



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Romans 4: 8-17

Romans

“Faith’s Footsteps”

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Well, our text this morning is Romans 4, we’re going to look at verses 9 through 17. Paul has set forth the gospel in chapter 3 and what he’s doing in chapter 4 is defending that gospel and in verse 9 we come into the midst or the middle of his defense. And here he writes, verse 9, “Is this blessing then on the circumcised or the uncircumcised also? For we say, ‘Faith was credited to Abraham as righteousness.’” How then was it credited? While he was circumcised or uncircumcised?

Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised so that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be credited to them, and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised. For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.

For if those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified; for the law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, there is no violation. For this reason it is by faith, in order that it may be in accordance with grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, (as it is written, ‘A father of many nations have I made you’) in the presence of Him whom he believed, even God who gives life to the dead and calls

into being that which does not exist. May the Lord bless this reading of His word. Let’s bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank you for this time together. We thank you for this opportunity to come together, to read the scriptures, read about your grace and the salvation that you have given, salvation which is received through faith alone and the great blessings that come as a result of that. And having read that to then spend time considering the meaning of our text. And so we count it a blessing to be here. We know that it is, but it is a blessing that will go unheeded if you do not teach us. And so we come to this text having read it looking to you for that blessing that the spirit of God would teach us. May He open our hearts to receive the truth. Guide us in our understanding of this text that we might be blessed by it.

What a blessing it is to know salvation and to know that it’s all of grace, it’s a gift. It’s done by you, not by us and so help us to understand that and to appreciate as a result your goodness and your grace to us. Bless us spiritually. Pray that for our time now and we pray that wherever your word is taught in this city and throughout this nation and world may your people be built up in a faith.

Bless us spiritually, bless us physically, bless those who are sick. Give them healing. Give them encouragement. Give encouragement to those who are grieving. We know that there are individuals in our congregation who have suffered the loss of family and we pray that you would give them encouragement and give them a good ministry to those around them. Bless us this evening as we come again to this place to remember our Lord, prepare our hearts for that. Prepare our hearts now for our time of study together in Christ’s name. Amen.

[Message] We’ve all had the experience of asking for directions, particularly if you found yourself in a strange city or a foreign country. Directions can be verbal or they can be visual. They can be found on a map or they can even be found in the dust with a line of footprints that become a path. In Romania outside the town of **Cloyesque** which is famous for its oil fields. There’s a footpath that I have noticed that is probably half a mile or a mile long. It goes from a housing development under the highway and across a field into the city. And often you will see children walking on it, school children I presume on their way to or from school. But someone was the first to walk across that field and others followed until those first footsteps in the soil became a well-worn path.

You don’t have to go abroad to find examples of that. In fact, I’ve been told that the streets on the campus of Harvard University were originally footpaths before they were paved. But before they became footpaths, someone had to be the first to walk across a field and others followed in his steps, finally eventually became a well-worn path. Now I mention that because that is happening regarding salvation and the heavenly city. We have a path to follow, a path to follow to that place. It is one that Abraham took. Those who follow in his steps are saved. That is what Paul writes about in our passage, following in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham. And by God’s grace his path has become well-worn.

Abraham is Paul’s example of salvation by faith. The apostle set forth the doctrine of justification by faith alone at the end of chapter 3. He explained the consequences of that great truth, that it leaves no room for boasting. You cannot boast about a gift and that is exactly what salvation is. It is a gift of God that is received by faith.

Then in chapter 4 he began answering objections to that doctrine because that doctrine goes contrary to man’s natural views on religion. Man, by nature, thinks in terms of works. Man thinks that man must work for his or her salvation, must earn God’s favor. And so in chapter 4 Paul defends the gospel of faith righteousness against the notion of legal righteousness or works righteousness and he uses Abraham as his proof.

The answer is three objections to the doctrine. The first in verses 1 through 8 which we considered last week that salvation is by works. Paul deals with that by citing Genesis 15:6 where there is no mention of works. It simply states that Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. He was justified by faith. He was forgiven of his sin and he was accepted by God as righteousness in his sight. Now in verses 9 through 17 Paul answers two more objections.

