

“That the Promise May Be Certain”  
(Romans 4:13-16)

I. Introduction.

A. Illustration:

1. How can you make sure someone receives something you want them to have, without rejecting it?
2. Answer:
  - a. First, there must be no conditions that the recipient has to meet on his own.
    - (i) It must be completely paid for.
    - (ii) And it must be freely given with no strings attached.
  - b. Second, the person’s heart has to be inclined towards it.
    - (i) It can’t be something he doesn’t want.
    - (ii) It especially can’t be something he hates.
3. These are the two obstacles that God had to overcome to bring us salvation.
  - a. He had to pay for it.
    - (i) We couldn’t pay for it.
    - (ii) So He paid for it in Christ.
    - (iii) Now He can offer it to us freely.
  - b. He also had to change our hearts.
    - (i) The fact is we hated God when we came into this world.
    - (ii) But He even changed our hearts, so we would receive His gift.
    - (iii) God does it all that it might be all of grace, and He receive all the glory.
    - (vi) And as we’ve seen, if by grace, it can’t be by works.

B. Review:

1. Abraham believed, and God reckoned it to him as righteousness.
2. David spoke of forgiveness, apart from works.
3. Last week, Paul showed us that Abraham was declared just before circumcised.
4. This morning, he will show us that God’s promise to Abraham that he would inherit the world did not come through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.

II. Sermon.

A. First, God made to Abraham a promise: “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” (v. 13).

1. He actually made him three promises:
  - a. God promised to give him a seed.
  - b. That all nations would be blessed through that seed.
  - c. But He also promised him and his descendants the land of Canaan.
2. But notice in our passage that the promise has expanded to the world.
  - a. Canaan was the kingdom of God, a type of heaven.
  - b. But one day that kingdom will encompass the whole earth, especially the new earth.
  - c. And so the inheritance God promised is really the new earth or eternal kingdom of God.
  - d. That’s why Jesus says, “Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5).
  - e. Those who are of faith inherit the reality, not just the type.

- B. But that promise did not depend on Abraham’s works, but the righteousness of faith: “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*” (v. 13).
1. The promise to Abraham and his seed was not through law.
    - a. Now it’s true that Abraham was called to walk before God perfectly. Moses writes, “Now when Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said to him, ‘I am God Almighty; walk before Me, and be blameless. And I will establish My covenant between Me and you, and I will multiply you exceedingly’” (Gen. 17:1-2).
    - b. But this was not the basis upon which God gave him the promise.
      - (i) If Abraham’s obedience was the basis upon which the promise was made, salvation would come through law, through works.
      - (ii) Remember, the promise to Abraham was to be the heir of the world, which means the new earth, which means salvation.
      - (iii) His obedience was not the basis, but it was the necessary fruit that must be in Abraham’s life if he was to receive the promise.
      - (iv) But it was a fruit that God produced in him, as He does in all His children.
  2. The true basis of the promise is the righteousness of faith.
    - a. This is the righteousness which comes through faith in Christ – His righteousness.
    - b. Christ is the only one who has earned the promise. Therefore, only those in Him may receive it.
    - c. He is the seed through whom the nations would be blessed.
- C. Now the point is: If God wanted to make certain Abraham would receive the promise, it had to be received by faith (vv. 14-16).
1. Law and faith are opposites.
    - a. “For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified” (v. 14).
      - (i) Why is it nullified?
      - (ii) Because under law you get what you work for.
      - (iii) Under faith, you receive what someone else has done for you.
    - b. What would we earn if we were under law?
      - (i) We would get wrath, “For the Law brings about wrath” (v. 15).
      - (ii) Not because there is anything wrong with the Law, but with us.
      - (iii) We’re sinners; all we do is sin; therefore, the Law can only condemn us.
  2. But if the principle of law is removed as the basis of inheriting the promise, then there is no principle to violate, and therefore, no wrath.
    - a. “But where there is no law, there also is no violation” (v. 15).
    - b. If salvation depended in any way on our works, we would fail.
    - c. But Paul will show us when we have faith, we are removed from our marriage to the Law and married to Christ (Rom. 7:4).
    - d. We are no longer under the Law *to be justified or condemned*.
      - (i) Therefore, we can’t violate it.
      - (ii) We can’t fail to be justified, because it depends now on Christ.
      - (iii) This doesn’t mean we can throw the Law away, with regard to obedience.
      - (iv) But it does mean we can set it aside with regard to justification.
  3. This was the only way God could guarantee that Abraham would receive the promise: *through faith*.
    - a. “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” (v. 16).

- b. There might have been another way: He could have made us all perfect.
  - (i) If there had been no fall, everyone would have received this blessing.
  - (ii) But once He decided to allow the Fall – which He did, as we saw last week to glorify His name, His attributes – this was the only way.
  - (iii) Someone else had to obey, to pay the price, we couldn’t.
  - (iv) And it had to be given freely.
  - (v) It also had to be received freely, or it might not have been received at all, which is why He also gave us His Spirit to change our hearts.

4. The message to the Jews here is clear:

- a. Cast away your righteousness, turn away from any principle of law to save you, and look to God for His righteousness in Christ.
- b. God didn’t give you the Law to save you, but to show you your need of the Savior.
- c. The Law isn’t enough. You need Christ.
- d. And the Law isn’t necessary to save you: a Gentile may come to Christ and be saved without being under the Law.

### III. Application:

A. If the promise of inheriting the world/salvation was to be certain to Abraham and his descendants, it had to be by faith, as we’ve seen.

- 1. Any law would fail.
- 2. It would fail because we would fail.
- 3. It had to be by faith.
- 4. This makes the promise certain.

B. I would ask you again this morning, are you under law or under grace?

- 1. Do you obey hoping that God will accept you?
- 2. Or do you obey knowing that He has through Christ?
- 3. Make sure that it is Christ’s works you’re trusting and not your own.
  - a. Cast your own righteousness away, your own good works – God won’t accept them.
  - b. Hold fast to Christ and His righteousness, for He will accept this.

C. This evening, we’ll see a good example of a man who trusted his own righteousness.

- 1. This is what the church told him to do.
- 2. But he found out that it would not bring him peace with God.
- 3. Only Christ can do that. Amen.