

“ABRAHAM, FATHER OF US ALL BY GRACE.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

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Scripture Texts: Romans 4:13-17

Introduction.

Paul is continuing to build his case that we are justified and saved only by grace through faith and this is a gift from God. Paul brought two expert witnesses to the stand, Abraham and David, and then he brought Abraham back and made clear circumcision and uncircumcision were nothing. It had nothing to do with Abraham's justification by faith.

Now having dealt with that one aspect of the law, Paul now takes on the whole law. It was not through any of the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise he would be heir of the world.

Abraham received the promise 430 years before the law was given to Moses, so the promise is not conditioned on obedience to the law.

God made a promise.

Abraham believed the promise.

God fulfilled the promise based on Abraham's faith, by grace, not by his law keeping.

We will consider this morning the content of the promise, how the promise is received, and who the recipients of the promise are.

What is the content of the promise, heir of the world, vs. 13.

I have a good friend who has received a very large inheritance. He is a believer, so he is of course very thankful and grateful for what he has received. But he is also very sobered and concerned. He knows the power of money. Money in our wallet or purse is a good thing, money in our heart is a bad thing.

He is thinking very seriously, carefully and prayerfully how to handle what God has given to him. He will give ten percent off the top, but that isn't the end of his stewardship of what God has given to him. He believes it is all God's, not just the ten percent, so he wants to honor and glorify God with it all.

That is wisdom for all of us, because all of us are heirs of one of two inheritances, and how we think about them and what we do with them matters for all eternity.

We are all heirs of Adam but we can also become the heirs of Abraham. By birth we all have inherited Adam's sin and Adam's future, death. But by grace and faith we can be adopted to become heirs of Abraham.

I am aware of this every time I stand by a grave with a group of people, like I did yesterday at Christie Neily's graveside service. There are always two groups of people at a funeral, two groups of inheritors. I am not thinking of the financial inheritance, but the spiritual inheritance. The seriousness of death motivates me to try to get people's attention.

To put it in the words of our text the two inheritors are the heirs of wrath or heirs of the world. Those are the two futures we all face.

What does it mean to inherit the world? Isn't inheriting the world a bad thing? Didn't Jesus what does it profit a man to gain the world and lose his soul? Don't we want rather to inherit heaven? That's a fair question. It depends on what we understand by world.

Adam was heir to the world until he lost it at the fall. We all start out as heirs of Adam, inheriting what Adam inherited, sin and death. In Ephesians Paul calls this children of wrath.

God's promise to Abraham and his offspring was he would be heir of the world.

How is Abraham heir, what is he heir of? That exact phrase is not in the OT, so where did Paul get that idea?

Four times in Genesis God made huge, sweeping, staggering promises to Abraham.

Genesis 12:2-3 I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. 3 ... and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

Genesis 17:7-8 I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your descendants after you. 8 I will give to you and to your descendants after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.

Genesis 22:17 I will greatly bless you, and I will greatly multiply your seed as the stars of the heavens and as the sand which is on the seashore; and your seed shall possess the gate of their enemies.

God promised Abraham would have a numerous posterity, a vast multitude of descendants, of natural and spiritual seed, offspring.

God promised Abraham would have God as his God and the God of his descendants forever.

God promised Abraham would have an everlasting possession, earthly and heavenly.

God promised Abraham a future and a hope, eternal security, his enemies crushed.

Notice the present and future emphasis of all the promises. Everlasting covenant, everlasting possession, God will be God to Abraham and his future generations, physical and spiritual.

Galatians 3:16 The promises were made to Abraham and to his offspring. It does not say, “And to offsprings,” referring to many, but referring to one, “And to your offspring,” who is Christ.

The promise made to Abraham’s seed, included Christ, the seed of woman who would crush the head of the serpent.

All these promises are not just for the Jews in Israel, these are promises Paul sees fulfilled in the Messiah, Jesus Christ. Jesus is Lord of all nations and all the earth, Jesus will reign until He has put to death all His enemies.

Last week I quoted Galatians 3:29 and it applies even more clearly now. “If you belong to Christ (that is, the Messiah), then you are Abraham's descendants, heirs according to promise.”

In you are in Christ, if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham’s descendants, and that means you are heirs of the world promised to Abraham, a promised fulfilled by Christ.

Now what does that mean?

Hebrews 1:2 In these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things.

I Corinthians 3:21-23 All things are yours, 22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas *or the world* or life or death or the present or the future—*all are yours*, 23 and you are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s.

Can you imagine being heir to a super rich person? That is what we are. The richest person in the universe makes us His heirs. Everything that is His is ours. This is what it means to be an heir of the world.

So where is it? Practically speaking we are like a child who is going to one day inherit it all. It is in trust, it is promised. Like it was for Abraham.

Hebrews 11:10 For he was looking forward to the city that has foundations, whose designer and builder is God.

