

**Works or Grace?, Part 1**

Scripture: Galatians 3:6–14

Code: 48-12

For now, open your Bible to Galatians chapter 3, and we come back to this wonderful epistle of Paul written very early in his ministry, the first of his epistles, to confront the constant problem of people corrupting the gospel. People do it because demons do it, because Satan does it. It is the strategy of hell always to corrupt the gospel. The gospel alone saves, and therefore Satan wants to confuse people about the gospel; and he does a very effective job of doing that. The whole world, for sure, lies in darkness when it comes to the matter of the gospel, when it comes to the matter of salvation being right with God. But even as we saw last week, the church, the church of Jesus Christ, including its leaders and its people, are largely bewitched, bewitched by the same false doctrine that holds the world captive – and we looked at that last time.

Today we live in the same kind of world that Paul lived in and the Galatians lived in; it is a world where there's singular truth. The gospel of Jesus Christ is revealed on the pages of Holy Scripture: God's plan of salvation through faith alone, apart from works. And there is the endless heresy that salvation comes by works: some works, all works, some ceremonial works, some ritualistic works, some philanthropic works, some moral works, some religious works, but some works. Satan can only corrupt the gospel one way. It is salvation by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone, apart from works.

So when Satan adds anything to faith alone, that is the corruption of the gospel; and those corruptions basically take almost infinite forms. In fact, in the time in which we live, most people have their own self-styled corruption of the gospel, thinking somehow that God owes them heaven because they're good persons, religious persons, moral persons, philanthropic persons, or they're not criminals. And even if they are criminals, God still owes them heaven because there are worse criminals than they are.

Heresy can only come in the adulteration, the corruption of the gospel. So part of the responsibility, of course, of believers is to make sure we get the gospel clear, and that we aren't, as we saw last week in chapter 3, verse 1, like the foolish Galatians who were true believers, but had become bewitched. They had become literally bewitched, as if they were under some kind of spell, to accept a false gospel.

Chapter 1, Paul says, "I can't even believe how soon you are removed from the truth to another gospel, which is not another, when you should know the true gospel. You already believe the true gospel." He goes on to say, "Anybody who preaches you any other gospel, let him be damned," and he says it twice: chapter 1, verse 8; and chapter 1, verse 9.

But nonetheless, the Galatians who were true believers who had believed the gospel were being foolishly bewitched. We saw that in our message from the opening five verses last week. And Paul

asks them the question: "Look at your experience. You have met Christ. You have vividly seen His death and the significance of His death and resurrection; you have believed that. You have been regenerated by a miracle of God the Father, and you have become the temple of the Holy Spirit. So you have encountered Christ and believed in Him. He has become your Savior and Lord. You have encountered God in the miracles done by the apostles as well as the miracle of your own regeneration. And you have encountered the Holy Spirit who is in you, who leads you, guides you, instructs you, empowers you.

"Consequently, you have the full Trinity, and you received that Trinity by faith, not by works. Why are you now foolishly being bewitched by people who tell you that salvation demands works? You already have the full salvation: Father, Son, Holy Spirit. Nothing is left outside. How can you be so foolish to listen to those who tell you lies?"

Who were these liars? Well, we know who they were, because we see them on exhibit in the fifteenth chapter of the book of Acts. Some men came down from Judea and began teaching the brethren. This is in Jerusalem. They came to Jerusalem in the early church, came from beyond Jerusalem and Judea, and they were teaching; and this is what they were teaching the believers: "Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses you cannot be saved." So they were basically saying to Gentiles – Jews had already been circumcised, which had no spiritual effect at all. But the Gentiles, they are saying, must be circumcised, or there's no salvation for them.

They went further than that. They also declared, down in verse 5, it is necessary to circumcise them and direct them to observe the law of Moses. This was brought to the leaders of the church in Jerusalem. They had a meeting; the meeting is recorded in chapter 15. The apostles, the elders got together and they talked about these things, and they said in verse 11, "We believe that we are saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ," in the same way they also are.

