

MBC – 6/5/2022 – Pastor Doug Thompson
 PAUL’S EPISTLE TO THE GALATIANS – GOSPEL FREEDOM
“Father Abraham Had Many Sons”
 Galatians 3.6-14

In ch.2, Paul tells the story of rebuking Peter for mis-representing the Gospel, by turning his back on his Gentile brothers in Antioch when some Jewish legalists came into town. He didn’t want to be seen associating with them. By his actions, Peter was implying that they weren’t saved because they didn’t keep the Law of Moses.

So Paul confronted him publicly. The Gospel was at stake! How is a sinner made right with God? Paul is talking to Peter when he says—

- Galatians 2:16 . . .yet we know (you and I, Peter) that a person is not justified by works of the law but through faith in Jesus Christ, so we also have *believed* in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified *by faith in Christ* and not by works of the law, because by works of the law no one will be justified.

He and Peter were both Jews, but when they trusted in Jesus, they were justified by faith, not by any Jewish lawkeeping. They had personally experienced what Paul told the Philippian jailer: “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved!” Then he throws the question out to the Galatians—

- Galatians 3:2 ²Let me ask you only this: Did *you* receive the Spirit by works of the law or by hearing with faith?

I.e., “My Christian brothers and sisters, how were *you* saved? Have any of you here been saved by doing enough lawkeeping? (Crickets) Weren’t you saved by *hearing with faith*?”

And right here, Paul pulls out the heavy artillery. The big gun: What about Father Abraham? The false teachers who had come to Galatia preaching law instead of grace appealed to Father Abraham to prove their point. They said: “This fake-Apostle Paul is wrong. Just look to the Scriptures! Was not our father Abraham justified by his circumcision, and keeping the Law?” So Paul turns their guns back on them: “You’re on: let’s consider Father Abraham!—

- Galatians 3:6–14 ⁶just as Abraham “*believed* God, and it was counted to him as righteousness”? ⁷Know then that it is those *of faith* who are the sons of Abraham. ⁸And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles *by faith*, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.” ⁹So then, those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. ¹⁰For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.” ¹¹Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.” ¹²But the law is not of faith, rather “The one who does them shall live by them.” ¹³Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”— ¹⁴so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

(Pray)

*Do you have peace with God this morning? Do you know that God is for you, not against you? And I mean, deep in your heart: do you know that God is no longer holding your sins against you? Do you live under the smile of God, or is He angry at you? And how can you know?

- We've seen throughout our study of Galatians there are only two ways to approach being right with God, being forgiven and accepted by God: one is the way of your own obedience and performance – being good enough that God accepts you. This way is impossible and doomed to failure. The other way is the way of faith in Jesus Christ, trusting wholly in who He is and what He has done

What Paul is saying here is that salvation has *always* been by faith, it has never been by works. And he lays out his case by using OT passages, that most Jews knew, but few understood. This morning we are going to follow Paul's argument and answer 6 questions with these 6 important OT passages—

I. How was Father Abraham saved? (Genesis 15:6)

- Galatians 3:6–14 ⁶just as Abraham "*believed* God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"

To every Jew, Father Abraham was the supreme example of a godly, righteous man. Paul knew that if he asked the average Jew, he would have said that God chose Abraham to be the father of His people Israel *because* Abraham was the most righteous man on earth. They interpreted Abraham's *faith* in Genesis 15:6 as *faithfulness*—well there is a huge difference between being saved by faith and being saved by faithfulness! Listen to what was written about Abraham—

- 1 Macc.2:51: "Was not Abraham found faithful in temptation and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness?"
- From the Book of Jubilee: "Abraham was perfect in all his deeds with the Lord, and well-pleasing in rtss. all the days of his life."
- The rabbis said that Abraham kept the whole law of Moses. The problem with that is that he lived 600 years before it was given!—but they said he knew it and kept it and was sinless!

*Now the inconvenient truth – if you just read your Bible – is that Abraham was far from sinless. He was a pagan, Chaldean Gentile when God called him. Along with his pagan family, he worshiped the Chaldean moon goddess, Nanna, with everyone else in Ur. He certainly wasn't saved by his lawkeeping – since the Law hadn't yet been given, and he wasn't saved by his circumcision, since that happened after Genesis 15:6 – that's Paul's argument in Romans 4.

- The facts are: God didn't choose Abe to be the father of the Jews because he was such a good man. You can read in Genesis how Abe lied, more than once. Scripture gives us no clue as to why God selected this pagan from the millions of others in pagans in the world. He just *chose* Abram, out of free grace and mercy, to be the recipient of His blessings--that's all we know.

