

Abraham's Blessing Through Jesus

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[0 : 00] That as soon as I started preaching, the thunder would start and the rain would start. So, come on God. Why don't I pray for us?

Lord God, we praise you. You are the God of the weather. You reign and Lord Jesus, you rule at God's right hand, the Father. And we pray that now we would listen to your words as words of power to us, more powerful even than the thunder, that we would heed your words and put our whole hope in you and in your gospel.

Help us to do this, Father, for our sake and the sake of the kingdom. Amen. Well, friends, the first century church in Galatia, it's a long time ago, but maybe not a lot's changed.

It was a church that was riddled with internal conflict, just riddled with it. There was a massive fight going on in the Galatian church. And Paul writes this letter to the Galatians to make this internal fight a public fight and to make it obvious to everyone watching that there's a real huge conflict going on in the Galatian church.

Paul, the apostle, to put it bluntly, he is at war with part of this church, a part called the Judaizers. It's sort of a nickname we've given to this group called the Judaizers.

[1 : 28] So there's Paul who planted the church and left the church, the Judaizers who have come in, and then they're kind of everyone else in the middle. Now, both sides, Paul and the Judaizers, agreed on a few things.

They agreed that God, the creator, was righteous and that we are not. And the real issue here is how can someone become justified before God?

How can someone get out of the punishment we deserve and be acquitted and declared right with God? How are we justified? On what grounds can we ever be declared righteous?

Paul had one answer. The Judaizers had another answer. For Paul, the answer was easy. The answer was all about Jesus. It was all about Jesus Christ. It was all about Jesus Christ crucified.

That was it for Paul, and we'll go into that in a minute, but it's all about Jesus Christ. The Judaizers, on the other hand, said it was about Jesus, yes, and or but it's also about doing good works of God's law, obeying these long lists of regulations.

[2 : 42] So, it's about faith in Jesus and works of the law. Paul, just Jesus. It's just by Jesus are we justified. The Judaizers, yes, Jesus and works of the law.

The Galatian church was stuck. They loved Paul. He planted the church. He converted them. You know, they got history with him. But the Judaizers, they've moved in, and they seem right.

They seem spiritual. They seem wise. They look like they've got it together. It may not be attractive to you, the idea of adding works of the law to Jesus, but it was very attractive to them.

I mean, it's attractive just to the base level of, we like to kind of, we like to contribute to things, you know. You let your kids, one of my daughters baked me a cake on the weekend.

It was really Helen doing it. She kind of condescends to let Jemima, you know, contribute something. We've got this human pride that wants to contribute something. And so, the Judaizers say, it's not just Jesus.

[3 : 49] You've got to do something. Why don't you do all these works of the law? And it sounds right. It was very attractive to them. And there's also this, there's a history to it, because the law stood for thousands of years.

The law stood for a long time as Scripture, as the phase of history they were in. And now it's no longer that phase. We're in the New Covenant. And so, it has historical pedigree, this argument.

And also, I think there's just a mere force of peer pressure. And this is where I think we are in danger at Holy Trinity of adding to the Gospel today. There's a whole thing about Christian fad, Christian trends that starts to undermine the centrality of Jesus Christ crucified.

Let me give a sort of a silly example, but you'll sort of get how this works. And you can then put in the real temptation. Imagine if you came to church and the band were all in horizontal stripy shirts.

Okay? Just imagine that. It's hard to imagine, I know. And then the preacher was in a horizontal stripy shirt. And the guy doing the notices in the communion, John O, was in a horizontal stripy shirt, bright primary colours on a white background.

[5 : 09] And then you'd think, week by week, you'd start to see more stripy shirts in the pews. Until eventually, you'd start to get the impression at Holy Trinity to be a Christian would be to trust Jesus and wear a horizontal stripy shirt.

The really spiritual people, the really full-on committed Christians are those who trust Jesus and have a stripy shirt. And you'd soon know you'd be going to Kmart on Monday and getting that same stripy shirt because you went to church and you felt second grade.