Salvation is by grace, through faith, apart from works. That is the singular true gospel of Christianity. Anything added to that is damning heresy, bewitching heresy. And unbelievers are bewitched in all kinds of false religions of works, including false forms of Christianity. But as I said last week, and I say again, most, most Christian churches, Protestant churches, are full of bewitched people who accept, even though they were saved by the true gospel, who accept false gospels in their bewitching.

The teaching of Scripture is clear. In the sixteenth chapter of Acts, Paul was talking to the Philippian jailers who said to him, "What do I do to be saved?" to which he said, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved."

In John chapter 1, the apostle John spares no times right out of the blocks, right out of the gates. In chapter 1, he says, "The children of God are those who believe in His name." In chapter 3, Jesus says, talking to Nicodemus, "Whoever believes in Him, the Son of Man, will have eternal life. For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting, or eternal, life." The Bible always talks about salvation by faith alone, and Paul in Ephesians 2 says that we are saved by faith, not works. Specifically says that: not works. So the devil always adds to the gospel of grace and faith, works, as a necessary means to receive salvation, forgiveness, and heaven.

It is clear, however, from the Scripture that there are no works by which we can earn righteousness. There are none. All our righteousness is our filthy rags. We are wretched to the core, to the bone. There is nothing in us that can please God. There is nothing in us that can do anything that honors Him in the way He deserves to be honored by perfect righteousness.

We cannot, therefore, claim that some ceremony or some ritual, whether it's baptism, or the mass, or any other sacrament. We cannot claim that some act of kindness or philanthropy, we cannot claim that some moral quality manifesting itself in some good work is the equivalent of the righteousness that God requires.

Jesus said, "Be holy, as I am holy," because that's what God said in the Old Testament. The only way that we can be holy is if God grants us His holiness, His righteousness; if He reckons it to our accounts, imputes it to our account, or as we read in Romans, credits it to our account. If He gives us His righteousness, and that is the gospel, that if you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ – no works – if you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ you will be saved; that is to be saved from your sin by being forgiven and granted the righteousness of God.

Now as we come to chapter 3 of Galatians, Paul is in the doctrinal section of the letter. The first two chapters he was defending His authority, because he wants them to know he speaks for God. So those opening two chapters defended his apostolic authority that he was the voice of God to them.

The last two chapters deal with freedom in Christian living. The middle two, 3 and 4, deal with the gospel of faith; and they are critical verses that make up this part of the book of Galatians. This is the doctrinal section. This is where Paul lays out salvation by faith alone. He writes, by the way, from an impassioned heart. He writes with zeal. He writes, I think, even from a broken heart over the soon defection and desertion of the Galatians in the fact that they had been bewitched by the Judaizers.

Now, remember, they were Jews who came down from Judea, as I read you in Acts 15. They were Jews. It is also stated in Acts 15 that they were believing Jews. That is, they believed in Jesus as Messiah; no doubt His cross and His resurrection. They believed. That gave them access to the believers, because they were believers.

And then they brought a hellish heresy, a damning heresy, and anyone who propagates that heresy is cursed, according to chapter 1. Paul has to clarify this. This is the singular great assault on the gospel, that salvation is not by faith alone, but by faith plus something else. They should have known because of their own experience. They had received the fullness of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. He says that in the first five verses.

What was missing? Nothing was missing. But they had become bewitched. So here, in chapter 3 in particular, and on into chapter 4, he is going to prove that salvation is by faith alone.

First of all, he desires to prove it from their experience. He did that in the opening five verses. But he goes beyond that to an even greater argument, and he starts in chapter 3, verse 6, with Scripture. Scripture is going to be the source of the rest of his discussion on this important topic. In fact, all through chapter 3 and all through chapter 4, he takes us to Scripture. And for Paul, obviously, Scripture was the Old Testament, New Testament not yet having been written and assembled.

