

## Blessedness for All

Isaiah 42:1-13

Isaiah 42:14-25

Psalms 116 1:-9

So far throughout this letter written to the believers in Rome Paul has been addressing the issue of whether one must be a Jew to be fully right with God. As we had seen when we went through some of Paul's other writings over the years it seems that the biggest issue that he faced was the idea that one must follow in the traditions and practices of Judaism to be truly right with God. We especially saw this in Galatians chapter 3, "Oh foolish Galatians who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? This only I want to learn from you, did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith? Are you so foolish? Having begun in the Spirit are you now being made perfect by the flesh?" As we know in the context of Paul's writing in Galatians, there were a group of men calling themselves Super Apostles, who were making the claim that it is good to believe in Christ, faith is good but only one step of the necessary process to be found right before God, one must also be circumcised and enter into the Jewish laws and traditions to truly be found right before God.

Paul's letter here to the Roman believers is not much different, as he is pointing them away from the law and traditions and focusing upon faith in Jesus Christ alone, and he is using Abraham as his example of this faith, being apart from the law and traditions for he has come 100's of years before the Egyptian captivity, and exile in which God had given Israel the law and set forth the temple practices. Paul is showing that Abraham was justified, and found righteous before God, before all of these other things were established. Making them not necessary for righteousness before God, one does not need to put themselves under the authority of the Jewish leaders, one does not need to put themselves under the law, or practice any of those previous traditions that were given to the Israelites by God to be found righteous before Him. But it is truly faith, and faith alone, and not only that, it had always been about faith and trust. There were never 2 means of salvation, it is not the law or faith, or the law, and faith, it is only by faith. And this is the central to all of Paul's writings, the Just shall live by faith.

The Jews believed that salvation by God was given exclusively to them, and the means by which it was administered was through the old covenant promises, through the law, and the sacrifices and temple worship, but Paul is pointing out that there was a covenant given to Abraham, before the covenant to the nation of Israel, and that covenant promise was a promise given to Abraham apart from the covenants given to Israel. And rather the Mosaic covenant did not overwrite, the Abrahamic covenant, but rather it was given as a guide to point to the Abrahamic covenant, that none can be righteous and that only through the promised seed, which is Christ, and faith in him may one be found to be righteous before God. God's promise of salvation embraces the whole world, it is not available only to the Jews, but to the Gentiles as well. This morning I want to go ahead and read starting in verse 1, and continuing to verse 13. ( Read 1-13) The first 8 verses here of this chapter which we looked at a few weeks ago law out by what means both the Jews and the Gentiles receive the promise which was given to Abraham. Verse 1 and 2 points out that Abraham was not justified by his works, but rather it was by faith, by his belief and trust in the Lord. If Abraham had been justified by his works, he would have something to boast about, we see this reflected in the Jews of Jesus time, and of the time that Paul writes these letters. They boast in their law keeping ability, they boast in their genealogy, they boast in their temple and sacrifices focusing upon everything but the messiah who was given, worshiping signs rather than the substance of them. And in doing so, rejected the very one who was promised to come to bring salvation to God's people.

Paul continues on in verse 4, saying that one who works, the wages are not counted as grace, but as debt. It is expected payment rather than a gift, it is seeking merit by works. The reality is that this is a very arrogant mindset, when it all boils down to its core the person working for their justification before God is saying, "I have done all of these things in your name, you now owe me my rightful payment of justification and righteousness." But the reality is that none of us are worthy of such, God owes no man and it is only be a free gift given apart from works that we may be found righteous before him. The one who is working for righteousness doesn't receive it as a gift, but rather it is as if God is paying a wage owed that is expected for the work accomplished. And whoever is working such to obtain righteousness certainly would have the right to boast about it, for it was gained on their own merit and deeds. And this is the idea that Paul is rejecting, pointing out in verse 5, that no one can be justified before God by their works, "but to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness

And this is what David wrote about, "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin." Blessed are those who are forgiven by the grace and mercy of God, not through works, and debt, but by the free gift of faith. It is God who determines righteousness, it is he, and he alone. The issues with seeking righteousness through works is it is we who are doing the work are determining ourselves to have done enough to earn righteousness. Isaiah 42:6 which we read this morning, says "I, the Lord, have called you to righteousness, and I will hold your hand; I will keep you and give you as a covenant of the people." He is of course speaking prophetically of the Messiah to come who will be given as a light to the Gentiles, to open the eyes of the blind, to bring out prisoners from the prison. But the point is here, that it is God who declares righteousness, it is God who works righteousness through us, it is he who holds us by the hand guides us in it. It is not, nor was it ever, nor can it ever be a work of man, for if it is, it is not righteous, but rather gives place for boasting, arrogance, and pride.