The first has to do with circumcision. Paul had been in many discussions, many debates in the synagogues and he could anticipate what the next objection would be. He could probably have anticipated that because he himself was a Jew, he knew how the Jew thought, he himself had been a Pharisee. He was a Hebrew of the Hebrews. And so he anticipates that the next objection would be about circumcision which was very important. Circumcision was the badge and is the badge of Jewish identity. It is required of every male Jew. It all began with Abraham. He was the

first of that line to be circumcised and so it was argued that his example shows that circumcision is necessary for salvation.

And no doubt Paul had the objection raised to him after he had cited Genesis 15:6, yes, Paul, it’s true. Abraham believe we all recognize that but you forgotten something, Abraham was also circumcised. That is necessary; that is important. And of course he was. The event of his circumcision is recorded for us in Genesis 17 when God again appeared to Abraham and in appearing to him He renewed the covenant that He had made with Abraham and reaffirm the promise that He had given.

At that time God changed his name from Abram which means exalted father to Abraham which means father of a multitude even though at that time Abraham still did not have the promised child Isaac who would be born through Sarah. She was 90 years of age at that time. She was barren. Abraham was 99, well past the age for producing children. But God promised to make him fruitful to fulfill the promise that He had given to him to make of him a multitude of nations. Then he give him the rite of circumcision which is the cutting away of flesh, the foreskin of the body picturing purity, the separation of the fleshly or the evil nature. It identified members of the covenant.

So the objection which Paul knew was on the Jewish mind was since God gave it circumcision must have merit. It must be essential for salvation. And so Paul answers this second objection with a lesson from history. He asks the question about the order of these events, when did they happen, what was their sequence, when was Abraham justified and when was he circumcised? The justification occurred before or after the rite of circumcision was given to him. Paul answers that in verse 10 that Abraham was justified before he was circumcised. His justification occurred in Genesis 15, his circumcision in Genesis 17, some 14 years later. So obviously circumcision contributed nothing to Abraham’s salvation. The two events were separated from one another by many years.

But to say they were separated from one another does not mean that they unrelated to each other. Circumcision was not, is not the basis for salvation, was not the basis for Abraham’s justification, but it did have value. And in verse 11 Paul explains the significance of circumcision as being both a sign and seal of salvation. That’s how Paul describes it, Abraham received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the

righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised. As a sign, circumcision pointed to something, to a reality beyond itself. That’s what a sign does. That’s how it functions.

And we can give various examples. A very common example, one that we see all the time, is the signs along the streets and highways that we travel. There are all kinds of signs. There’s signs about the speed limit. They give us direction as to how fast we can go. There are signs that mark an exit or a location, signs with names that identifies streets. The street signs are not the streets themselves. That’s obvious enough. They’re only signs that point to the street, that identify the street, that identify the exit that’s to be taken or the location that we are seeking. And the sign of circumcision did the same thing. It pointed to a spiritual reality without being that reality. They pointed to the covenant relationship that Abraham had entered with God through faith.

It was a testimony to justifying faith. It wasn’t the means to justification, just a reminder of faith’s righteousness and certainly nothing for anyone to boast about. The one who’s circumcised doesn’t circumcise himself. He’s the object of it. He’s the recipient of it. There’s nothing in that rite which would lead one to boast. Circumcision is just a sign, a pointer, an indicator or something. A circumcision was also a seal, Paul says, of the righteousness of the faith.

Seal authenticates the genuineness of something. When the government stamps the United States seal on a document like a passport, that means it’s official. It’s the real thing. When a graduate receives a diploma, it has the school’s seal stamped on it. It is official, it is genuine. That seal doesn’t make the student a graduate. It simply authenticates that he or she is. The school has given that affirmation, that validation and circumcision as a seal authenticated Abraham’s righteousness. It didn’t make him righteous. He was declared righteous long before that seal was given.

