

All Justified Are Heirs of the World

📖 Romans 4:13-17

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Why did Paul write Romans? To prepare the believers in Rome for his soon expected visit. Paul had longed to go to Rome for many years but had been prevented thus far. He saw an opening and suspected that he would be arriving soon. He was trying to expand his ministry to a sphere where he had not yet reached with the gospel. Though there were many at Rome who were already believers he had not preached the gospel at Rome. Where was Paul when he wrote it? Corinth. He was at Corinth hoping to come to Rome soon. What is the theme of Romans? The gospel of God's righteousness through faith. It's a systematic theology of the gospel from condemnation all the way to application. We've already studied the doctrine of condemnation, by which all men are under the just penalty of sin and are now studying the great doctrine of justification, by which all who believe are credited with the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ.

The doctrine of justification has been a tension point since the Reformation. Those who see that we are free argue that justification is a legal declaration made by God at the moment of faith apart from works. Those who want to be in power argue for justification as a process mediated by the Church as she dispenses grace through the sacraments that help us acquire congruous merit. Notice that in 3:21 the crediting of righteousness is described as a gift of God's grace, not something we work for but something we freely receive. Note in 4:1-5 it is illustrated by the incident with Abraham, who lived before the Law and therefore did no work, as well as in 4:5 that God justifies the ungodly. Note in 4:6-8 that David pronounces blessing upon the one whose sin is freely justified. Since David was a Jew, a Gentile might ask in 4:9 whether this blessing of justification is on the circumcised only, or on the uncircumcised also. In other words, am I justified by faith alone or do I need to first be circumcised and come through Judaism? Paul turns once more to Abraham for the answer. 4:10 asks, "How then was it credited? While he was circumcised or uncircumcised?" The answer from Genesis is clear, Abraham was an uncircumcised Gentile when he believed. He was not circumcised until 29 years later. How then could circumcision have anything to do with Abraham's justification? It didn't. And neither does baptism. However, this does not mean that circumcision and baptism have no place in the plan of God.

As 4:11 shows circumcision was a sign of righteousness by faith. They were to circumcise their boys on the eighth day in order to serve as a sign that they needed to walk in the footsteps of Abraham by having faith. This was for a purpose. Since Abraham was justified while uncircumcised then he is the father of all who believe, whether Gentile or Jew, whether female or male, whether slave or free. So there was no need for a Gentile to first be circumcised and introduced into Judaism before he could be justified. Justification is always by faith alone no matter who might be involved! Cornelius and his household are good examples of Gentiles that came to faith apart from circumcision. And as amazing as it was for Peter and the circumcised believers with him on that day, those Gentiles were justified without being circumcised. The vital point then in 4:9-12 is that Abraham is the spiritual father of all who have believed. This establishes the background for understanding the colossal statement of verse 13.

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. In the Greek you can shift words around in order to emphasize something. You don't have to put the subject first, for example, you can put it in the middle or last. But if you change things around and put something first that seems out of place that is to show emphasis. What is placed first in this Greek sentence? **not through the Law.** The emphasis by no means is keeping **the Law** what makes us **heirs of the world.** What is this promise to be **heir of the world?** The word **heir** means to "possess, to acquire as a possession," The **world** is "planet earth as a place of habitation." The **promise** in view is a promise of global ownership and rule. Those who are heirs of the world will rule the world. Abraham is an **heir of the world** and **his descendants** are also **heirs of the world...** McClain says, "The inheritance that the Jew looked forward to was the world. He wanted his Messiah to come in order that they as heirs might take over the world."¹ However, as the verse indicates, this inheritance is acquired **not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith.** So then it is not the physical descendants of Abraham through Isaac and Jacob that will one day take over and rule the world under Messiah but the spiritual descendants of Abraham, those who had **faith.** This should have been obvious from Abraham's faith. But the Jews looked upon Abraham as having done works, yet Abraham lived before the Law and therefore before works in the sense in which they imagined. The inheritance therefore is for all who believe, whether Jew or Gentile. This means that one day, when the Messiah returns we will be heirs of the world, we will take possession of the world and we will rule over it, governing in various capacities under Jesus, the Messiah. This rule will be earthly and for one thousand years, what is known as the millennium.

