

‘The saving faith of Abraham.’ (8)

There was a man who decided that his life would be more exciting if he had a pet. So, he went to the pet shop and told the owner that he wanted to buy an unusual pet. After some discussion, he finally bought a centipede, which came in a little white box to use for his house. He took the box back home, found a good location for the box, and decided he would start off by taking his new pet to church with him. So, he asked the centipede in the box, ‘Would you like to go to church with me today, we will have a good time.’ But there was no answer from his new pet.

This bothered him a bit, but he waited a few minutes and then asked him again, ‘How about going to church with me and receive blessings.’ But again, there was no answer from his new friend and pet. So, he waited a few minutes more, thinking about the situation. He decided to ask him one more time; this time putting his face up against the centipede’s house and shouting, ‘Hey, in there! Would you like to go to church with me and learn about The Lord?’ A little voice came out of the box, ‘I heard you the first time! I’m putting on my shoes.’

I wonder how many times the apostle Paul had to repeat himself to the Jews concerning God’s grace? In our sermon, today Paul is going to resort to the Judaizers favourite Old Testament character whom they used in their arguments to convince the Galatians to return to circumcision and ceremonies of the Old Testament law. But as we’re about to read Paul is going to lay out God’s salvation by grace under the Old Testament law and show us how the obedient life of Abraham proves that we are justified before God by faith.

Galatians 3:6-9 “So also Abraham “believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” Understand, then, that those who have faith are children of Abraham. Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.” So, those who rely on faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith.”

Straight away Paul tells them that Abraham was justified, which means being right with God, before he came into a special covenant relationship with God. In other words, Paul is saying that the covenant didn’t make Abraham righteous before God. In fact, a little later in [Galatians 3:17](#) Paul is going to remind them Abraham was made righteous even before the Old Testament Law was given. But Paul’s point is that neither the Old Testament law nor God’s personal covenant with Abraham or Israel is now necessary for the salvation of the Galatians.

Now remember what we’re dealing with here, we’re dealing with a bunch of legalisers who are trying to teach that Jesus didn’t do enough to save us. And so, they said, you have to accept Jesus but also keep the old laws and be circumcised. But what Paul wants to do is remind them that it was Abraham’s obedient faith, not his meritorious works of law that justified him before God.

James 2:21 “Was not our father Abraham considered righteous for what he did when he offered his son Isaac on the altar?” It was Abraham’s faith that moved him to obedience because without that faith he wouldn’t have acted. Hebrews 11:17-19 “By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had embraced the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, even though God had said to him, “It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.” Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death.”

The writer tells us that the justifying action of offering Isaac was founded upon Abraham’s faith. And he trusted that God could raise people from the dead. And it was because of that faith, his actions and trust in God, that it was ‘credited to him as righteousness.’ The Greek word translated ‘credited’ means something is accredited to the account of another.

In other words, righteousness is accredited to the account of Abraham and all who walk by faith. The accounting or accrediting doesn’t happen as a result of our performance of law in order to earn righteousness. No one is credited as a result of meritorious good works. Loved ones, all the good deeds in the world can never make us right with God. If you never miss one day in your Christian life of gathering together on the Lord’s Day to worship God, that won’t make you right with God. If you know all the books of the Bible and can recite all the apostle’s names, that won’t make you right with God. If you sell your house and give it all to charity, that won’t make you right with God.

You see loved ones, when Abraham had no son, God made the promise in [Genesis 15](#) that He would be the father of many nations, not just the nation of Israel. A little later in [Genesis 17:3-5](#) God says to him “As for me, this is my covenant with you: You will be the father of many nations. No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations.”

In other words, the Gentiles, who were without the Old Testament law before the coming of Jesus, were considered sons of Abraham, not because of a special covenant-law relationship they had with God, but by faith. They are justified by faith in the work of God on the cross and salvation by faith has always been in view of the cross. Salvation by faith and grace before the cross was made possible because those who were obediently faithful were looking forward to the cross.

By faith, those whom God justified in view of the cross, trusted that He would do so according to His eternal plan. **Ephesians 1:7** “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace.” We today are justified because our faith looks back to the cross because we trust in the blood of Christ and trust that God will redeem us from our sins.

Now notice what Paul says here in **Galatians 3:7** “those who have faith are children of Abraham”. We can just imagine the anger in the Jew’s mind when he said those words. We can imagine them thinking to themselves, ‘**what! Faith doesn’t make you child of Abraham! Being a Jew makes you a child of Abraham!**’ Now remember that the Jews regarded Moses as the father of the law and Abraham was the father of the nation.