Circumcision was the official validation. It reminded Abraham that he had been justified, that he was a member of the covenant, that he was in this unique relationship with the Lord and it assured him that all of the promises that God gave to him within that relationship would be fulfilled. So Abraham received two gifts, justification and circumcision in that order. First justification by faith when he was uncircumcised, then circumcision much later as a visible sign of his justification. But

the Jews had reinterpreted circumcision so that instead of being a sign and seal of righteousness, it became a means of obtaining righteousness.

It’s not unusual. That is not something that is a particularly Jewish trait. It’s common to human nature. People want to gain some kind of merit for what they do. They want to invest something with some kind of value that it maybe does not have in order to be able to take some kind of credit for what is done. And people have done the same with baptism. It is only a sign of our justification. It is done to show that a believer in Jesus Christ has been identified with Him in His death, burial and resurrection. In baptism we are testifying that we’re identified with Him, that we are new creatures in Jesus Christ. Justification happens first, and then as a public testimony of our faith, we are baptized.

Now that is very clear from the New Testament and particularly from the examples that we find in the Book of Acts. In Acts 10, for example, Cornelius and the gentiles had gathered in his home there in Caesarea. The apostle Peter had come down from Joppa and preached to them the gospel. And as they heard the gospel, they believed and suddenly the Holy Spirit fell upon them and they began to speak in tongues. All of the Jewish believers with Peter were amazed when that happened. It meant that gentiles could be saved apart from becoming Jews. It meant that gentiles could be saved without circumcision. It meant that salvation has nothing to do with rites and ceremonies.

And so Peter said, “Surely no one can refuse the water for these to be baptized who have received the Holy Spirit just as we,” can he? Well, obviously not. No one can receive the water of baptism because these people had already received the Holy Spirit. They were already saved which means they were saved before they were baptized. Baptism did not add a thing to their salvation and they were saved in a state of uncircumcision just as Abraham had been saved.

To say that a person is saved by faith plus a ceremony, by faith plus baptism is essentially no different from saying that a person must be circumcised in order to be saved. Now that’s a dangerous thing to do because that is what is called the Galatian Heresy is what Paul wrote against in the Book of Galatians is what he calls another gospel which is not another. It is a different gospel; it is a false gospel and Paul pronounced an anathema, a curse on those who preach it, even, he says, if that preacher is an angel in heaven or an apostle, Galatians 1:6-9.

And the whole point of Paul’s argument here in Romans 4 is that salvation is by faith plus nothing. It is through faith alone in Christ alone. That is proved by the fact that Abraham was justified by faith and circumcised only much later. In fact, that sequence of events was intended so that Abraham would be the father of all who truly believe, both Jews and Gentiles. His salvation, while uncircumcised was to teach gentiles of future ages that they can have the righteousness that he had, the righteousness that is through faith and that circumcision has no bearing on that, the circumcision is no more necessary for them than it was for Abraham. He is the father of all who believe. He is the father of gentiles who believe, gentiles who are not circumcised. He is the father of Jews also, the father of all who believe.

Circumcision doesn’t cause justification, but circumcision doesn’t prevent it either. It was intended actually as a help. It was intended to remind the Jews of the way of salvation, to remind them of faith righteousness. And so in verse 12 to guard against the idea that maybe circumcision is bad, that maybe circumcision is a hindrance, Paul adds that Abraham is the father of circumcision, that is of Jews, who, in addition to their circumcision, also, he writes, follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised.

So while circumcision adds nothing to salvation, it is not an obstacle to salvation. What is necessary is to follow the example of Abraham’s faith. He is the father of all who believe. Now to say that he is the father of all who believe doesn’t mean that Abraham is the first man to have been justified. There were multitudes before Abraham who were justified: Adam, Eve, Abel, Seth, Enoch, Noah, many others. But Abraham’s salvation is the first instance in which the way of salvation is made clear. It is the case in which God explicitly states that people are justified, they are saved by faith.

