

**Our attempts to earn salvation prove our need for salvation.**

“Brothers and sisters, I’m using a human illustration. No one sets aside or makes additions to a validated human will. 16 Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say “and to seeds,” as though referring to many, but referring to one, and to your seed, who is Christ. 17 My point is this: The law, which came 430 years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously established by God and thus cancel the promise. 18 For if the inheritance is based on the law, it is no longer based on the promise; but God has graciously given it to Abraham through the promise.

19 Why, then, was the law given? It was added for the sake of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise was made would come. The law was put into effect through angels by means of a mediator. 20 Now a mediator is not just for one person alone, but God is one. 21 Is the law therefore contrary to God’s promises? Absolutely not! For if the law had been granted with the ability to give life, then righteousness would certainly be on the basis of the law. 22 But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin’s power, so that the promise might be given on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ to those who believe. 23 Before this faith came, we were confined under the law, imprisoned until the coming faith was revealed. 24 The law, then, was our guardian until Christ, so that we could be justified by faith. 25 But since that faith has come, we are no longer under a guardian, 26 for through faith you are all sons of God in Christ Jesus.” -- Galatians 3:15-26 (CSB)

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It’s good to be back with you guys. We often joke about needing a vacation from vacation but I promise in this case, for our family, it's true! We have made much progress and are actually living in our new house, dust and all. Thank you to those that have lended a hand to help.

Related to this move and renovation-instead-of-vacation, I have been known to set very aggressive schedules for major projects like this. Usually relying on the labor of others mind you! I like to get things done (building projects anyway) and I set expectations high and strive to achieve them.

I have no designs on project management, I just like to be quick with the difficult things so we can get back to the normal things.

This had me thinking about the ways in life that we pursue success and face expectations for achieving. "Under promise and over perform" is the mantra of good business. Perhaps this has evolved into lowering expectations in lots of things, as a way of coping with not achieving.

When it comes to the deepest things of life, we have a tendency to do that with our walk or pursuit of God - we lower standards - and in the church we can downgrade the law... (the communicated standard of God, the thou shall and shall nots.)

It can be a result of seeing the law wrongly. Paul here gives the church the right view of the law in light of the promise of God and salvation found in Christ.

We are moving slowly through Galatians 3, not because I wanted John, John, and Scott to preach the same sermon! But because we are in desperate need to wiggle the truth found here into our souls. This is the book of our times - rightly the book of their times. The Galatians had been tainted by Judiazering teachers saying the law was the way to Christianity.

Works righteousness - and it is a recurring theme in the history of the church and something we have to course correct for constantly.

'I am just going to get right before I come to God...' Or the deconstructionist view, 'I am going to need all the other Christians to get right before I come to God.'

Or my salvation - the pearly gates entrance ticket - must be earned with my sweat equity in this thing called faith. I have to prove to God I am worth it. My moment will come when I step into it...

To those and other ways we lower the law as if it is something we can accomplish or need to accomplish to be a strong Christian, the Bible says, salvation is the result of promise not law - and the law is meant to highlight that.

Our path this morning is to hear Paul tell the church that our rescue is rooted in promise and that the law points to the promise.

## **Our Rescue is Rooted in Promise**

Paul has been building his case for the grace of Christ and the freedom it brings to the Galatian churches. It is what they were founded on, what they cherished when first hearing it. And it is what some of the traveling false teachers got wrong. For them it was grace plus something - some work by us to get there. To be saved.

When I say salvation I mean that humanity is born into sin after a disobedient moment in a garden at the beginning. So from the get go we are all unrighteous and unable to stand before a holy, perfect, unique and separate God. God's way though is rescue. He frees captives, he breaks people out of bondage. And even the greatest of graces of rescue beforehand all point to the work of Christ on the cross.

That the perfect God-man would pay the price in our place, die for us, and thereby make us righteous, able to stand blameless before God. It is what our souls ache for whether we have words to articulate it or not.

“The purpose was that the blessing of Abraham would come to the Gentiles by Christ Jesus, so that we could receive the promised Spirit through faith.” --

**Galatians 3:14 (CSB)**

Christ's redeeming work was so the blessing of Abraham would come to Gentiles, to us.

Paul uses a human example to illustrate it. If man-made covenants are intended to be kept and not broken, then how much more will God keep his covenantal promises to Abraham?

Where some in the church thought and taught that salvation was a result of a certain way of living - it is actually a result of an old promise.

To be a great nation, to be a blessing...“The Lord appeared to Abram and said, “To your offspring I will give this land.” So he built an altar there to the Lord who had appeared to him.” -- **Genesis 12:7 (CSB)**

So this anchor promise according to Paul (and the Spirit) is to Abraham and his “seed” which is Christ.

Huge. The One, the perfect offspring will bring blessing to the world, will bring rescue and a kingdom of life and freedom. You guys, this is our thing. And the work of Christ has delivered it, the gift of the Spirit has confirmed it.

“The universal distribution of the Spirit to Jews and Gentiles as a result of Jesus’ death made God’s universal promise to Abraham a reality.” Jarvis Williams

And it is by this promise, not your record, not your drummed up worth, not your best thoughts or worst ones, that you are saved. It is what the churches needed to hear. It is what I need to hear! It is what we need to hear.

And because that promise is proved true in Christ, all the rest apply too.

Yet, even with all we know of the grace of Christ, we can miss the promise.

I remember being at a Bible study with dear friends and Stacy and I were exulting in Zephaniah 3, with tears imploring our friends to cling to the gospel of grace and believe that God actually liked them.