All the promises to Abraham point to a future inheritance, a new heaven and a new earth. All that belongs to Christ will be ours.

I Peter 1:3-5 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, 5 who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

But it is not just future, it is now as well.

I Peter 2:9-10 You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. 10 Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.

Do you hear the promises made to Abraham, fulfilled in all who have Abraham's faith. Chosen race, chosen by God; royalty, from Abraham would come kings, a holy nation, from you would come nations, a spiritual kingdom; possessed by God, God's people, by mercy, grace.

This should have an impact on us, far more than inheriting ten million dollars would. We should have joy, peace, hope. No fear or doubt about our future, even in the present, temporary trials and struggles. Let this be the solid ground under your feet, under your faith.

This table is our reminder we are heirs. God's promises are fulfilled here. We aren't just invited into God's house to eat at the servant's table or the guest table, but at His table as sons.

Like that incredible display of grace when King David invited Mephibosheth, the relative of the defeated King Saul, to come into his palace and eat at his table with his sons. What grace, what glory, what an inheritance.

Ephesians 2:3-6 [We] were *by nature children of wrath*, like the rest of mankind. 4 But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved— 6 and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, 7 so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.

Every believer in Christ is an heir. Whenever you hear the word “heir,” it speaks of something good. It speaks of an inheritance you don’t work for, an inheritance that is yours not because of what you do, but because of *whose* you are, heirs of the world.

How will the promise be fulfilled?

Not by the law, vss. 14-15

What would happen if our salvation depended on our keeping all the law of God?

What would happen if our eternal inheritance depended on our good works?

What would happen if the promises of God were conditioned on our goodness?

What if God only adopted into His family, as His heirs, those who deserved it, those who performed up to His standard of acceptance?

Faith would be nullified, and the promise would be void.

God’s promises to us are worthless if they depend on our keeping the law, because there is no one who can keep the law. God’s promises to us are empty if they are based on a condition that we can’t meet, they will never be fulfilled.

We would have no confidence, no certainty, no peace of mind, no hope. We would be riddled with doubt, anxiety. Hope of salvation would vanish as an impossibility.

This is the very hopelessness and fear and doubt the entire world lives under without Christ. This is why every other religion and religious sect is based on works, ceaseless striving, trying harder to be better and do better. Every sin sinks us deeper into fear and anxiety and an urgency to pursue more penance, more self-punishment, more self-atonement.

The only thing the law does is increase our wrath, and remove the promise.

But only by grace, vss. 16-17

The inheritance is received by grace. The reason the promise doesn't depend on the keeping of the law, is so that it may rest on God doing it, and because it rests on God, it can be guaranteed for all who believe. God is the one who determines how His promise would be fulfilled.

The adoption we have by faith is secure, it is based on the goodness and grace of God which is unchanging. This is why we sing:

My Hope is Built on Nothing Less

My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness
I dare not trust the sweetest frame
But wholly lean on Jesus' name.

Rock of Ages

Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling;
Naked, come to Thee for dress,
Helpless, look to Thee for grace:

Not the labors of my hands
can fulfill thy law's demands;
could my zeal no respite know,
could my tears forever flow,
all for sin could not atone;
thou must save, and thou alone.

Who are the recipients of the promise?

It is like the Jews were contesting Abraham's will, saying that the Gentiles have no legal rights because they haven't kept the law, they aren't legitimate children, heirs.

So once again, Paul makes clear, to the Jews who are followers of Christ that those who imitate Abraham's faith, without having the law, are of the faith, are adopted according to the promise.

All who have Abraham as their father. All who by faith believe God's grace given to us in Christ. All who make Christ the object of their faith.

Abraham can be father of us all because he is not a father based on the law or those who keep the law. He is the father of believing Gentiles and believing Jews.

Implications and application.

What inheritance do you want, Adam's or Abraham's? Turn your back on Adam's inheritance, every day make that choice. However appealing, attractive, inviting, seemingly pleasing. It is worthless, no, worse than worthless, it promises only eternal misery.

By faith because of God's grace trust and receive His promise in Abraham. Make Abraham's inheritance yours by faith. Don't neglect or despise God's gift of grace. Who says no to an inheritance?

Has the righteousness of God been credited to your account? Do you trust Christ to cover your sins and to be God's righteousness for you?

This meal reminds us of the gift of God, the grace of God, the righteousness of God, the wonderful promise of God; who we are in Christ. "A chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession." This meal is given to us to feed and strengthen our faith and our hope. Joyfully remember and believe.

Prayer: Holy Father, thank you that through Abraham's seed, Jesus Christ we can be heir of the world, of all that is yours. Thank you that we have such a rich inheritance not because we have done anything to deserve it, but because Jesus qualified us through His death and resurrection. And since Jesus died to give us this wonderful inheritance, we can go out into this world in joy, peace, hope and faith, trusting our souls to your grace and mercy. In Jesus name, amen.