This expression, “Follow in the steps of our father Abraham,” is very picturesque. It gives us a good idea of his life and what we are to do. And it has the idea of marching in a file, in a single line. John Murray in his commentary on the Book of Romans writes, “Abraham is conceived of as a leader of the band and we walk not abreast but in a file following in the footprints left by Abraham.” I have a picture in my mind of school children in Romania walking in a single file across that long field as they follow that path or maybe of an army that marches in single file following its leader or its guide. And that’s what we do with Abraham. We follow in

his footsteps which are the footsteps of faith. And those who follow him and call him father are those who believe as he did.

That’s what it means to follow in Abraham’s steps. Believe. Trust in Christ. This image of walking in his footsteps gives us a good picture of what salvation means, the whole picture of salvation. It begins with simple faith, but we’re wrong if we understand salvation as merely an act of faith in which we believed initially and then that’s sort of it, just a past back to believing. It’s not that. Salvation is a walk of faith. It is a walk in this life toward a final destination.

Abraham was a pilgrim, he’s described in that way in the Book of Hebrews in chapter 11. He was a Pilgrim in this world, but he didn’t want aimlessly in this world. His life was not a nomadic existence. He lived as a nomad, it’s true, but spiritually he was a pilgrim. He was going somewhere. He was marching, as the author of Hebrews tell us, to a city which has foundations whose architect and builder is God. The life he began by faith, he continued by faith until he arrived at the heavenly city.

It’s the same for every believer in Jesus Christ. We begin by faith alone and we persevere in the faith to the very end. Not in our own strength, not in our own ability but in the strength and in the grace of God. That is what characterized Abraham’s journey of faith. It was all of grace. You study out his life and you see from beginning to end God took the initiative. When he called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees Abraham was in darkness. He was an idolater living among idolaters. God chose him.

From eternity past he set his love on this man was not Abraham in Ur thinking about God, becoming more and more enlightened and God saw that and smiled upon that and chose him. No. From all eternity God set his love on this man, this idolater. Chosen, He called him out of Ur and Abraham obeyed, he went out. God led him to Canaan. He promised the land to him as his inheritance. He promised him a multitude of descendants, he promised to make of him kings and nations. Abraham didn’t ask for that blessing, God promised that independent of Abraham. All of that was God’s doing.

When Abraham was justified in Genesis 15, God came to him. God appeared to him, repeated His promise of a descendent. Abraham believed and he was justified. He was all of grace. When Abraham and Sarah finally had the child promised, Isaac, they were both well past the age of producing children. Sarah herself

was barren, but God gave ability so the promise would be fulfilled. From beginning to end, all that Abraham was and did was of God. It was his work. What Abraham did was respond. He believed and he obeyed. It’s the same for every believer. From beginning to end, God takes the initiative. It’s His work of grace.

So following in Abraham’s steps is responding in faith to God’s gracious initiative. It is beginning by faith and persevering in that faith to the very end until entering the heavenly city. That’s the way of salvation, faith in Christ from beginning to end. That’s Abraham’s path. It’s not a way of ceremonies, it’s not a way of rituals, it’s not a way of works. Now if you study the Christian life then you know what the instruction, the New Testament is. You know that there are ceremonies, there are ordinances, we have baptism. We have the Lord’s Supper. We celebrate those on Sunday night. They’re very important, they have a place, but they don’t add to our salvation.

Salvation is not condition upon those. We do them as saved people in obedience to our Lord and to his instruction. But to look at the path of salvation, to follow in the steps of Abraham, the steps of faith, we don’t see works, we don’t see ceremonies, it is simply faith alone in Christ alone, trusting in Him. Not faith plus. Not faith plus circumcision or baptism. It is faith plus nothing. That is what Abraham teaches us, that is why he is the father of all who believe. And all of chapter 4 has been a defense of that. He has demonstrated, Paul has, from scripture from Genesis 15:6 and from history, from the sequence of events that Abraham was not just defined by works or by ceremonies.

Now in the next verses Paul broadens his defense to explain that salvation is not by law, whether by the law of Moses or by any code or standard that a gentile might have lived by. The reason is law, by nature, is contrary to the faith that Abraham had and contrary to the promise that God had given to him. It is like oil and water, the two do not mix. Or light and darkness. Law and faith, law and promise are contrary to one another. Paul begins in verse 13 by stating the promise that God made that Abraham would be heir of the world, that Abraham and all of his descendants would inherit the earth. And as the author of Hebrews tells us, Abraham believed that promise, he lived by that promise all through his life. He was looking for that city whose builder and maker is God. He lived out his life in light of that promise with faith in it.