Another thing to take of note from this quote of David, is exactly what righteousness itself is. Many would describe it as living a holy and just life. And yes, in a way they would be right, but that is the fruit of one who is already declared righteous, again that is the mindset of one who is looking outwardly, who is looking to gain by works. The reality is, that David is pointing to, is that righteousness in the eyes of God is defined by the forgiveness of sins through Christ. He whose lawless deeds are forgiven and whose sins are covered by the work of Christ not of themselves is therefore found to be righteous before God. To be counted as righteousness apart from works is to have ones lawless deeds forgiven, and ones sins not attributed to their account. What a wonderful promise and statement, for us who are yet still in this body, who wrestle and struggle with this dead body which seems prone to sin. Because Christ's righteousness is laid to our account, we through him are made holy and are considered to be right before God and our sins are not attributed to our account because of Christ's blood which was shed to cover over them. And we who have experienced such a forgiveness of our sins recognize what a great blessing it is from God to be counted as one righteous. It wells up in us joy, and worship and praise to him who has accomplished it, there is no boasting in self, but only worshiping of God, for it is he who has given this glorious and wondrous gift of salvation freeing us from the dark prison of sin. Which brings us to Verse 9 this morning where Paul is addressing who this blessedness had been given.

We have seen as we have gone through these first 4 chapters of Roman's Paul's arguments pointing out that righteousness is by faith alone, and not through works pointing out that even Abraham was declared righteous by God through faith, and likewise David recognized the righteousness was given by God who grants forgiveness of our sins. So now the logical question that follows, is who is this promised righteousness for? Who truly are the children or Abraham and heirs of God's promise. Which we have also seen Paul has concluded that it is those who are of faith are heirs and children of Abraham, not of flesh, but of faith, for God has therefor brought together all peoples in him by the free gift of faith, making nothing of lineage, and everything of Christ who was promised, and him crucified. The Jews rely upon their lineage to Abraham, but it must be more than that, for even in Isaiah 42, speaking of the promised Messiah, that he is to be a light to the Gentiles. If Christ is a light to the Gentiles, to those who are outside of the covenant promises with Israel, the temple worship and sacrifices, then there is more to the promise given to Abraham than mere physical descendants, which is what Paul is getting at in this passage this morning talking about circumcision. He sets forth this question in verse 9, if this righteousness by faith he has been talking about applies only to the Jews? To those who have been circumcised, or does it also include the uncircumcised Gentiles? Of course we already know the answer to this question simply by what Paul has already been saying up to this point, but he is building an argument against those who find their hope and righteousness in the signs of the flesh, he is dismantling piece by piece any form of self righteousness, any form of works, or trust in lineage to point that whether Jew or Gentile, whether circumcised or uncircumcised it is only those of faith who are justified and declared righteous before God.

It is likely that the Jewish people in Rome to whom Paul is addressing believed that the blessings which David proclaimed only applied to those who have been circumcised, since circumcision was the sign of that Abrahamic covenant it is not difficult to follow the logical conclusion then that circumcision is required to receive the promises of the covenant that God made with Abraham. Paul again goes to Genesis 15 as a key to understanding this issue, Which was the same answer given in verse 3 about being justified by faith, not of works. "For what does scripture say, Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness." Again pointing to the fact that if Abraham was found righteous by faith, then the sign that was given is inconsequential, for justification was outside of circumcision, the promises and the blessings came before, and circumcision was the sign of that covenant, not a necessary requirement for it. In the subsequent verses Paul breaks this down even more, verse 9, "Does this blessedness then come upon the circumcised only, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness. How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Righteousness was accounted to Abraham while uncircumcised." This is a very significant argument, for circumcision was the identifying mark of the Abrahamic descendants, it was a sign of the promises given to him, and it was a practice that set the people apart from the other nations around them. To understand circumcision to be required for righteousness before God is to miss the point entirely. When we talk about the modes of salvation, Arminianism, vs the doctrines of grace, we will often use the terminology that arminiansim is putting the cart before the horse, that is, that its backwards, belief does not cause faith, but rather it is faith that is given by God which causes belief, so to it is the same here with the Jewish understanding of circumcision, they saw it as being tied to the promises to Abraham, and to be an heir and capable of receiving those blessings one must therefore be circumcised.