And then you'd come next week with your brand new stripy shirt and, you know, it'd feel great, wouldn't it? And then, of course, imagine what would happen if our ex-senior pastor who just left us, Paul Barker, comes back from Malaysia where he's working, comes in and we're all wearing stripy shirts.

What would he say? He'd say, you fools, you idiots. What have you done? I preached the gospel of Christ crucified here for a long time and now you've added to it.

Friends, those things happen all the time in evangelical churches that we become fools when we entertain these extra things that we think we must have on top of Jesus.

[6 : 22] But Jesus is enough. Well, let's listen to Paul's frustration and his anger. And Sharon read this well. Paul, you foolish Galatians. I'm on page 946.

You foolish Galatians. Who has bewitched you? It was before your eyes that Jesus Christ was publicly exhibited as crucified. Paul calls them for what they are.

They are fools. They are idiots. They are out of their mind. He's not saying something about their IQ. He's saying he's putting on a moral judgment because of their foolish thinking because they haven't thought in a gospel way, in a Jesus-honoring way.

They've thought in a stupid kind of crowd, faddish, human pride kind of way. And so Paul is saying if you buy into these arguments of adding to Jesus, you are stupid.

You are sinfully stupid. You are out of your mind. It's like you are under a kind of a spell. Someone cast a spell and bewitched you that you would do such a stupid thing. Why is it stupid?

[7 : 30] Because it's so different to the way that Paul planted this church. Paul says, Now the church in Galatia, they're a church a long way from the crucifixion location.

And in time, they're a decade or two since Jesus died on the cross. But Paul's saying in my preaching, as I declare the gospel to you, it was like you were there.

It was like you saw Jesus crucified. The word for publicly exhibited is the word like placarded, like a real estate sign on the street.

It's a public exhibit of the truth. His house is for sale. Christ was publicly exhibited in Paul's preaching. He didn't hide it. He didn't water it down.

He didn't hint about it. It was just direct. Jesus Christ died for your sins. That was his gospel. And so Paul is saying, You were one for the gospel because of Christ crucified.

[8 : 35] Why are you now changing? Now, just as an aside, I think there's a principle here for us to learn about church life. And this motto is often applied to youth ministry, but I think it applies to any kind of ministry in the church.

I think Chris told it to me, actually, our youth minister. The quote is this, What you win them with is what you win them for. What you win them with is what you win them for.

The point of that quote is to say, What you win people with in the church, what makes them come here is what will make them stay. And Paul is saying, I won you for Christ crucified.

You were won for Christ crucified. Why would you ever leave that? Why would you ever leave that? Paul says, You weren't won for Christ crucified and works of the law.

You weren't won for two things. You were won for the one thing, Christ crucified. So the question for us as a church is, Why are people here? Why is it growing? Is it growing because people are here for Christ crucified?

[9 : 42] Or are they here for something else? Now, we can attract people with all sorts of things, and that's okay. We can attract people with food and friendships and fun, but that's not the heart of who we are, is it?

The heart of who we are is Christ crucified. And really, we've made a huge error if that's not why people are staying. People can come for all sorts of reasons, but you need to stay because we worship, we follow, we serve Christ who was crucified.

That's our foundation of this church. Now, Paul could say, That's all I did. That's all I gave you. Is that what we could say?

He goes on to appeal to their experience. He says, He questions them. He interrogates them. And the only thing I want to learn from you is this, verse 2. Did you receive the Spirit, the Holy Spirit of God, by doing works of the law or by believing what you heard?

And the answer is obvious, that they received the Spirit by believing the gospel of Christ crucified. Are you so foolish? Having started with the Spirit, are you now ending with the flesh?

[10 : 56] You started with the Spirit, but you've actually gone backwards. These people haven't taken you forward. They've taken you backwards. Did you experience so much for nothing?