And by the way, that's all you and I know about why God chose pagans like you and me! Amen?

- ***Abraham isn't the example of the man God saves because of his goodness. Abraham is the example of the man God saves in spite of his badness! By faith alone.*** "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness."

Gen.15:6 is one of the most important verses in your Bible, so let's read it in context—

- Genesis 15:1–6 ¹After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." ²But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" ³And Abram said, "Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir." ⁴And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: "This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir." ⁵And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring(seed) be." ⁶And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

Did you know that the first time the word "faith" is mentioned in the Bible is Gen.15:6?

Abraham simply *trusted* in what God had promised him, and God *justified* him – He accounted righteousness to him. Now he had believed God long before this: He packed up his family and took them to a land he had never been to, just because God told him to! But something clicked on that night when God took Abe out, showed him the stars, and said, "Abe, why don't you count those stars." "Count the stars, Lord? Are you kidding? Where do I start, how do I keep track? And I get the feeling that there are more than I can comprehend, let alone, count!" *"Exactly. And so shall your descendants be!"*

And you can imagine Abe shaking his head and thinking to himself, "I knew God's plan was going to be big, but this is way beyond me. This boggles my brain! I can't try to figure it out, all I can do is believe God."

- And God said, "That's the right answer. Abe, you old pagan sinner, because you trust Me, I have accepted you as my child. *"Even so Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness."*"

Someone said this about Abe's faith: *"It was a psychological yielding under the weight of a divine goodness too massive to fit inside the cramped quarters of human calculation!"* I wish I'd said that! That's how Abe was saved, and then Paul says—

- ⁷Know then that it is those *of faith* who are the sons of Abraham.

Now get what I'm about to say: This is how everyone is saved, whether before or after the cross – in the OT and in the NT – by faith – unconditionally surrendering to what God has revealed about Himself. And now, since God has revealed Himself in His Son, faith is trusting in Christ. Paul calls Abraham *"the father of all who believe"* (Rom.4:21) because every person in heaven will be there because they *believed* God the way Abe did—

- So what you sang as a kid is true: "Father Abraham had many sons, many sons had Father Abraham, and I am one of them, and so are you, so let's just praise the Lord!" That's if you share his faith. If you do, then you are Abraham's true son – in v.29, he calls you Abraham's offspring, or seed – while an unbelieving Jew is not. If there were any of those Judaizers listening to this

letter being read, their heads must have exploded on the spot! If you are a Christian, think about this: you were part of that promise God made to Abraham: you were one of those stars that he couldn't count – you are a son of Abraham!

Then Paul says that even this inclusion of Gentiles was predicted in the OT—

II. How was the Gospel preached to Father Abraham? (Genesis 12:3)

- ⁸And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles *by faith*, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “In you shall all the nations be blessed.”

Let's look at it—

- Genesis 12:1–3 ¹Now the LORD said to Abram, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ²And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

This is the beginning of God's promise to bless Abe and his offspring. In the context of Paul's argument here what is the blessing? Justification. And this blessing would extend to “all the families of the earth.” I.e., even Gentiles would share in salvation through faith alone – through Abraham, the Father of the Jews – amazing!

- But look at the phrase in Gal.3:8 again – “*In you shall all the nations be blessed*” – “All the nations” = panta ta ethne. This phrase shows up in Jesus' Great Commission—“Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations” = panta ta ethne – what Jesus was saying was, “Go out and fulfill the promise God made to Abraham!” The Gospel is for all peoples, every language, every skin color, and if you've been at MBC for awhile you know that this theme is all throughout the Scriptures: God promised Abraham that through his Seed (capital 'S'), some from every nation, tribe, and tongue would be saved – through *hearing with faith*, not the works of the law.

And again, as this letter is being read in the Galatian churches, Jewish minds were exploding in the congregation. And he says it again—

- ⁹So then, those who are of *faith* are blessed (with salvation) along with Abraham, the man of faith.

Not those who share his genes, but those who share his faith—

- Romans 9:7–8 ⁷and not all are children of Abraham because they are his offspring (physical offspring), but “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.” ⁸This means that it is not the children of the flesh who are the children of God, but the children of the promise are counted as offspring.

And I have to jump down to—z+

- Galatians 3:29 ²⁹And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring (seed), heirs according to promise.