But that promise was not given on the condition of Abraham keeping a law. It is not through the law, Paul says, but through the righteousness of faith. Then in verses 14 and 15 Paul shows the negative consequences that would follow were the law imposed upon the promise or were the law added to faith and what he shows is that first of all, the law would make faith void. The two are opposites. The law requires work in order to receive its wage. Faith is just the opposite. It simply receives a gift. Abraham was justified by faith. But if the promise is fulfilled by law, then that faith is void. It cancels out. Secondly, it would nullify the promise, Paul says. And the reason is because, as Paul has already demonstrated, in 3:20, but really, we can go back to 1:18 through 3:20, no one is justified by the law.

No one can keep the law. Whether that law is a code of conduct that the gentile had or whether it’s the law of Moses that the Jew had, no one keeps the law. No one can. So if the fulfilment of the promise of inheriting the world is dependent on law keeping, then the promise will go unfulfilled. No one can do that. Dr. David Martin Lloyd Jones who was for many years the senior minister at Westminster Chapel in London in his commentary on this text writes, “Law means failure. Therefore, if a promise had been made through the medium of the law, what God was giving, as it were, with His right hand He would be taking back with His left hand. There would have been no promise at all. It would have had no value whatsoever.”

The law would not produce the promise, can’t produce the promise, it would nullify it. What it would produce is given in verse 15: wrath. That’s the third consequence of salvation by law or imposing a law on promise. And it’s the reason that the promise could not be produced, could not occur by law keeping. The law brings about wrath Paul says. That’s why the law was given. A law was not given in order to be obeyed. Now it’s stated in that way, it’s stated ideally as a way of achieving salvation, but as soon as one gets on that path, as soon as one seeks to arrive at the heavenly city by perfection, because that’s what the law requires, one finds very quickly that they’ve fallen off the path. They cannot do it.

The law was given to show us that we can’t do the law, that we can’t keep it. It was given to show people their sin, given to show them their need of a savior. The statement that Paul makes here where there is no law there, there’s also no violation answers the question, well, how does the law work wrath? How does that occur? And it does that by exposing sin. If there’s no law, then there’s no violation. Now

corruption is there, people are still sinful, but their sinfulness is not exposed. But whenever law is imposed, whenever a law is established, then there will be violation, there will be transgression. And as a result of that there will be wrath, punishment will follow.

So the law makes the promise impossible. The two are opposites. The law imposes obligations for fulfillment, promise does not. The law says you shall, the promise says I will. The law lays obligations upon us, the promise gives the obligations to God. And since men cannot keep the law, the only way for the promise to be fulfilled, for the inheritance of the world to become a reality, to be obtained is by God making it a free gift, giving by grace and having it received by faith. That is what Paul states in verse 16, “For this reason it is by faith in order that it may be in accordance with grace so that the promise would be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only those who are of the law but also those who are of the faith of Abraham who is the father of us all.”

Salvation in any way dependent on our merit or our effort or our goodness or our obedience and salvation would be completely unattainable and we would be hopelessly lost. But when salvation is dependent on God alone and His grace, His unmerited favor, then it is absolutely certain. It is guaranteed, as Paul writes, because He is faithful and His promises cannot fail. And so Paul writes that the promise is by faith in accordance with grace.

Faith is the only act that could be in accordance with grace, consistent with grace because grace gives and faith receives. Faith does nothing of merit. Faith doesn’t achieve. It simply receives what God offers. And faith is all that God required of Abraham when the promise was given. God never asked Abraham to keep a law. He never imposed a law on him in order to have the promise. He gave the promise unconditionally.