Your Christian life, your suffering, I suffered for you with the gospel. We did so much in Galatia. We did so much for Jesus. Was that all wasted? If it really was for nothing.

Well, then, does God supply you with the Spirit and work miracles among you by your doing works of the law or by your believing what you heard? Paul is saying, think about your life.

You went to the Galatians. You were religious Jews, but you were spiritually empty. And then when you turned to Christ and believed the message that he was crucified for you in your place, you were filled with the Spirit.

You were born again. You were given new hearts. You were given changed lives. You were given a new relationship with God, your Father, through the Son. Did that happen through works of the law or through Christ crucified?

[12 : 03] There's no answer to that. Paul's humiliating them. He's drawing them back to the cross. See, here's another one of Paul's assumptions that we may or may not share, but we should share.

It's this. The cross of Christ is powerful. The cross of Christ changes lives. Believing in the cross of Christ is evidence of the work of the Holy Spirit.

Turning from independent works-based living to the cross of Christ alone is the great miracle that people call regeneration, a new heart for God, a new heart to want to love God, not just earn your way to God, but actually just to receive his mercy and forgiveness and call him adopted father.

Friends, that's a powerful message. Now, there may be some here who I think you actually do believe that and therefore you do have the Holy Spirit, but you're not sure.

You're waiting for something extra. You're waiting for God to zap you. You're waiting for some moment or some experience, but you don't need to have it. If you trust Christ crucified, if you believe in Christ crucified in your place, in your stead for your sins, you are a Christian.

[13 : 25] You have the Holy Spirit. You've got nothing left to wait for. Today, start calling yourself a Christian. If you're not baptised, get baptised because you've made it.

You've made it. That's how the Galatians were converted then and that's how it still happens today. People believe in Christ crucified for their sins. That's the gospel. They believe it.

They trust it. They're forgiven. They're saved. Now, that's the argument for Paul from experience. He's appealing to their conversion experience with his church planting ministry in Galatia.

But Paul has an even better argument than that and it's the argument from a higher authority scripture because experience can teach you things about God, but it's only the Bible that's the infallible word of God, the inerrant word of God where we can actually settle these disputes black and white.

And so, Paul now appeals to scripture in verse 6 and he really wants to settle this argument tonight. And he appeals to the great hero of spiritual and unspiritual Jews, Abraham.

[14 : 36] Just as Abraham, quote, believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness, so you see those who believe are the descendants of Abraham.

And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, declared the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying in the promise, quote, all the Gentiles shall be blessed through you, all the nations.

For this reason, those who believe are blessed with Abraham who believed. Abraham is like the great believer, the great model of faith and trusting the promises of God.

In Genesis 15, he didn't have any kids, he's very old. God says, look at the stars in the sky, so shall your descendants be. And Abraham said, okay, I believe that.

And the scripture says, Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. That was like for him, a point of justification, a point where God accepted him because he trusted the promise.

[15 : 40] Abraham wasn't saved because he was righteous or he did all these righteous acts, though he did do them, but that's not why he was saved. He was saved because God gave him an impossible promise and he trusted it.

And in Abraham, there's actually a promise for you because it's what Paul says. In Abraham, there's a promise that all the nations through you, Abraham, will be blessed.

So not just Israel, not just Jews, but all of us who are from many nations, who are in Australia, who are a long way from Israel. But here we are in Abraham, we are saved the way he was saved through believing the promise.

And Paul says it's like the gospel in Genesis. It's like the gospel predicted, foreshadowed, pre-announced in the book of Genesis, you know, a long time ago, 4,000 years ago for us, 2000 BC, the gospel was announced that by faith, all nations will be justified.

And something I've noticed that I really don't like, and it's happened in this church, but it happens everywhere, is that people can't trust the Bible anymore because they think it's kind of ambiguous.