So he's going to take us to the Old Testament, and we're going to see what's so important, that salvation has always been by faith alone, even in the Old Testament, even in the Old Testament. There was not a salvation by works in the Old Testament, and by faith in the New. It's always been by faith, because men are always sinful, always incapable of coming to the standard of God's righteousness. And if they are to be righteous, God has to grant it to them, and He grants it only when they believe Him, when they acknowledge Him as trustworthy.

Now you can be sure of one thing: the hero of these Judaizers, these Jews who were trying to impose the law on believers, their hero, or one of their heroes was Abraham, Abraham. Abraham was the father of Israel. Abraham meant everything to them. Repeatedly in the gospel accounts, the Jewish people lean on Abraham as their father. And as their father, he has passed on to them their Jewish genealogy, and the assumption has been all through the history of Israel that if you're a Jew, you're okay with God, you're fine with God.

There are people who teach that today. There are even quote-unquote "evangelical preachers" who say that today, that if you're Jewish you're fine with God, because you're a child of Abraham, you're in the genealogy of Abraham. That's certainly what the Jews believed in the time of our Lord; and many believe it even today.

So they would bank their eternity on their Abrahamic ancestry. They would go back as far as Abraham. And why Abraham? Because Abraham is the father of that nation. Abraham is the father of that nation.

So in verses 6 to 9, we have Paul's positive proof that Old Testament salvation is by faith alone, positive proof that Old Testament salvation is by faith alone, and the positive proof is Abraham. They want Abraham to defend their works system. He's going to take Abraham and defend faith alone using Abraham. He's going to beat them at their own game by an accurate understanding of Abraham, such as we read in the fourth chapter of Romans a little while ago. So let's look at verse 6, and we'll look this morning at verses 6 to 9.

"Even so Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned, or counted, to him as righteousness. Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham. The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles, or the nations, by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, 'All the nations will be blessed in you.' So then those who are of faith are blessed through Abraham, the believer." And he gives Abraham that title, "the believer," which becomes the title for all New Testament people of faith.

Now this is so very, very important. All the Jews leaned on Abraham, and they saw Abraham as circumcised, and they saw Abraham as a law-keeper. There's some serious problems with that, if you remember what we read in Romans 4. But let's go back and follow the pattern of the story, back to Genesis chapter 12 where it all began. Genesis chapter 12.

God is going to call out a people for Himself, a people to whom He will give His divine revelation, a people who will embody the prophets, a people who will be His witness nation in the world. That's their purpose. It is not simply that He designed to save the nation spiritually. In fact, most of the Jews throughout human history are in hell. They were not saved by the promise that through Abraham, God would build a nation.

And this is crystal clear in the second chapter of Romans, because it says there, “He is not a Jew who is one outwardly, but he is a Jew who is one inwardly.” And it repeats it again in Romans 9, verses 6 through 8: “Not all Israel is Israel.”

The temporal nation of Israel was under the protection of God as a nation to be a witness for Him, but that did not grant them personal salvation. And salvation is always personal, it is always internal, and it is always spiritual. It is never national; it is never external; it is never physical. God is going to call out a people to whom He will give His revelation, who are to be His witness. He is the one true and living God, and they are to represent Him in a world of many gods, polytheistic nations.

So the Lord said to Abram, in chapter 12 of Genesis, verse 1, “Go forth from your country.” He lived in Ur of the Chaldees. “Go from your country, from your relatives, from your father’s house, to a land which I will show you. I’ll make you a great nation. I will bless you, make your name great, so you shall be a blessing.” I mean, that was the whole point, to bless them, so they could bless the world.

“I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse. In you all the families, all the nations of the earth will be blessed.” And Abram was 75 years old when he followed the command of God and left Haran with his wife Sarah. God says, “I am going to call you, and from your loins produce a great nation that will bless the entire world.”

Over in chapter 15, very important, God is still speaking to Abram. Abram is a believer now in the true God. He is a believer in the true God. Verse 22 of chapter 14, “I have sworn to the Lord God Most High, possessor of heaven and earth.” He is a true believer in the true God. He has abandoned all the gods of his ancient family.

