

Christ, the Seed of Abraham

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Preacher: Joshua Winters

[0 : 00] If you have your Bible with you this morning, I invite you to open it up with me to Galatians chapter 3. Galatians chapter 3. We began looking at this passage a little bit last Sunday.

The churches in the region of Galatia had begun to embrace what Paul referred to as a false gospel, a different gospel.

Some men who were Jewish by birth, he refers to them as the circumcision group, had infiltrated the churches in Galatia.

And they were teaching this false gospel. They were teaching that in order to be made right with God, to be saved, you need Jesus plus you need to do the works of the law.

You need to be circumcised. You need to observe the special days and months and years. We are the true children of Abraham, was the attitude that they had.

[1 : 01] And if you want to be cut into the family, you need Jesus, yes, but you need these other things too. And Paul is writing with all of his passion to correct this false notion and to remind the churches in Galatia that that's not the gift of God that God is offering through the gospel.

We saw this statement in chapter 3, verse 7, last Sunday. He said, understand then that those who have faith, and of course he's talking about faith in Jesus Christ, those who have faith are children of Abraham.

He goes on from there to talk about the law. We looked at that last Sunday and how some are trying to say that it's by works of the law that we gain a right standing with God.

And Paul says, no, no, no. By the works of the law, we are under the curse of God. We deserve his just and righteous punishment because we've blown it.

We've failed to keep the law. We haven't lived up to God's good and righteous standard. And the good news we heard last Sunday was that God sent his son, Jesus, to redeem us from the curse of the law and to take that curse upon himself, that judgment upon himself, so that we might be set free from the debt that we owe to God in terms of his justice for what we have done.

[2 : 48] Paul ended that section, we ended it last Sunday, with this statement of how he has redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles or to the nations through Christ Jesus.

And so we're going to continue on with what Paul is teaching here because he has more to say. He has more to say about the law and how this factors in.

He has more to say about the gift of Christ and the gospel. So we pick it up this morning in verse 15 of chapter 3. Paul says, So Paul's getting practical.

He's giving us an illustration that we can all relate to. It's maybe a little harder for us to relate to it in our culture today because we don't have covenants of the same weight or seriousness as they had.

And even the ones that we do that are most serious, it's very common for us to break them. You think of marriage, you think of divorce, you think of... And so I'm trying to think of, you know, what's the best, what's the closest equivalent that, you know, we can really think of.

[4 : 18] And this is not a perfect illustration, but perhaps we might think of an agreement with a bank to borrow money, a mortgage.

What is Paul saying here? When you make a serious, a human covenant, we all know that you can't just set it aside or you can't just add to it later on.

You know, once you have signed on the line for that money, you have obligated yourself to pay it back. You can't just decide, you know, three weeks later, I don't want to pay it back.

I'll keep it. I've already spent it, but I'm not going to make the payments. No, you can't set it aside. It's binding on you. Same with making changes to it.

The bank, they can't come to you and say, well, we made this agreement, but we actually want to change that now. And we want to make it so that you pay additional payments and more.

[5 : 20] Give us more. Or we're going to just change the interest rate. We're going to jack it up. This is what the agreement was. And it's binding. It's set. You can't go back and change that.

And Paul's saying, this is how it is with the covenant that God made with Abraham. It's binding. He can't just set it aside. He can't just change it or go back on his word.

Let's keep reading. He says, so it is in this case. The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Now we're going to skip down to 17. We'll come back to what's in between.

What I mean is this. The law introduced 430 years later does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise.

So what is he saying? Yes, the law of Moses came in 430 years later. But it doesn't set aside the promises that God made to Abraham and his offspring.

[6 : 27] It doesn't somehow just nullify that. It doesn't change the terms of it so that now it's you need to do all this in order to receive what's promised.

No, it doesn't work like that. That covenant that God made with Abraham, it stands and it's binding. If you were here that Sunday, God himself passed through the halves of the animal.