[17 : 00] But here Paul is saying, now the Bible is clear. In fact, he talks about the Bible like the Bible's almost a person. He says, verse 8, the scripture foreseeing that God would justify, the scripture foresaw something, the scripture declared the gospel beforehand to Abraham, the scripture foresaw that God would do this.

So he speaks about the Bible as an alive book that announces things in advance, that declares things, that predicts things, that settles arguments. So it's not fair, I think, on major issues like this to say, that's just your interpretation of the Bible.

You know, anyone can interpret it differently or, you know, that smarter people than us have disagreed on this, therefore we're not going to figure it out. That's a really wrong view of the Bible.

For Paul, the Bible speaks and the Bible's alive. The Bible can settle it and it ought to settle it in your heart tonight that you are saved by faith alone. Now, having sort of made the point from Genesis, Paul needs to go a step further, a step that often we don't want to go to because what he's done is he stated the positive case.

It's clear from the Bible, from Abraham, that we are saved through faith alone. That's the positive case but now he wants to give the negative case. What if you don't trust in Christ alone?

[18 : 29] What if you actually want to go the route of Jesus plus something else? What will happen to you? Okay? And this is where it gets negative. You know, often people like preachers to talk about heaven but they don't want anyone to talk about hell.

They want preachers to talk about grace but not about repentance. Well, here Paul talks about faith and now he's going to talk about the curse of God. Okay? The curse of God.

Verse 10. For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse for it is written, cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the things written in the book of the law.

Now, it is evident that no one is justified before God by the law for the one who is righteous will live by faith. Habakkuk, it's one of Paul's favourite Bible verses, Habakkuk 2.

But the law does not rest on faith. On the contrary, quoting Leviticus, whoever does the works of the law will live by them. Now, what's happening here is that Paul is going to use the law to prove that you can't rely on good works of the law to be saved.

[19 : 37] So, he starts with quoting Deuteronomy 27, Cursed is everyone who does not observe and obey all the things written in this law. And that's actually an important chapter in the law.

It's a chapter where God did this sort of game with Israel. It's not a game but like this illustration where there were two mountains, Ebal and Gerizim and he put half the people on one and half on the other and on one mountain he announced all the curses and on another mountain he announced all the blessings of obeying the law.

But it's even clear within Deuteronomy that God spends most of the time on Mount Ebal talking about curses. Actually, there's a real sense in Deuteronomy that they are going to fail.

They're going to fail. And for Paul, he then puts up kind of a Bible contradiction and he quotes Habakkuk and Leviticus. He says, Habakkuk says the righteous live by faith but Leviticus says the one who wants to go the works law way has to live by that.

So will you live by faith or will you live by works? So it's kind of a Bible contradiction. And what Paul is trying to prove is that there are these two ways but one of them is a dead end.

[20 : 52] One of them is a dead end and one of them is eternal life. And the dead end is obviously trying to do the works of the law. No one apart from Jesus has ever obeyed the whole law and if you break one part of the law, if you don't do everything written in the law, you're cursed.

That's what the law promises and so nobody actually is able to do it. No one has the power to do it. Why would you ever add that to the gospel is Paul's argument.

If you try to please God by being good, by doing good stuff, if you try and earn your brownie points to heaven that way, you will fail and if you fail, God will curse you.

That's the promise of the law. God is judge. You know, God is not this kind of God who gives out encouragement ribbons for getting there halfway or a trophy for trying.

God is a righteous judge and if you don't meet his law, he's not going to let you into heaven. You've failed. You're cursed by the law. But here's the good news again and I love that Paul closes on this.

[21 : 57] Verse 13, Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us. For it is written again in the law in Deuteronomy, cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree.

That is, who dies under kind of a civil penalty of a public execution such as being killed and put on a tree or such as being crucified and have nails in your hands on two planks of wood which is basically a tree.

Now, Christ became a curse for us, verse 14, in order that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles so that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

So here's the good news that Jesus who was perfect, who only deserved blessing from God under the terms of the law, he allowed himself to be punished for you, punished for me.