God comes to him again in chapter 15, and tells him not to be afraid. “I am a shield to you. Your reward shall be very great.” He’s been told he’s going to be the father of nations; he doesn’t even have one child.

“O Lord God,” – verse 2 – “what will You give me, I’m childless? The heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus.” That was his main servant; and if there was no son, then the inheritance could pass to the son of the most intimate servant. “I don’t have a child.” Verse 3: “You’ve given no offspring to me; one born in my house is my heir.”

“Then the word of the Lord came to him: ‘This man will not be your heir; but one who will come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir.’ And He took him outside and said, ‘Look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you’re able to count them.’ And He said to him, ‘So shall your descendants be.’ Then he believed in the Lord. Then he believed in the Lord.”

This is a massive, massive promise against all reality and probability. This is an old man married to an old lady; they can’t have children. And he has no offspring, and he believes that the Lord is going to give him children like the sand of the sea or the stars of heaven. “He believed in the Lord;” – here’s the key verse – “and he reckoned it to him and righteousness.” Wow. It was Abraham’s faith that caused God to credit him with divine righteousness.

There is salvation by faith. Abraham is the prototype of faith. He’s not the first person who believed.

“By faith Enoch,” Hebrews 11. “By faith Noah,” Hebrews 11. But then it’s, “By faith Abraham,” and Abraham becomes a kind of father of faith to all succeeding generations of believers. He’s not only physically the father of Jewish people, spiritually he’s the prototype, in a sense, the father of all who believe God through human history. So God gives him a nation physically, but also through that nation comes a Messiah, and through that Messiah comes a world family by faith. That’s inherent in the promise of Genesis chapter 12.

Now the Jews would say, “Look, Abraham is the pattern. Yes, he believed God. But Abraham was circumcised.” That’s true. Let’s go over to the end of chapter 16. The end of chapter 16, it’s a sad situation.

There’s some doubt that crept in about just exactly how God was going to provide this seed. So Sarah makes the suggestion that he make one of the servants in the house pregnant. And she got pregnant and bore Ishmael, who fathered the Arab people. That was a pain that keeps on throughout all of human history, as the Arab-Israeli conflict goes back to Hagar and Ishmael.

Eighty-six years old now. Ten years at least have past; there’s no child. Then the child comes, and the child is born. And Abraham is ninety-nine years old – chapter 17, verse 1. And when he’s ninety-nine years old, the Lord comes to him. And the Lord, down in verse 9, says, “You have your child; the promise is now being fulfilled. Here’s what I want you to do. You shall keep My covenant, you and your descendants after you throughout your generations.

“This is My covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: every male among you shall be circumcised. And you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin; it’ll be a sign of the covenant between Me and you. Every male among you who is eight days old shall be circumcised throughout your generations, a servant who is born in the house or who is bought for money from any foreigner, who is not of your descendants. A servant who’s born in your house or bought with your money shall surely be circumcised; thus shall My covenant be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant. But an uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people.”

And Abraham was circumcised. Important thing to note is, at least fourteen years after Genesis 15:6, he believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness, Abraham was circumcised as an old man. Salvation didn’t come to him because of circumcision.

Let me add another very important footnote. The law wasn’t given for hundreds of years after Abraham, so he certainly wasn’t saved by observing the law and ceremony of Moses. There was no law. There was no circumcision when Abraham was reckoned as righteous. And that is precisely Paul’s point.

Now what is the point of circumcision, just ever so briefly: it had a preservative effect from a physical viewpoint. Throughout history, Jewish women have had the lowest rate of diseases, transmittable diseases, because circumcision eliminates the possibility of things being introduced into a woman’s body by the folds of the foreskin. So God was protecting them from diseases, as He promised He will in Exodus.

But more than that, that was a symbol of the fact that they needed to be cleansed at a profoundly

personal level. And that's why the Old Testament says in Deuteronomy 10 and Jeremiah 4, "Circumcise your hearts. Cut away that part of you, which is the residence of your disease. Circumcise your hearts."