But the problem was the Jews forgot who Abraham really was, Abraham wasn’t a Jew, he was a Gentile. **Ezekiel 16:3** “This is what the Sovereign LORD says to Jerusalem: Your ancestry and birth were in the land of the Canaanites; your father was an Amorite and your mother a Hittite.” Paul says being a spiritual child of Abraham doesn’t come as a result of being born a Jew, being a spiritual child of Abraham is based on faith.

The Gentiles hadn’t received the Old Testament law, nor had God established a covenant relationship with them. But Paul says, those who walked by faith during the Old Testament times were children of Abraham by faith, and therefore they were justified before God by their faith. The spiritual nations of whom Abraham was the father, have always been justified by faith. Abraham was justified by obedient faith and so are we.

How many times have we heard Christians talking about being born into the church? How many times have we heard Christians talk about how their parents were faithful members of the Lord’s body? Our faith has to be our faith and we can’t rely on the faith of our parents to make us right with God. No-one was born in the church, they were born again into the church. The Jews were claiming to be right with God based upon their claim that Abraham was their father.

Now don’t misunderstand what Paul means when he’s talking about faith here. The faith which Paul is talking is about is obedience to Him in whom we have faith. This isn’t a simple mental acknowledgment that God is and His Son is our Saviour. The saving faith which Paul is talking is a responsive and responsible faith. Paul says in **Galatians 5:6** “The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love”.

When John Wesley was six-years-old the parsonage in which he lived with his family caught fire. The alarm was given and the parents thought everyone was out of the house safely. But when they started counting, they discovered that one of the children was missing. And, to their horror, they saw young John Wesley at an upper story window, caught in the burning building. The father, a devout, scholarly Anglican minister, immediately dropped to his knees, praying that God would save the boy. His mother, who not only was a person of great faith but also a very practical woman, immediately ran next door, got a neighbour with a ladder and, working with the neighbour, rescued her son from the flaming house.

You see loved ones, there are times when the best way to express your faith is to get off your knees, go get a neighbour with a ladder, and do what has to be done in a given situation. Paul says that faith has to express itself, it has to show itself, in other words real faith doesn’t just sit around and do nothing, it leads us to do something.

Now let me ask you, **who was first to hear the Gospel?** Now if you thought it was those who were around when Jesus came to earth you would be sadly mistaken. Paul says in **Galatians 3:8** “Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: “All nations will be blessed through you.” Paul quotes from **Genesis 12:3** and tells us that Abraham was first to hear the Gospel.

And he says that all nations were blessed in the coming of Jesus for the atonement of men. The good news of justification by faith was first announced to Abraham and God revealed to Abraham that righteousness comes through faith. And those who would follow in the steps of Abraham’s faith would receive the blessing of salvation of the promise that God made to Abraham.

In other words, those who express their trust in God for salvation by faith are blessed by the faith of Abraham. They are blessed because God promised Abraham the blessing of salvation. It was through his seed that the Redeemer came as **Genesis 12:1-3** reminds us.

And notice this, since the blessing came as a result of God's promise, its fulfilment didn't depend on the meritorious work of Abraham or even upon Abraham's faith. In other words, the totality of the blessing was based solely on the grace of God to save man through Jesus. That's why Paul goes on to say in **Galatians 3:10-12** "For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: "Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law." Clearly no one who relies on the law is justified before God, because "the righteous will live by faith." The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, it says, "The person who does these things will live by them."

Now there is something we need to clear up before we get into the text here. Today, we think of 'cursing' as someone using foul language, profanity, or perhaps, even blasphemous words against God. Our definition usually is synonymous with 'swearing.' This is a form of cursing, but it's only a small portion of what curses mean in the Bible.

Cursing in the Bible is not only speaking evil of someone, but evil coming upon someone. If a person is under a curse, according to the Bible, evil has come upon them in some way. Sickness, tragedy, or bad circumstances are occurring in their lives. But this doesn't mean that every difficult circumstance that we go through is a curse. Sometimes God leads us through circumstances to stretch our faith. This is for our own good, as it's helping us to grow stronger and identify ourselves with Him. However, He isn't bringing anything upon us, but rather leading us through a circumstance so that we might experience His overcoming power.

And so, when Paul says, 'For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse'. He isn't talking about some kind of voodoo curse, he's talking about the difficult circumstance a person may find themselves in when they try to keep the law. He's arguing against the Judaizers by showing them the teaching of the Old Testament concerning those who would seek justification by law-keeping. Those who choose to be justified by law-keeping must suffer the curse that law brings.

And what is that curse? The curse of condemnation. It brings condemnation because no-one can live perfectly under law in order to be sinless, and therefore be justified. **But who are those who are cursed?** The cursed are those who seek to use law with the illusion that they can justify themselves before God by their meritorious performance of law. And the problem with this teaching is that if anyone wants to be right with God through law keeping, you can't break one law, you have to keep the law perfectly. **James 2:10** "For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it."