Go back and read Genesis 15 and how the covenant was established, how the animals were all sacrificed, they were all laid out in a line, but when God appeared in that flaming fire, only He passed through those animals. Abraham did not. The promise that He made to Abraham was unconditional and Abraham believed Him, trusted in Him. That’s salvation by grace through faith. Because it is by faith, salvation is open to all. It’s open to the Jew and the gentile alike. There are no

conditions. That’s the gospel. And it has always been the gospel in the New Testament as well as in the Old Testament.

Isaiah 55:1, I could give a number of examples but this says it so well, “Every one who thirsts, come to the waters; And you who have no money come, buy and eat. Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost.” How do you buy without money? You simply receive as a gift. And what Isaiah is saying in these figures, all the wonderful things of life, picture the great spiritual things that are offered to us and they are for us free of charge. That is free grace.

Faith alone, is Paul’s emphasis here. This is what he’s stressing throughout Romans 4. He stresses the priority of faith in Abraham’s salvation. Now in verse 17 he explains the nature of that faith, the reasonableness of his faith. The God he believed in is the God who, Paul writes, gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist. Genuine faith, biblical faith is not unreasonable. People have this idea about faith, tend to think scientists don’t have faith, they work according to the scientific method. They proof out everything and believe what they have proven. Failing to see that scientists begin with faith. They begin with faith in themselves and their research and the data that they have and all kinds of things.

Everybody lives by faith, but people tend to think faith is a religious concept and it’s irrational. It believes contrary to the evidence, it believes whatever one wants to believe, something that is beyond any kind of verification. It’s irrational. Faith is not. It’s not unreasonable. It’s not unrational. It’s always reasonable to trust a person who is reliable. And that’s what Abraham did in trusting in the Lord. God revealed Himself to Abraham. What Abraham believed was a revelation. God actually appeared to him, He revealed himself to Abraham and Abraham believed in the Lord. He believed the promises that God made to him.

In Genesis 17:5 which is what Paul quotes here, the first part of the verse of verse 17, God told Abraham that he would make him a father of many nations. Even though Abraham was 99 years of age, even though Sarah was 90 and barren, past the age of producing children, Abraham believed that promise. Was not an irrational act on his part. He believed that promise because Abraham knew God and he knew things about God and specifically two attributes are what Abraham trusted in and those attributes are God’s power and God’s faithfulness. He knew God was well able

to do what he says and he knew that God being God is faithful. God is the creator. God calls into being that which does not exist.

So Paul says, and that recalls Genesis 1, and God’s creation of all things ex nihilo, creation out of nothing. And God is not like us. We do not create. Creation is out of nothing. We make things. We form and fashion things, but what we make is already in existence, we simply manipulate it. God begins with nothing and calls it into being. Now a god who does that can do anything. Nothing is too difficult for Him. He can raise the dead. And Abraham believed that. He believed that God would give him a son and a multitude of descendants even though he was as good as dead, dead to that ability of producing children. He believed that God is able and he believed that God would do it because God keeps His promises.

Ultimately, that promise that was given to Abraham is one of spiritual descendants, that’s what the descendants mentioned in verse 16 referred to. God’s grace, Paul said, guaranteed the salvation of those descendants. They would be given to Abraham, he’s promised a multitude of descendants and God promises that they’re going to be saved, promises that they will believe. And down through the ages men and men would follow in Abraham’s footsteps of faith. That path has become well-worn because of grace.

That is the sole reason that people see the truth, that people understand the gospel and believe it and keep believing to the end. The omnipotent power of God, God’s omnipotence and the grace of God, His power and His faithfulness. Paul put it in different words but with the same idea in Philippians 1:6 where he says, “For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus.” Well, that’s the same faith that Abraham had. God begins the work of salvation and He accomplishes, He never fails. The work that He began, He finishes because He’s all powerful and He’s completely faithful.

The almighty power of God who created all things out of nothing and raised the dead, raised His own son, glorified Him, can give spiritual life to dead sinners. That’s how we’re described in our own natural self, we are dead and trespasses in sins, don’t have any ability in and of ourselves. That’s no obstacle to God; God can do anything. God can do what is for us impossible. He can give life to the dead sinner, give life to the worst of sinners and in fact, He does that. That’s how great the grace of God is. The God in whom Abraham believed.