In the New Testament, Colossians 2:11 says, "Circumcision is gone now. Don't let anybody force circumcision on you; just have circumcised hearts." That was not required of the Gentiles at all.

Philippians 3, we are the circumcision who worship Christ in the Spirit. Ours is a spiritual cleansing. Why? Why was that particular symbol chosen? Because nowhere is depravity more manifest than in procreation. If you want to know whether a man is a sinner, just look at every single human being he's ever produced. You are sinful at a core level. You need a profound cleansing.

Circumcision is a symbol of that, as well as a protection. But when Abraham was justified, declared righteous by God, he was neither circumcised, nor aware of the Mosaic law, or any ceremonies. Salvation was apart from law-keeping, apart from circumcision. He was a Gentile when God saved him. And if the Judaizers know their Old Testament, they're not going to use Abraham as an illustration. God made Abraham a promise, a remarkable, impossible promise from a human perspective. And Abraham believed God for that promise, that he would become literally the source of a physical nation and a spiritual people that would cover the earth like sand of the sea and stars of the heaven. It just seemed so impossible; but he believed God.

And then, an even more dramatic test of his faith comes in the twenty-second chapter of Genesis. Isaac is with Abraham. They go up the mountain, Mount Moriah, to offer a sacrifice; and God says to Abraham, "Isaac is the sacrifice. Put him on the altar and kill him." And Abraham lifts the knife. Why would he do that? Because he believed this, Hebrews 11 says: he believed that if Isaac died, God would raise him from the dead.

Hebrews chapter 11 says that explicitly. He trusted God to such a degree, that he believed he and Sarah, as old and barren, would have a massive family that would stretch across the earth; and that if need be to fulfill that when all there was was one son Isaac, God would raise him from the dead. That's all God wanted to show was his faith; and he pulled his knife back and provided a ram, which was a picture of the sacrifice of Christ to come.

So you can't use Abraham as your illustration. And that's what we read, didn't we, in the fourth chapter of Romans. So many verses; but just a couple to remind you, as you hear the echo of them. Verse 3: "What does Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.' Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness."

Righteousness came to Abraham from God because he believed. Was he righteous? No, he was not righteous, and demonstrably not righteous when he went in and got his servant pregnant. But God justifies the ungodly whose faith is credited as righteousness.

And then he quotes, Paul does, from Romans, in Romans chapter 4 from Psalm 32, that God forgives the lawless, covers the sins of the sinful, doesn't take them into the camp; and He does it by faith. And then Paul asks the question, in Romans 4: "Was he circumcised or uncircumcised? Well,

he was uncircumcised. The law: Did he obey the law?" There was no law." I can't tell you how foundational this is, folks. This is the biblical argument that you cannot add any works to salvation by faith alone.

Now the Jews thought Abraham was enough. Very early, Matthew chapter 3, John the Baptist comes preaching to the Jews, and he's telling them basically that they're no better than pagans, because he says, "You need to have a baptism. You need to be baptized; I'm here to baptize you." And the only people that were baptized in their world were Gentiles who wanted to become proselytes to Judaism. So it was a proselyte baptism.

So John the Baptist is saying, "You need to be baptized," which is saying, "You're no better than Gentiles. You're no better than Gentiles. You're not ready for the coming of the Messiah," John the Baptist, the forerunner of the Messiah. "You're not ready for his coming. You need to acknowledge your sinfulness, repent of your sin like a pagan, and publicly be baptized."

In fact, John said to the Pharisees and the Sadducees, the elite religious leaders, "You brood of snakes! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?" You can just imagine going to a group of rabbis today who believe that because they're Jewish, they're safe with God, and saying to them, "You brood of snakes! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come?"

And then John the Baptist said this: "And do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham for our father.' For I say to you, that from these stones God is able to raise up children to Abraham. The axe is already laid at the root of the trees; and you're going to be cut down and thrown into the fire." Try that at the next convention of Jewish rabbis. It's a reality. They were trusting in their Abrahamic ancestry.