You, a believing Gentile, are a true Jew, Bob Dylan is not. Barbara Streisand? Not a Jew. But if you share Abraham's faith, everything God promised to him is yours – and God promised him the world (Rom.4:13). Next, Paul turns his argument around and asks the question—

III. What is the result of trying to keep the Law to be saved? (Deuteronomy 27:26)

And Paul's answer was a real surprise for some of his listeners – look at what he said—

- Galatians 3:10 ¹⁰For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse.

“Wait, wait Paul! You have it backwards – you are cursed if you *don't* rely on doing the works of the Law. Every good Jew knows that.” But then he reminds them of Deut.27:26—

- for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by *all things* written in the Book of the Law, and do them.”

God's Law demands perfect obedience—

The Jews at this time saw the Law of Moses as 613 separate, fragmented, laws. They debated about which ones were more important than others – they called some “light” and some “heavy. – like what Roman Catholicism does with its “mortal” and “venial” sins. And they believed that if you broke one law, you could make up for it by trying really hard to keep another—

- The rabbis even said, “Whoever fulfills only one law, good is appointed to him. His days are prolonged and he will inherit the land.” You keep a law, you get credit, you break a law, you incur debt. You just have to do your best to keep the scales balanced.

Isn't that the way most unbelievers think? “Hey nobody's perfect, but God understands that, so if you try your hardest, He will cut you slack.” Like anyone is even trying their hardest, right?

But here is Paul's logical syllogism—

- 1.) Only those who perfectly obey the Law will escape the curse.
- 2.) No one perfectly obeys the Law—
- 3.) Therefore: no one who is relying on lawkeeping to save them will escape the curse.

He says the same thing in—

- Galatians 5:3 ³¹I testify again to every man who accepts circumcision (he means, relies on it) that he is obligated to keep the whole law.

And most of you have already been thinking of what James said in—

- James 2:10 ¹⁰For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become guilty of all of it.

So if you are counting on your lawkeeping to be right with God, you are under God's curse – because you haven't kept His Law. Paul is completely biblical here, isn't he? His whole argument is from the OT Scriptures – but these Jewish legalists were blinded by their own sinful pride to what God was saying in His Word. They missed the message,

The passage in Deuteronomy proves that salvation doesn't come from lawkeeping, and the next passage he quotes says that it *does* come by faith—

IV. So how then *is* a person saved? (Habakkuk 2:4)

- Galatians 3:11 ¹¹Now it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law, for “The righteous shall live by faith.”

Now we need to read this with the correct emphasis. It's not saying that the righteous shall live by faith, walk by faith, trusting, serving every day – that's true – but this is talking about salvation. It's saying, “the righteous shall *live* – i.e., have eternal life, by faith.

Well if salvation comes by faith, then it can't come by works, because those two ways are mutually exclusive. One looks to self, the other looks to God, right? He's already said, it's not by works of the law but by hearing with faith. And then he comes at it again—

V. But can't we be saved by doing the Law? (Leviticus 18:5)

- Galatians 3:12 ¹²But the law is not of faith, rather “The one who *does* them shall live (gain salvation) by them.”

This is from Lev.18:15 – and it proves Paul's point again: Only if a person *does* the Law – completely and perfectly, will he “live,” be saved, by the law. So again, throughout all of Scripture, we are never saved by *doing*, but by *trusting* in God – now the result of trusting God will always be doing, but that's another sermon – and it's the whole series we did on James, right? Saving faith will always *result* in obedience and fruit. But the fruit is not the root! Faith is the root. Good works are the fruit.

So let's sum up Paul's OT argument—

I. How was Father Abraham saved? Genesis 15:6

By faith – he believed God, and God accounted righteousness to him.

II. How was the Gospel preached to Father Abraham? Genesis 12:3

God promised that he would be the spiritual father of some from every people, nation, tribe, and tongue who would be saved by faith just as he was.

III. What is the result of trying to keep the Law to be saved? Deuteronomy 27:26

Deuteronomy says that if you are trying to keep the Law to be saved, you are under the curse of God because it requires perfect obedience.

IV. So how then *is* a person saved? Habakkuk 2:4

The righteous will live by his faith – Paul quotes this again in Romans and it is the verse that God used to save Martin Luther and spark the Reformation!