And he alone did. And there were no requirements on Abraham's side. Things that he had to do in order to receive these promises. God promised by himself that he would stick to these things.

That he would do these things. That he would bless Abraham and his offspring and give them the land. And God will keep his promise, his covenant. Verse 18.

For if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on the promise. But God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise.

[7 : 35] Those words depends on the law. If the inheritance depends on the law. If it depends on us doing enough of the good works, the righteous deeds, the ceremonial washings, the holiday, the holy day observances in the law.

If it depends on that, getting what was promised, then it doesn't really come by the promise. It comes by works. It comes by our obedience.

But notice the word if. If the inheritance depends on the law. Inherent in that is the statement. It doesn't. It isn't dependent on that.

He says if the inheritance depends on the law, then it no longer depends on the promise. But it doesn't depend on the law or the works of the law. But God in his grace gave it to Abraham through a promise.

Everything that God promised Abraham. The land, the blessing of his offspring to bless the nations through him. It was intended as a gift of grace.

[8 : 48] Not as something that he had to somehow earn. This wasn't a rewards program that God set before Abraham. It was a gift of grace. It was a gift of grace. And it was to come to him simply because God promised it.

Which kind of raises the question in our minds.

Well then, why the law? Why the law? Why was that brought in in the first place? And this is exactly where Paul goes. I mean, if the whole inheritance comes to Abraham and his offspring just by faith.

Then why did God bring this whole covenant, the Mosaic covenant, the law in 430 years later? Paul is going to give us some answers to that question.

Starting in verse 19. Why then was the law given at all? It was added because of transgressions until the seed to whom the promise referred had come.

[9 : 57] So here we begin to see the beginning of the answer. We see two things. Because of transgressions. Because of sins. What do you mean by that, Paul?

He's going to explain it a little bit more as we go on. The law was given because of sins, because of transgressions. But the other thing we notice here in verse 19 is that it was added.

The law was added because of transgressions until the seed to whom the promise referred had come. And even there, that little word until.

It was intended to be a temporary relationship. Not a permanent one. And Paul's going to say more about that as well. Let's go down to verse 21 and continue to focus in on this question of why the law.

Why the law? Verse 21. Is the law therefore opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not. For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the

law.

[11:09] Now there's a lot in here. It's kind of a loaded statement. But I want to draw your attention to a couple things. There's another answer to the question of why the law here.

If a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the law. In other words, we would get a right standing with God on the basis of law if it was possible for God to give a just and right law that we could keep.

But that wasn't possible. In fact, implied in this that could impart life is the truth that the law could never do that.

In fact, that it wasn't even the purpose of the law. The purpose of the law was not to give us a right standing with God or to give us life. Are we hearing this correctly?

Are we seeing this right? Paul has already said this a few times throughout his letter. Back in chapter 2, verse 16. By the works of the law, no one will be justified.

[12:25] Chapter 2, verse 21. If righteousness could be gained through the law, Christ died for nothing. This has kind of been his point all the way through this.

The law cannot give you a right standing with God. It doesn't matter how much you try to keep it. It's not enough. You've already blown it.

We will blow it. We're under the curse of the law. And so we deserve to be punished because of that good and right standard that God has given to his people.

So why the law? Well, the law was not given to be the thing that delivers, the thing that saves us. What does Paul say?

He says, But Scripture has locked up everything, verse 22, under the control of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe.

[13:31] Scripture has locked up everything under the control of sin, or shut up everything under the control of sin. The purpose of the law was not to save.

The purpose of the law was to clarify the relationship and help us see where we stand before God, to help us see that we are locked up under the presence, because of the presence of sin, under the penalty of sin, and under the power of sin.

It was to help us see that the way is shut, and that there's no way out of this, so that we might turn to God and cry out for help, and find that the way to be saved, the way to be made right with God again, is not through obedience.

It's not through law-keeping. It's actually through the gift that God intended all along to give, the gift of His Son, so that what was promised might be given to those who believe, but how would it come to them?