The most powerful dialog between Jesus and the Jews on that subject is in John 8 – you might want to turn to it. In John 8, Jesus is talking to the Jews, and He tells them they don't know the truth, they don't know the gospel. They don't know the truth about God, they don't know the truth about salvation.

But He says, in verse 32, "If you listen to Me, you'll know the truth, and the truth will make you free, free from the search from the truth, and free from judgment and wrath. So they answered Him," – this was their response to Jesus – 'We are Abraham's descendants, have never been enslaved to anyone. We don't need to be set free, we've never been enslaved to anyone. How is it that You say, 'You will become free?' 'Truly,' Jesus said to them, 'truly, truly, I say to you, everyone who commits sin is a slave of sin. You're all slaves of sin. You're all slaves of sin, all of you. And only when you believe the truth can you be set free.'"

Now, remember, Abraham believed God. He believed that God's word was true, he believed God was trustworthy; and when he believed God, it was counted to him for righteousness. He believed all that God had said. Jesus is saying to these Jews, "You do not believe the truth. You don't believe the truth. You are slaves of sin. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free for real. I know you are Abraham's descendants; yet you seek to kill Me, because My word has no place in you. If you were really Abraham's children, you wouldn't try to kill Me. I speak for God. Abraham believed God when God spoke. I'm speaking for God, and you want to kill Me. If you were Abraham's children, you would believe the truth about God."



Verse 38: “I speak the things which I have seen with My Father; therefore you also do the things which you heard from your father.” He hasn’t identified who their father is yet.

“They answered and said to Him, ‘Abraham is our father.’ Jesus said to them, ‘If you are Abraham’s children, do the deeds of Abraham.’” And what did Abraham do to be justified? He what? He believed. “So believe when God speaks, and I am speaking for God.”

“You’re seeking” – verse 40 – “to kill Me, a man who has told you the truth, which I heard from God; this Abraham did not do. Abraham believed the truth from God. You don’t; you want to kill Me.”

“And then He says,” – in verse 41 – ‘You’re doing the deeds of your father.’ They said to Him, ‘We’re not born of fornication;’ – which is a slur against Him, accusing Him of being a bastard child – ‘we have one father: God.’ Jesus said to them, ‘If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and have come from God. I haven’t come on My own initiative, but He sent Me.

“Why do you not understand I’m saying? It’s because you can’t hear My word.’ – here it comes – ‘You are of your father the devil, and you want to do the desires of your father. He was a murderer from the beginning, doesn’t stand in the truth because there’s no truth in him. Whenever he speaks a lie, he speaks from his own nature. He’s a liar and the father of lies. Because I speak the truth, you do not believe Me.’” That’s the issue.

Abraham believed, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. The Jewish people did not believe, and they were pronounced to be doomed to divine wrath. Their attitude was that righteousness was some debt God owed them because they were the children of Abraham. But Abraham’s salvation was graciously granted to him by faith, and not by works, and not by circumcision, and not by keeping the law. “And you are not the sons of Abraham.”

Salvation in the Old Testament’s always by faith – read Hebrews 11 – always by faith. But the biggest section of Hebrews 11 really deals with Abraham, because he’s the father of faith. When you come to verse 8, “By faith Abraham.” Verse 11, “By faith Sarah.” Verse 17, “By faith Abraham.” That long section featuring Abraham. It was by faith Isaac, by faith Jacob, by faith everybody else in that chapter. By faith, everybody is saved.

In John 8:56, later in the eighth chapter, our Lord said, “Abraham your father.” Really important statement. “Abraham your father was extremely glad to see My day, and when he saw it he rejoiced.” Abraham didn’t know who Christ would be specifically, but he knew God was going to provide a sacrifice. God was going to provide an acceptable offering. He knew God was going to fulfill His promise of an atonement for sin, which would satisfy the justice of God, and by which God could reckon righteousness to a believer.

