He would not forsake His children. Therefore, He sent His own Son, Jesus Christ, to save us from sin. But how was salvation work actually accomplished? In the New Testament, there are at least five terms that illustrate salvation grace. Paul used three of them in this passage – redemption, justification and atonement. The other two words that we will not study today are reconciliation and triumph. When we study these words, it will help us understand God’s grace on a deeper level. As a result, we should respond with gratitude to God.

EXPLANATION

1. 救贖 Redemption

The terms redemption and justification (or the adjective form “justified”) both occur in **verse 24**: And are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. The word redemption is used in slave trade. In the Bible times people became slaves through different means. They could be captives in a war, or they were children born from slave parents, or they sold themselves because they were unable to pay off a debt. You may remember Jesus’ parable of an ungrateful servant in Matthew 18. He owed the master so much money that it would be impossible to settle the debt in his lifetime. The master was so gracious that he canceled the debt altogether. But this wicked servant turned around and insisted a fellow servant to pay back a much smaller debt right away. Later, the master learned what had happened. **Verse 34** tells us how the master dealt with the ungrateful servant: In anger his master turned him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed. Therefore, this servant became a slave and prisoner. The servant had to find ways to come up with a ransom to re-gain freedom. It is like when someone is held hostage by a kidnapper. The Bible tells us that before we accept

Christ we are slaves to sin. In **John 8:34**, Jesus said to a group of Jews: ... “I tell you the truth, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.” When we do not know Christ, we are like inmates locked up in a dungeon. We indulge in sins and yet we call it freedom. We commit sins in our acts, speech and thoughts uncontrollably. Jesus died on the cross on our behalf to pay for the ransom. As a result, He compensated for the damage to God’s glory due to our sins. Thus, those who are in Christ can be set free from sin. To Christians, sin is no longer their master. Christ became their Master. Therefore, we should not be fooled by Satan anymore. When temptation comes we can tap into the power of God that enables us to walk away from sin. In the name of Jesus, we can say to Satan: “Leave me alone!” God also restores our image as His children. From now on we should now live for God’s glory. In all we do, we should make our Heavenly Father proud.

2. 稱義 Justification

The second word that illustrates salvation is the term justification. The word appears in three different forms in **verse 26**: He did it to demonstrate his justice at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus. The word “justification” is a court terminology that means being cleared of one’s offense. Paul told us that those who put their faith in Christ will be justified. It is not because God the Ultimate Judge cannot prove that we are guilty, but it is because Jesus substituted us for our penalty. The Heavenly Father looks at us through Jesus and declares us innocent. Once there was a dad who was deeply troubled by his son’s misbehavior. Even after repeated spanking, the child was still defiant. Finally, the father came up with an idea. He said to his son: “Bobby, I have told you many times that if you disobey me I will smack your behind. This time is no exception.” Then the dad leaned over a chair, but instead of whipping his son the rod landed on his own skin. The child was speechless. He had a new understanding of his father’s love. Since that day, he never committed the same mistake again. Brothers and sisters, our Heavenly Father loves us so much that He offered His own Son to suffer for us. God took the initiative to give us His grace freely. Paul used Abraham’s example to illustrate this truth. He said in **Romans 4:3** - What does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” The same Greek word for “justification” is rendered “righteousness” here. God promised to bless Abraham with many offspring. At that time Abraham was 75 years old but without a son. Abraham believed in God’s words. Because of Abraham’s faith, God declared Abraham as righteous. In other words, God justified Abraham. There was nothing Abraham could do to earn God’s credit. We as sinners are completely bankrupt before God. When we accept Christ, we follow Abraham’s example to put our trust in God. God’s grace humbles us. There is nothing we can boast about ourselves. Your wealth, your education or your reputation in the society cannot save you. It is true that your behavior is way better than a criminal. But deep down inside you understand that if God is to settle your sin record then you will be guilty as charged. In Christ, we have been justified. Satan will constantly dig up the dead-bones to accuse us. It is true that we should be ashamed of our past. At the same time, we have to be mindful of God’s grace again and again. In Christ, we are a new person.

3. 挽回祭 Atonement

God redeemed us from sin and justified us through Jesus Christ. Thirdly, Paul told us that Jesus was our sacrifice of atonement. Look at **verse 25**: God presented him as a sacrifice of atonement, through faith in his blood. He did this to demonstrate his justice, because in his forbearance he

had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished. By definition, the phrase “sacrifice of atonement” draws its background from the Old Testament ceremonial ritual. God ordered the priests to offer animals on the altar to temporarily remove the sins of people. **Hebrews 10:11** states the inadequacy of animal sacrifice this way: Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. God ordained such means to provide short-term cleansing of sins. However, the killing of animals, or even the thought of offering would remind people of their sins. Also, the painstaking process of offering animals made people wonder if there was a better way to remove sins. That perfect way is Jesus’ death on the cross. Continue to read the **next verse**: But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. This “priest” is none other but our Lord Jesus Christ. He was both the ultimate High Priest and the ultimate sacrifice. He became our scapegoat! The word “atonement” relates to the sacrificial system in another way. The same Greek word for “atonement” also refers to the cover of the Ark of the Covenant. Another name for the cover is mercy seat. Still remember the Indiana Jones movie? The Ark in the movie was quite close to the descriptions in the Bible. The Ark represents God’s presence. Therefore, the Ark is not like an artifact in a museum that anyone can casually look at. Once a year, on the Day of Atonement, only the High Priest could come before the Ark. He would sprinkle animal blood on the mercy seat to plea for God’s pardon. The ritual foretold Jesus’ shedding of His blood to bring us to God. From now on, there is no need to present animal sacrifice and there is no need to go through a priest. In Christ, we have the perfect Mediator to gain access to God. The Old Testament Jews came to worship with guilt and fear. But today, we come to worship with peace and joy. There is no more condemnation for those who are in Christ. We no longer need to burn animal offering to remove sin. Instead, we present our hearts in an offering of praise to the Lord who loves us and died for us.

CONCLUSION

What the world needs now is love. But it is not the kind of love between spouses, family members or friends. It is the perfect love from God. What the world needs now is Jesus. The most serious problem in this world is the sin problem. Sin separates us from God. Jesus redeemed us by paying a ransom to set us free. Jesus justified us and elevated us from a sinful to a righteous status. Jesus also offered Himself as the ultimate sacrifice of atonement to restore our peace with God. A Christian organization has an annual conference. In a particular year, the title for the meeting was “Save from What?” I use that name as the title for this sermon. The key issue they wanted to wrestle with was: through the salvation of Jesus Christ what do we actually save from? The answer they came up with was that we are saved from God’s judgment. The Bible says our sins trigger God’s wrath. Without Christ we will be eternally condemned. There is no other way to satisfy God’s righteous standard for us. We should forever be grateful of the undeserved grace that God gives us. If you do not know Christ that means you have to shoulder the burden of your sins all by yourself. When you leave this world, you will face the holy and righteous Judge. Come to Jesus. Confess your sins and receive Him by faith. When you accept Jesus, you express willingness to follow Him the rest of your life. From now on, you have a new boss, and you live for God’s glory. In a moment, we will observe the communion together. Brothers and sisters: I hope that after you listen to this message your heart will be filled with thankfulness to the salvation work of Jesus Christ.