Through faith in Jesus Christ, says Paul in verse 22. He goes on to kind of give us a bit of an illustration, to help us see how this works, and I'll read it first, and then we'll talk about it.

[15:04] Verse 23. He says, Before the coming of this faith, we were held in custody under the law, locked up or shut up until the faith that was to come would be revealed.

So the law was our guardian until Christ came that we might be justified by faith. Now that this faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian.

So Paul is giving them an example, an illustration. There's a lot of discussion over this illustration. The word guardian is kind of, it's discussed. Some translations say tutor, some say teacher, some say schoolmaster.

And so what exactly is the metaphor there? We have a hard time, I think, relating to schoolmaster. We don't really have that in the same sense as they did.

And so I really like the way that the NIV has translated it, as guardian and using the language of custody. The best kind of example I could think of in my mind was, perhaps most of you will remember a time when you, your parents maybe took you over to your grandparents' house or to a relative's house, and you stayed there for a time.

[16:20] And they were kind of in charge of you. They would watch over you when you were kids. You know, they, in that moment, your grandparents kind of became your guardian. They, they, they had the care over you.

They had authority over you. You were under their charge. But, in that situation, it was temporary. The expectation was that when your parents come and pick you up, you're no longer under their authority.

You're no longer under grandma's house rules. While you're there, you're under grandma's house rules. But when you, your parents come to pick you up and you get to go home, you're no longer under grandma's house rules.

You're under mom and dad's now. It's not a perfect illustration, but I think it starts to get us thinking about the way that this, that this works and what Paul is trying to show us here.

That's how it was with the law. The law was never meant to be the permanent relationship. It was given as, as a guardian.

[17 : 26] It was given as something that was to hold sway for a time. Until, Paul tells us, the seed to whom the promise referred had come.

And so, why the law? Let's, let's just kind of sum this up briefly and bring it all together. Why was the law given? It was given temporarily to be a guardian, to have charge over the people of God because of transgressions.

It was not given to impart life. It couldn't. It was given to help them see that they needed the gift of God to have life, to be made right with God.

And if we zoom back for a moment and, and, and think about this and what we know of the Old Testament and the law, it, it makes sense. What, what do we read in the Old Testament?

We read that God gave them requirements about clean, cleanliness, cleanness, ceremonial cleanness. You, you, you are unclean.

[18 : 33] And so, if you want to come close and approach and have a relationship with me, you have to do these things to be clean. There's, there's something, there's a problem here that separates us.

It's, it's uncleanness. It's, it's sin. If you want to, to, to have a relationship, you're going to need somebody to, to stand in the gap between you and me, a priest, a mediator.

You need a sacrifice to bring. You got to bring a sacrifice that's going to cover your sin and, and, and divert the, the wrath that you deserve for your sin.

All of these things, the temple, the, the, the tabernacle, the way that they're set up are, are driving home this point that, that even though God has promised all of these good things, there's something that stands in the way of us receiving that.

There's a problem and it's sin. We are guilty before God. We have broken his law. And so, how can God simply just overlook that and be just?

[19 : 45] This is part of what the law was intended to show us all along. We're in trouble with God. We're on the hook. We're unclean. We have, we have sin.

We're, it, it is in us and we are under the, the penalty of it as far as justice is concerned from God.

And so, we're kind of seeing this, this, this, this bigger story here. God gives this promise, these promises to Abraham, wonderful, to Abraham, but then he gives the law to help them see that there's, there's something in the way.

You can't receive these promises unless this is taken care of, sin. And then the good news is what Jesus, what God has done to deal with that problem of sin, which the law exposes.

Let's go back up to verse 16 and hear the good news. The good news of the seed of Abraham. We skipped over this, but let's, let's hear these words.

[20 : 59] The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. Scripture does not say and to seeds, meaning many people, but and to your seed, meaning one person who is Christ.

Now there's discussion here over what Paul means, especially as it pertains to, scripture does not say and to seeds, meaning many people, but into your seed.