Abraham died in faith, never saw the promise. All those in Hebrews 11 died in faith, never saw the promise; but they all believed the promise was to come. “Abraham saw My day and rejoiced.”

So now go back to Galatians chapter 3, we can wrap it up, verse 6: “So Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.” That’s the point. Verse 7: “Therefore, be sure that it is those who are of faith who are the spiritual sons of Abraham.” And I love verse 8: “The Scripture,” –

take out the parenthetical phrase – “the Scripture preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘All the nations will be blessed in you.’ The Scripture preached.” The personification of Scripture is the voice of God.

We see the same thing in chapter 4, verse 30 in Galatians: “What does the Scripture say?” The Scripture speaks, God speaks. The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the nations by faith,” – always – “preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, ‘All the nations will be blessed in you. You’re a man of faith, you were justified by faith, and from that faith, that model of faith, will come a heritage of faith from all the nations throughout redemptive history.” The issue is not racial genealogy, it is the heritage of faith, faith, faith.

The Scripture preached the gospel, the good news. What the good news is, is the whole world will be blessed. How will they be blessed? Because by faith in the truth that God reveals at any point in redemptive history, by believing the truth that God has revealed, you will receive divine righteousness credited to your account by faith alone. That’s the gospel.

It’s not just Abraham either. There’s a marvelous story about Naaman – don’t have time to get into it. But in 2 Kings chapter 5, Naaman was a Syrian terrorist who kept coming over into the land of Israel and massacring people, and stealing things; and the Lord struck him with leprosy; and Elisha came along and healed him. And this is a Syrian, this is a Gentile terrorist. But Elisha the prophet doesn’t just heal him, he communicates the truth to him, the truth that he desperately needed to hear. And this is what Naaman said. Naaman gives his testimony in chapter 5, verse 15: He says, “Behold, now I know there is no God in all the earth, but in Israel. I have come to believe in the true and living God of Israel alone.”

And then in verse 16: “As the Lord lives, before whom I stand,” – he believes in the true and living God. What happened? Verse 19, the prophet Elisha said to him, ‘Go in peace.’” There you have the salvation of a Syrian Gentile terrorist by believing in the true and living God. That’s always the way of salvation; there is no other way.

So, as Abraham believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness, so through Abraham will come the line of the Messiah. Through the Messiah will come the sacrifice to provide that salvation to all who believe. And then the salvation will stretch to the world; all the nations will be blessed. And Abraham will be the father, in a prototypical sense, of all who believe.

Verse 9 sums it up: “So then those who are of faith are blessed with Abraham,” – I love this – “the believer, the believer.” That becomes the New Testament word to identify Christians: the believer. It’s always faith, faith alone. God asks nothing more of us. Faith is not a righteous work, faith is an empty hand receiving righteousness.

Father, we thank You for Your truth. We thank You for the clarity of the gospel. How absolutely vital and critical it is. And I pray, Lord, that You will bring this message to bear hard upon the hearts of any who are counting on their goodness, their works, their religion, their morality, their baptism, their sacraments, or anything else they’re involved in, to be the means of their salvation. We know that is a cursed, damned heresy that will catapult them into eternal hell. Salvation is through faith in Christ alone, by grace. And may no Christians become bewitched to tolerate false gospels, which are cursed because of the damage they do.

Help us to be faithful to the true gospel: first, to believe it, and then to proclaim it. Keep our minds clear as to what the gospel is, so that we can rightly proclaim its glory, and be bold enough to say to someone, "That's not the gospel; and if you believe that, you'll never ever enter heaven." We need that kind of boldness, Lord.

Thank You for bringing Your truth again to us with such power. And we praise You, in Christ's name. Amen. Amen.

Available online at: <http://www.gty.org>

COPYRIGHT (C) 2018 Grace to You

You may reproduce this Grace to You content for non-commercial purposes in accordance with Grace to You's Copyright Policy (<https://www.gty.org/about#copyright>).