He allowed himself to become curse for you, curse for me and Paul even puts the substitution so strongly that he became a curse for you.

[23 : 07] He became a curse for me. He receives our curse, he becomes a curse in your place so that you can be saved through faith, so that you can be saved through faith alone, through trusting Christ crucified alone.

He was the spotless lamb of God but he became a curse for you. He was the eternal son of God, he became a curse for you. He was the perfect righteous one, the beautiful one, he became a curse for you so that just by faith, not by faith and scoring brownie points but just by faith, God will grant you eternal life through Christ crucified.

And there might be some who say here tonight, you might not say it because you might be too ashamed to say it but you might in a point of honesty confess to a friend that you feel worthless, that you feel like you've seen things, sinful things you ought not to have seen and you feel just crap because of that or that you've done things you shouldn't have done and you feel awful because of that or you've allowed people to do things to you that you shouldn't have allowed them to do to you and you just feel awful because of that.

Your sense of guilt is 10 out of 10. It's like, if I could put words in your mouth, it's like you're saying I feel like I'm under a curse and if you are and the answer is if you are trying to get to God through your own goodness, you are under a curse but the good news of the gospel is that Christ became a curse for you.

Christ took the punishment, Christ suffered for you. You needn't feel like that not because you haven't done those things but because Christ became a curse for you.

[24 : 58] The Son of God was cursed for you. That's a serious matter, he did it for you and therefore if he did that, that's the only way to be forgiven. That's the only way to get to heaven, it's the only way to be saved, it's the only way to be justified, the only way to be declared righteous, the only way to receive the Spirit is by faith in Jesus Christ.

Well, let me conclude. We actually don't know who won this fight, right? So we don't actually know what happened. Our historical records aren't that clear.

It may have actually been that Paul lost the fight and the Judaizers won the day and that's why there's not really a famous church there in church history because they won and they killed it.

The point stands though is that the foundation of the gospel is clear and it may not have been received in Galatia but other places, every generation, the church has to decide is this the only way to be saved?

Is this the only way to be saved? The Christian church, the true Christian church in every place must stand on Paul's gospel of salvation through Christ crucified alone and every generation therefore we need to have a fight.

[26 : 22] Every generation we need to have the same fight and it's the kind of fight that the world needs to see us have that we fight for the integrity of the historic, original, apostolic gospel of Christ crucified.

it's a fight we need to have and it's a fight that you probably need to have in your own heart because you will be tempted to trust in yourself and not Jesus. It's a fight you need to fight every week probably.

So friends, let me just encourage you, don't get caught up in adding to Jesus. Don't get caught up in thinking there's other things you've got to do into the horizontal striped shirt or whatever.

trust in Christ alone. There are always going to be idiots around the church, fools, who want to add to Christ crucified.

There are always going to be those people but the question is will we actually fight for the doctrine? Will we draw a line in the sand over this theological truth? Will we trust in Jesus alone?

[27 : 23] What will we say to people when they ask us about what do we believe? Will the first thing on our lips be Christ crucified? That's the question. What's at stake is that this is the gospel and if you don't believe it you're cursed.

That's the bottom line. Jesus has done it all for you. He was crucified in your place. He was cursed for you so that you could actually stand here today and say I'm a Christian and you're not saying anything about yourself.

You're saying something about what he did for you. I'm a Christian. I'm justified. This Holy Spirit dwells in me because I trust in Jesus alone.

So let's pray. Let's pray for that and thank him for that. Lord Jesus we're so astonished that you would become a curse for us. Thank you so much.

We don't deserve it. We only deserve to be cursed and yet you loved us so much to stand in our place. So Jesus help us to treasure you and to treasure that gospel always and to never ever add to it and to never ever drift from it.

[28 : 35] Please keep us close to you Lord Jesus always. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.