What does he mean by that? And you know, some would say that God meant all along in the Old Testament when he, times when he gave the promise to Abraham, what he meant right from the start was to you and your seed, singular, referring to Christ.

That's how some read that. Others read it more as that Paul is, by the Spirit, applying that word to the ultimate fulfillment, which is Christ, a single person.

Either way, what's crystal clear here is that the seed, the ultimate fulfillment of the promise points to Christ. Let me read it again and hopefully we'll hear that.

[22 : 12] The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed, who is Christ. The seed, the offspring of Abraham, who is Christ.

All along this series, we've been hearing all these promises that God gave to Abraham and maybe we've been wondering, well, through the centuries, how has God kept these promises?

Because in some places, it doesn't look like he really has. but perhaps this is the key detail that we're missing. The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed, his offspring, who is Christ. Could it be that God intends to keep all of these promises that he's made to Abraham to Christ? And when we stop and think about that, Christ is a son of Abraham, descended from Abraham in the flesh.

He is the ultimate heir of all of the promises. He is the son of God, but he took on full humanity when he came down into our world and he was born into the lineage of Abraham.

[23 : 41] where is Paul going with this? What's the implication of this? Verse 19, the law was added because of transgressions until the seed to whom the promise referred had come.

until the offspring of Abraham, Christ, that the promise referred had come. The promise referred to him.

Ultimately, God intended to fulfill it through him. And so, we're going to look at this in a moment in verse 26 to 29, but I'm going to try to describe it for you and hopefully if you see it, then we'll read it and if you see it there, then that's good.

But what I'm seeing here is this. God intends to keep all of the promises that he made to Abraham to the Lord Jesus Christ himself, the offspring, the seed of Abraham.

And sin doesn't stand in the way of Christ receiving all of that. He keeps the promises to Christ and then he takes all who have faith in Jesus Christ.

[25 : 02] He puts them into Christ so that we too might receive all that has been promised. All the blessings that God has promised to Abraham.

That's what I'm seeing here. Now let's read it in verse 26 to 29 and see if you see that as well. So, in Christ Jesus you are all children or sons of God through faith.

for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Gentile neither slave nor free nor is there male and female for you are all one in Christ Jesus.

And then here's the final statement. If you belong to Christ then you are Abraham's seed heirs according to the promise.

Four times in that section Paul takes up this language of union with Christ. He says in Christ Jesus you are all children of God.

[26 : 13] He says for all of you who were baptized into Christ think of that picture of baptism going into the water baptized means to immerse or to plunge into for you are all baptized into Christ and have clothed yourselves with Christ.

Literally Christ you put on you are in him. Paul is trying to press this home as strongly as he can. he says at the end of verse 28 for you are all one in Christ Jesus and therefore if you belong to Christ then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise.

There's this statement in the midst of this that's got some of us kind of wondering what is he talking about here verse 28 he says there is neither Jew nor Gentile some translations say Greek neither slave nor free nor is there male and female for you are all one in Christ Jesus and some of us are thinking Paul what are you saying here I mean we've kind of got this strange cultural context in which we've got gender identity stuff being talked about what do you mean there's no male and female why is he throwing this that there is no legitimate differences between people or is he making a different point I think he's making a different point I think the point he's trying to make is that whether you're Jew or Greek whether you're slave or free whether you're male or female it doesn't make a difference as to whether or not you are a son of

Abraham and therefore an heir of the promises why because you are in Christ think about this Jesus himself was descended in the flesh from Abraham he was circumcised on the eighth day he was born under the law Paul says in another place he kept the law perfectly and we don't think this way in our North American culture but back in Old Testament times if you wanted to receive the inheritance you had to be a son you had to be male if you were female you were you know you entered into another family by marriage and you would receive inheritance over there was kind of the typical way that it happened Jesus meets all the requirements to receive the inheritance that God promised to Abraham he's a son he was circumcised he's a true descendant of