It’s one of the lessons of this passage. God is great. God is able to do what we cannot do. God is faithful. There are a number of lessons. Let me just give three. First God has given a great promise and that is the promise that He gave to Abraham and to the multitudes of his descendants that they would be heirs of the world. That is the promise of eternal life. That is the promise of a glorious future. The God who created the world out of nothing will recreate it into something glorious beyond comprehension, something that will not fade away, something that will not be tarnished, will never fall again. God will do that. Everything will be new, everything will be joyful. God will wipe away every tear from their eyes and there will no longer be any death. There were no longer be any mourning or crying or pain. Revelation 21:4.

That’s the future. And it should give us perspective on this present life on the world in which we live which is presently passing away. The life to come will not pass away. It is real, God has promised it to all who believe in Christ. That’s the second lesson. The heirs of the world to come are those who believe. God’s way of salvation and method of justification is very simple, it is suited to all men. It is not restricted to one nation or one group. It is not bound by ceremonial regulations. A person doesn’t have to put himself or herself under a legal system in order to be saved. What is required is faith, believing in the Lord Jesus Christ as the one who died for sinners and receiving Him as savior and Lord.

And thirdly, those who do believe, those who have salvation are absolutely secure. It’s all of grace, it’s not of works. We no more keep ourselves saved than we get ourselves saved. It’s all of God from beginning to end. That is Paul’s meaning in verse 16. God promised Abraham’s descendants, they are his elect ones, they guarantee the promise of being heirs of the world. He made salvation be of grace. And he’s absolutely faithful. So we can rest in him. We can rejoice in our salvation.

Salvation which is a gift. That’s what sovereign grace gives, not complacency, but joy and peace in the Lord. And the desire to live a new life, live the life that God has given us. People don’t become complacent when they realize they’ve received a gift. That’s sometimes the charge of the idea that we are eternally secure, but remember also, those who are secure are changed. They’re new creatures in Christ. They have a new attitude, a new perspective on life.

And Paul will deal with that in chapter 6, “Shall we sin that grace might abound? May it never be! How shall we who have died to sin still live in it?” We’re new creatures in Christ. So we have a natural aversion to sin. Grace produces that and grace produces gratitude and appreciation for what God has done and it gives us a desire to serve Him, gives us new perspective, a desire to please God and to live for what really matters, to live for what’s eternal.

Christ tells us to store up treasures in heaven where the moth and rust cannot destroy. That’s a wise life and that’s the kind of life that a person who’s regenerated, who’s a believer in Jesus Christ has, that new perspective. Have you experienced God’s grace? Do you know that the promise God has given is made to you? Is it yours? You know that, you have that promise if you’re a believer in Jesus Christ. But if you are here without Christ and you sensed that you are lost, the directions are simple.

Paul gives them here. Follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham. Those steps lead to the golden city. They’re the way to salvation. So if you’re here without Christ, trust in Him. Don’t trust in yourself, don’t think you’ve got anything good that can commend you to God. Don’t think about your baptism as though that has some merit with Him. Don’t think about your honesty or whatever you might muster up as some good thing that you can offer God because He accepts none of it. He tells you to accept what He has, receive it by faith and faith alone. Trust in the Lord Jesus Christ as your savior, believe in Him and you will be saved. That’s the promise for all, Jew and gentile alike, male, female, slave, free, whoever it may be. Great sinner that you may be, trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. God saves. May God help you to do that and help all who have done that to rejoice in the grace of God, gift of life that He’s given us and the great future that’s ours. Let’s pray.

[Prayer] Father, we thank you for your goodness and your grace. Reminded of that in this text. Wasn’t circumcision, any ceremony that saved Abraham any more than it saved Cornelius and the gentiles in his household. It doesn’t save anyone. Grace saves. Christ, through His work on the cross, saves and we as sinners, helpless that we are, we simply receive that gift. Thank you, Father, for the gift of life in Christ. Thank you for salvation. Thank you for the Lord Jesus and it’s in His name we pray. Amen.