And so, by quoting **Deuteronomy 27:26**, Paul argues that man has no hope of justification if he tries to be legally justified before God on the basis of his ability to keep law. I mentioned this a few weeks ago, the law highlighted our sin and God's holiness but it couldn't offer forgiveness of sins. By the time of Jesus, the Jews, and specifically the Judaizers, were making the law a means of justification. Instead of viewing the law as a means to an end, they viewed it as the end within itself.

I have to also point out that the word, 'the' in **Galatians 3:11** isn't in the original Greek text. And that's important because what Paul is saying is that, no-one can be justified before God by the perfect keeping of any law. It was never the purpose of law to produce salvation. The purpose of law is to direct our attention to our inadequacies in reference to law, and therefore, plead for God's grace. It's the purpose of law to manifest sin and death, and therefore, direct us toward the atonement of the cross. It's the purpose of law to direct our lives in the direction of God's grace and what He would have us do.

In other words, law directs our lives but the grace of God through the cross takes care of our misdirection's. As someone once said, 'The Gospel must be the bad news of the conviction of sin before it can be the good news of redemption.' Listen loved ones, no-one can be justified, made right with God, by law keeping. But if we want to be right with God, we have to live by faith. And this isn't a new concept, God has always wanted people to trust in Him and not in themselves. Paul quotes from **Habakkuk 2:4** where it says, "See, the enemy is puffed up; his desires are not upright—but the righteous person will live by his faithfulness." This statement is quoted in three contexts in the New Testament and in each example the Jewish Christians were seeking to return to law-keeping as a means of salvation.

Now notice what Paul is doing here, he is contrasting words. The words, **'By faith'** emphasises total reliance on God for our salvation. **'Works'** or **'flesh'** are words that Paul uses to emphasise the fact that there are those who trust in their own ability to keep the law and do good works. Think about this, loved ones, Paul is saying that no-one can save themselves no matter how obedient they are to God and His will.

Now let me ask you, **does that bother you? Does that make you feel uncomfortable?** You see, those words are offensive to the legalist and the reason they are offensive is because they want to feel as if they are contributing in some way towards their salvation. But as Paul says in **Galatians 3:12** **"The law is not based on faith; on the contrary, it says, "The person who does these things will live by them."** Law in and of itself doesn't demand faith, it doesn't demand that we trust in God which again isn't a New Testament idea. Paul quotes from **Leviticus 18:5** which says, **"Keep my decrees and laws, for the person who obeys them will live by them."** **Why is Paul quoting this Old Testament passage?** Simply to show us that if anyone could be justified by law-keeping, then they must keep all the law perfectly.

Paul carries on with his argument against these legalisers and says in **Galatians 3:13+14** **"Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole." He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we might receive the promise of the Spirit."** **Don't you just love those words, 'Christ redeemed us'?** They say it all, **don't they?**

Those words tell us everything we ever really need to know concerning our salvation. Jesus ransomed us from the curse of having to live perfectly according to law in order to be justified. He made us perfect in Him by His cleansing blood and He became the curse by taking upon Himself that which condemned us through law, that is, our sin against law.

And remember this, loved ones, it's not that our works subsidise some insufficiency of the atonement. His work through the cross came regardless of our insufficiency. The point is that there can be no salvation without the atonement of Jesus that takes care of our sin problem in relation to law. God's solution for our sin problem comes as the free gift to all who would submit to obedience of the Gospel.

But what does it mean to be cursed on a tree? Deuteronomy 21:22+23 says, **"And if a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God. You shall not defile your land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance".**

For most capital offenses covered by Jewish Law, stoning was the form of punishment. On some occasions the dead body would be hung in public as a deterrent to further crime. The apostle Paul referred to this law in relationship to Jesus and His death on the cross. Paul is saying that Jesus was cursed for us, hanging on the cross as a substitute for our sins. He's saying that Jesus was willing to suffer the condemnation of hanging on a tree for our benefit. He took our condemnation by being condemned for us on the tree.

But why would He do that for us? Why did He have to go to the cross? Jesus died in order to reaffirm the blessing of salvation by grace through faith. Salvation by faith that was promised to all nations through Abraham was fulfilled at the cross. **Titus 2:11** **"For the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people."** In other words, the Gospel, is the avenue through which we must pass in order to receive the blessing of the promise of the Spirit.

Now in the context of this letter, Paul isn't talking about receiving the Holy Spirit at baptism. He's referring to the out pouring of the Holy Spirit upon the apostles in **Acts 2**. Now we're not going to go into all of that because time won't permit us, but let me say this before we finish. No-one can save themselves, loved ones, no-one.

If you've been trusting in your own abilities to be right with God, you need to accept that you can never do enough to be saved. **Why not simply accept God's grace and trust in what Jesus done for you at Calvary?** Speak to someone about how you can receive God's saving grace today.