Abraham and so when it says in verse 16 the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed meaning one person who is Christ God will keep all of the promises made to Abraham to the Lord Jesus Christ he will inherit them all and then God has put us into him so that the things that would otherwise disqualify us don't disqualify us anymore and it's this way that it will be fulfilled that the

blessing of God will go through Abraham and his seed to the nations through the person of Christ male and female it sounds strange until you read in verse 26 so in Christ Jesus you are all my Bible translated children of God through faith but literally it's sons you are all sons and sons are the ones who at least in the context of the scriptures receive the inheritance and so when he says that there is no male or female

[30 : 34] I think what he's pointing to is that just because you're female you're not disqualified from the inheritance because you are in Christ and he is a son who will inherit everything that's been promised it's a little hard to wrap our minds around this this we're talking about the big scope of the plan right from Genesis all the way to today and into the future but I think that this statement sums it all up so well in verse 29 this is the point Paul is trying to get across those people are telling you we're the true children of Abraham the true sons of Abraham you guys are not and if you want to be you got to do all this stuff Paul saying no if you belong to Christ then you are Abraham's seed you are his offspring and this is what follows from that you are heirs according to the promise you don't need to do all this other stuff you don't need to keep the law you don't need to be circumcised you don't need to be

Jewish you don't need to be a male son to inherit what has been promised Christ and the gift of God is that he's going to put you into Christ and unite you with him through faith so deeply so that you receive all of it as a gift of grace this is the gospel this is the gospel if you belong to Christ then you are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise what's the promise I mean Paul's talked in context he's talked about all kinds of things we could flip back to verse 8 the promise is that there will be blessing generally for the nations verse 6 a gift of a right standing with God Paul has spoken of the gift of the spirit in verses 1 to 5 in verse 14 that we might receive the promise of the spirit what about the land we might wonder verse 16 the promises plural were spoken to Abraham and to his seed and where he quotes from to say that and to your seed is the promise to you and your seed I will give this land Christ will inherit all of that and in Christ we too are counted as the seed as the children of Abraham who will enter into that and inherit it as well some of you may not have been here when we went to Romans 4 but in Romans chapter 4 it says that Abraham by faith became heir of the world heir of the world proclaiming the final expansion of the land promise it wasn't just all along just for this little piece of land in the Middle East it was for the world because how can all the people of the children of Abraham if it's been widened to the nations like this through Christ and it has how can all of us fit into this little parcel of land in the final expansion of the promise of the land has been proclaimed in the New Testament it was proclaimed through Paul what did Jesus say he said blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth as in the whole thing what did John see in his vision a new heaven and a new earth the place where behold the dwelling of God is now among men or with his people and he will be their

God and they will be his people it was always going to this trajectory to the world what does Paul say to the church at Corinth he says are not all things yours and I think the implied statement or qualification there is in Christ are not all things yours whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world this is the good news when Jesus returns he will bring the fullness of his kingdom the fulfillment to all of the promises that have been made he himself will inherit it and through him we get it too though we don't deserve it though we were outside the family that was chosen and we get it as a gift of grace through faith and so if there's anyone that comes around to tell you that you need to do this you need to keep these regulations you need to do these rituals you need to know [36 : 12] Jesus has done it all through him I receive it all as a gift of grace if you belong to Christ then you are the seed the offspring of Abraham children of Abraham and heirs of all that's been promised let's pray father in heaven we thank you for these words we give you praise and glory for sending your son into our world to be a true flesh and blood one of us human being what a gift Lord we would be happy just to have our sins forgiven we would to have a relationship with you for eternity in some kind of way but we thank you that your plan has been to give us all of the blessings that you have promised to your people that we're not cut out because of our our differences thank you that it's not about us measuring up to the standard having the right lineage

Lord it's it's about you and your son the seed of Abraham and we thank you most of all that this is just a gift Lord it sounds too good to be true in one sense but it really points to your true graciousness and your generosity we don't deserve this Lord we're sinners we we've we've sinned a lot we thank you for your mercy and for your grace in Christ's name amen man oh son any