V. But can't we be saved by doing the Law? Leviticus 18:5

No, because lawkeeping doesn't jive with faith: lawkeeping looks at self and how you are doing. Faith looks to Christ and what He has done. So, final question--

VI. How is the curse of the law removed in Christ? Deuteronomy 21:23

- Galatians 3:13 ¹³Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree” —

I consider this one of the most important passages in all of Scripture for understanding Christ's atonement – how is the curse of the law removed in Christ? Answer: He took on the curse for us!—

*We understand the blessing of God, but we struggle understanding the curse of God because we don't grasp the infinite purity and holiness of God. God, who cannot allow sin in His presence. To be cursed by God is the most horrible sentence that can be pronounced in this universe: it is to be cast out of the presence of God, to be abandoned by God – Jesus spoke of the outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth. In the OT we read of cities and objects and even people being “devoted to destruction,” – think of the book of Joshua. That is what it means to be cursed by God – and now we need to read v.10 again—

- Galatians 3:10 ¹⁰For all who rely on works of the law are under a curse; for it is written, “Cursed be everyone who does not abide by all things written in the Book of the Law, and do them.”

*Who is under the curse of God – is it just those who rely on works of the law to save them – i.e., is it just legalists who are under the curse? What does the next sentence say? Anyone who does not keep God's Law perfectly is under the curse. And that is every human being who has ever lived, save One – which is why Paul says in Rom.4:15, “*The Law brings wrath!*” Not blessing and salvation. Beloved, we have all earned the wrath and condemnation of God for our sins.

And this is where the Gospel comes in! God comes to our rescue. On the cross, Jesus took the curse of our disobedience upon Himself. Let that sink in. . . “by becoming a curse.” What does that mean?

- Among the Jews, when criminals were executed, which was usually by stoning, their bodies were tied to a post until sunset as a sign of God's curse on that condemned person – they were abhorrent to God.

When Jesus hung on the cross – He was sinless, innocent, the holy, spotless Lamb of God! But what did Isaiah predict?

- Isaiah 53:6 ⁶All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; *and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.*

Our sins were accounted to Him – imputed to Him – We sing, “Behold the man upon a cross *My sin upon His* shoulders.” And this wasn’t some play-acting. It was real: God treated His Son just as though *He* told that lie that you told this week; *He* laughed at that filthy joke that you laughed at; *He* thought those lustful thoughts that you thought. And God treated *Him* just as though He was under *your curse* – and mine – for *our* sins.

During those hours of darkness, the Father turned His face away. He crushed His Son, putting Him to grief. Didn’t Jesus cry out from the cross, “My God! My God! Why have You forsaken Me?” He experienced that outer darkness – abandoned by His Father--

- Galatians 3:13 ¹³Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—

And here is the Good News of the Gospel: He became a curse “for us” – ***for us!*** – aren’t those two of the most beautiful words you have ever heard? For us, in our place – as our Substitute!—

- 1 Peter 2:24 ²⁴He himself bore *our* sins in *His* body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By his wounds you have been healed.

No wonder the Gospel was such foolishness to the Jews! Their Glorious Messiah, hanging on a tree under the curse of God! It became a common insult among unbelieving Jews to respond to Christians by shouting “*Jesus anathema!*” – “Jesus is accursed!” (1 Cor.12:3). And he was, but that is the very heart of the Gospel, isn’t it? And it was there, in the OT Scriptures, but few understood these words—

- Isaiah 53:5–6 ⁵But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. ⁶All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.
- 2 Corinthians 5:21 And Paul wrote: ²¹For our sake He made Him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in Him we might become the righteousness of God.

God treated His Son, on the cross, as our sins deserved – He took our curse, so that He can now treat us as only His Son deserves.

VII. What is the result for those who trust in Christ?

- Galatians 3:14 ¹⁴so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

This ties the entire Bible together: In Gen.12, God makes a massive promise to Abraham. It’s a promise of salvation, eternal life, and the indwelling Holy Spirit, that will come to his spiritual seed, which will include some from every nation, tongue, and tribe, *in Christ*.

And how do we share in this promise to Abraham and his spiritual kin? What are the last two words of v.14? “*Through faith.*” Not by trying, but by trusting – trusting that what Jesus did on that cross, 2,000 years ago, satisfied God – and if your trust is in Jesus, then God is satisfied with you.

*Are you *in Christ, through faith* this morning? When you look up and see that Man on that cross, under the curse and wrath of God – was He up there for you? Is all of your trust in Him so that you can say—

- Galatians 2:20 ²⁰*I have been crucified with Christ.* It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

I want to say to every person in this room this morning, and those who are listening and will listen to this message, maybe in years to come: you are either covered by the righteousness of Jesus Christ, or you are under the curse of God. And if you die under that curse, you will be cast into outer darkness. Away from the presence of God. Forever.

- John 3:36 ³⁶Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life; whoever does not obey the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God remains on him.