One response was,, “these are promises for other people not us...”

Maybe that is what the churches were thinking and they were convinced they needed to do work to be saved.

Paul says salvation is rooted in something deeper than moral law. Something so much more spectacular than your ability or goodness.

“But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin’s power, so that the promise might be given on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ to those who believe.” --

**Galatians 3:22** (CSB)

Yes the law is part of the Jewish experience, it had been given to set apart a people as witnesses of God. But it is the promise that delivers.

“My point is this: The law, which came 430 years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously established by God and thus cancel the promise. 18 For if the inheritance is based on the law, it is no longer based on the promise; but God has graciously given it to Abraham through the promise.” -- **Galatians 3:17-18** (CSB)

And you get in on it on the basis of faith, nothing else.

Huzzah! That’s good news.

So then, why the law?

### **The Law Points to the Promise**

“Why, then, was the law given? It was added for the sake of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise was made would come. The law was put into effect through angels by means of a mediator.” -- **Galatians 3:19** (CSB)

The law was given as a guide for human response to rescue. You probably know the story of the exodus. Israel, after a key family finds itself in dire need and settles in Egypt, had grown in number and become slaves to Pharaoh. And God heard their prayer, remembered his promise to them and delivered them from captivity.

By the grace of God the people are brought out and given the promised land. On the journey they receive the law through Moses and so begins a long story of redemption that proves that the first exodus was not the final rescue.

Along the way, to the people the law became a way of earning and when that is the case it has no power to deliver what we need or hope for. It isn’t against the way of God but it is not the reason we are saved.

“Is the law therefore contrary to God’s promises? Absolutely not! For if the law had been granted with the ability to give life, then righteousness would certainly be on the basis of the law.” -- **Galatians 3:21** (CSB)

The message of the law was, ‘you have been rescued now live this way so others will see.’ We tend to see it as ‘if you want to be rescued you better live this way.’

God works differently and his promise is better.

A woman falling out of a plane doesn't need flight lessons, she needs a parachute. We are all falling out of the plane apart from Christ our parachute.

But when we see the law rightly it is a tool to feel the full weight of sin and to make us aware of our inability, our need. Not only does that prime us to embrace and experience his promise but it also makes us kinder to other needy people.

“Let he without sin cast the first stone...”

“Moses had become the textbook for the successful life and Abraham served as a mere preface. By this radical shift of proportions, the very nature of Moses' law was turned inside out: instead of its being used to keep failures in the life of faith from ending in despair, instead of its being used to guide untested human beings in their faith pilgrimage, the law was used as a handbook for success - a set of rules which, if followed, would eliminate risk, venture and growth from life, and insure a perfect performance approved by God and admired by society.” Paul restores the original proportions: Abraham, a thorough and complete exposition of the free life of faith; Moses, an important but minor supplement to encourage and guide us through the failures that are normal in the life of faith.” Eugene Peterson

What a relief this is. That we experience the love of God in Christ not because we have more points than demerits. The Galatians were being coaxed away from the love and into earning.

And earned love is exhausting. It isn't meant to be that way.

My children don't have to wake up every day and try to be my children. They just are. (And on good days, they wake up thankful they are my children.) Even if they don't, they still are. This is us with God and his promise.

Friend, if you have faith in Jesus, that his life, death, and resurrection was for you, then you are already there! Already rescued. Everything else of life is gravy.

This truth, and this promise is like a balm to the confused Galatians told they have to earn, work for their salvation, for citizenship in the Kingdom.

This is a relief to us - a north star to orient all of life around.

We want a map, or Google to tell us where to go, but Abraham was without a map and his faith was counted unto him as righteousness. He followed, he loved, he confessed and prayed and believed. God was his center.

"Paul wants the Galatians to understand that the requirements of the law that imprisoned past generations in guilt and guided them away from self-trust were also leading them to faith in Christ. Faith in Jesus would not eliminate the moral requirements of the law, but would grant freedom from its condemnation and give hope of new life to those who had become aware of their inability to keep its holy standards." GTB

The promise of rescue matches God's redemption long game.

The law is not contrary to the promise but a guardian - a school marm generating longing for Christ - that we would hunger and thirst for righteousness that is only found in him.

And now that he has come, we can live higher - united to him in faith, made the seed of Abraham. All sons and daughters through faith in Jesus.

We tend to think the law is the WAY to Jesus and rescue and resurrection, but the law points to our need of rescue and the Seed of Abraham to save us and bring us to real life. This is the way.

Some might say to us, "You are going the wrong way!" but how do they know which way we are going?! We follow Jesus and this is what his word says of those that believe in him. His promise. Our rescue. His and our joy.

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Look up friends, Jesus has you. Believe in him.

Rest in the promise and live free. God doesn't grade on a curve, he takes the test for you.

The joy of this was illustrated by one of the recent Olympic events. The high jumpers from Italy and Qatar had ended up tied after going through all the rounds. And where some would say, keep going, exhaust all of your ability, try harder, do better; they both got gold medals. What joy they had.

Seeing Christ in the promise to Abraham, rescue on the basis of faith, is a lot like that but someone else has jumped for us and we still get the gold. Let's live higher into this promise.

“I will make you into a great nation,  
I will bless you,  
I will make your name great,  
and you will be a blessing.  
3 I will bless those who bless you,  
I will curse anyone who treats you with contempt,  
and all the peoples on earth  
will be blessed through you.” -- Genesis 12:2-3 (CSB)