But the entire point that Paul is making here, is that thinking is backward, it is putting the cart before the horse. Look at verse 11, “And he received the sign of circumcision,” It was a sign, not the means or mode of the promises and blessings, but a sign, “a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that the righteousness might be imputed to them.” So that begs the question then, since Paul has argued that circumcision avails nothing, it accounts for nothing in righteousness before God, then what is the purpose? As we see in verse 11, it is described as being a sign, a seal of the righteousness of faith, showing that it is not essential to faith itself, but instead it was confirmation, it documents, ratifies and authenticates Abraham's right standing before God through faith, a right standing he had by faith, already, apart from the sign, apart from the seal. To understand the sign which was given as confirming seal of the covenant God had given Abraham to be THE mode in which righteousness is found, is again a backward misunderstanding. The gentile, is at no disadvantage because he lacks the sign, since it is by faith that righteousness is found, not by a physical act marking the body.

Paul speaks to the gentiles first, showing that righteousness comes by faith, but in verse 12 he also includes the Jews showing that Abraham is the father to all, in faith, whether circumcised, or uncircumcised. Verse 12, “And the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of faith which our father Abraham had while uncircumcised. Paul could have easily have included Abraham as the father of the Jews first, as the fact still remains that they enjoyed the blessing priority to be first in the history of salvation, for God's message of the promised messiah, who would come to reconcile his people to himself came through the lineage of Abraham, but Paul is making a point here, that now that priority means little, the gospel has gone out to the gentiles, and the blessing and righteousness that Israel had before God was always found through faith and belief. The fact of the matter here, is that Abraham isn't the father of the Jews only, but a father to all of those of like, saving faith. For as Paul writes in verse 13, “The promise that he would be an heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith” Again showing that this blessedness that David was talking about, these promises given to Abraham that through him all the nations shall be blessed, was by faith, not by ritual, or law, not of wages and debt, but as a free gift given from God fulfilling his promise by sending the see of Abraham, which is Christ and to impute his righteousness to our account, covering, and removing our sinful nature, making us to account as ones who are righteous and holy, by merely believing upon the one who has provided the way of escape from the bondage of sin and rebellion.

Being a Jew is of no advantage, being a Gentile is of no disadvantage in the eyes of God, for all are equal in their fallen state, all have sinned and have come short of the glory of God, there is none who is righteous, there is none who is able to keep God's commandments, there is none who can stand before God justified in their deeds and actions, it is only by trusting the promises of God that righteousness is found through Christ Jesus, that salvation and forgiveness of sins is found in the shed blood of the promised messiah. These things are apart from our own ability, our own works, but rather are a gift given to a people that God has chosen, both of the Jews, and of the Gentiles. He has taken his people out of every nation, tongue and creed, and has established a kingdom through his Son. And we are those people, if we but only believe as Abraham did, that God is faithful in his promise, and that he has provided for himself a way to reconcile us to him. The key is faith, not law, not genealogy, not nationality, not circumcision, but faith and faith alone.

And that faith, is given to us as a gift, by God, so that we may believe. Ephesians 2, “And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins. But God, who is rich in mercy, because of his great love in which he loved us even when we were dead in our sins, made us alive together with Christ, for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is a gift of God, not of works lest any man should boast. For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works which God prepared before hand that we should walk in them.” And that is it, that is the key to salvation, it is God's calling in you, driving you to repent and believe, to love and follow him. The new birth is a supernatural work of God creating in us a new creature, one who loves God, and his children. Do you have this love? Has God worked his great work of reconciliation in you? If you are unsure, pray about it, go to him, read his word. Paul says to the brethren in Philippi, “( 2:12 ) Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for his good pleasure.”

Only God can save, and only God can grant the peace of salvation. Put your hope, and your trust in him. Jesus said, “Come to me, all yo who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light.” If you are burdened down with a heavy load of sin, guilt and doubt, give it to Jesus, his burden is light for it is he who has carried it for you, and we can rest in him, knowing that he has bore our sins upon the cross so that we may be set free of that bondage. Trust him, repent, believe, and find everlasting peace and rest within his arms.