What we are referring to them is the doctrine of the kingdom. Rev 20 is the passage that gives us the time span of the kingdom as 1,000 years but Rev 20 is by no means the passage that we base our belief in the earthly kingdom upon. All Rev 20 does is tell us the length of the kingdom. The belief in the earthly kingdom is built on hundreds of passages from the OT. What Paul is saying is that those who

have a faith like Abraham are heirs of the world and will inherit the kingdom. The doctrine of the kingdom assumed by Paul has a historical development that we should summarize under several points. First, from the beginning of creation God's purpose was to establish a kingdom on earth ruled by man functioning under His authority. We are aptly created for such a task, being made in God's image. When God rules through a human and not directly it is known as a mediatorial kingdom. Mediatorial because man is functioning as a mediator between God and nature. God's desire was to create a man and a woman who would help the man in ruling the world for His glory. The first man was Adam. He was the first king of creation and Eve was his queen. Together in a marriage covenant they were to rule the world in submission to God. This rule was lost at the Fall as the second point will show but it must be understood that it was God's purpose from the beginning of creation to establish this mediatorial kingdom ruled by man. In Matt 25:34 when it comes time for this kingdom to begin Jesus will tell the believing sheep who have survived the Tribulation that it is time for them to inherit the kingdom which has been prepared for them from the foundation of the world. This kingdom was always God's purpose with space-time history and yet this kingdom has never been accomplished and therefore it remains to be accomplished. Second, Adam lost the kingdom to Satan at the Fall so that Satan is now the god of this world and ruler of this age. Adam, the rightful king and heir, by an act of disobedience to God, forfeited his right to rule the kingdom. At this time, Satan came into power. He is presently ruling over all the kingdoms of the world (including the United States; see Dan 10 the prince of Persia in Daniel's day). Human kings, presidents and rulers are pawns in the hands of Satan. Luke 4:6 gives plain evidence that His rule is legitimate. In that passage called the temptations, Satan took Jesus to a high place and showed him all the kingdoms of the world saying, "I will give You all this domain and its glory; for it has been handed over to me, and I give it to whomever I wish." Satan had it handed over to him by Adam. He knew that Jesus, as the second Adam, had come to restore heirship of the world to the human race. The temptation was that Jesus could restore this rule by worshiping Satan rather than going to the cross. Since this would be idolatrous Jesus rejected the temptation and chose the cross instead. He therefore is the heir of all things (Heb 1:2). Third, Abraham was promised this kingdom by Covenant after he had faith. Genesis 15:6, where Abraham is said to have believed, occurred while Abraham was still in Ur before God made the promise to restore the kingdom. Thus Abraham was already a believer when God entered this covenant. His faith was already credited as righteousness. It is his faith therefore which rendered him an heir of the kingdom to come. The Law was not given until 430 years later (cf Gal 3:16). Therefore heirship is based solely on faith. Who did Abraham have faith in? The seed Messiah who was to come in the future and bring in everlasting righteousness. Fourth, it is the Messiah who would restore the kingdom to man's rule. Originally the Messianic promise was given in Gen 3:15 to the woman and He was predicted to crush Satan and ultimately restore the world to man. The Messiah was then promised to come through the line of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Judah and finally David through his son Solomon. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit in Mary and received his throne rights from Joseph.

He is the one who without sin died for our sin so that through faith we could be counted righteous and heirs of the world. Hebrews 1:2 reveals Him as the "heir of all things" and as having been designated as such by His purification for our sins. Col 2 reveals Him as having defeated Satan and the demonic forces on the cross in order to rightfully take back the kingdom rule. When he returns at the Second Advent He will sit on David's throne and rule the kingdom with a scepter of iron as a genuine member of the human race. Fifth, all who have faith like Abraham are also heirs of this kingdom. This is Paul's teaching in Romans 4:13. Not through Law but through faith we will inherit planet earth as our place of rule. Jesus will be the King of kings and we will rule the world under Him. The rule will be perfect because we will all be ruling in perfect resurrection bodies.

So there are your five points for the doctrine of the kingdom and heirship which form the background for what Paul says in Romans 4:13 about Abraham and his spiritual descendants being heirs of the world through faith alone.

Verse 14 explains why it is through faith alone and not Law. **For if** is a first class condition. The **if** is not conditional, it's assuming it to be true for the sake of argument. Paul is saying, **if**, and assuming it to be true for the sake of argument, **if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified.** If being an heir of the world was based on keeping **the Law** then how could Abraham be an heir? He never had the Law given to him. He lived 430 years before the Law was given. If heirship was based on Law then his faith is **void and the promise invalidated.** God would not have kept His word to Abraham. So then the thought that it is those **who are of the Law that are heirs** is unthinkable.

Further, as verse 15 reminds us, **the Law brings about wrath.** Why does the Law only bring about wrath? Because there is no one who continually keeps the Law. If you break just one point of the Law you are guilty of breaking it all. It is silly to say that you keep the Law or live by the Ten Commandments. You do nothing of the sort. The Law went much deeper than external commandments, it went to the internal heart, to the thoughts. When looked at from that standpoint no one ever kept the Law. Therefore if heirship of the world is based on Law then no one will inherit the world. This means that Satan has conquered, that he is more than a conqueror and we have been defeated. **But** Paul also gives us a contrast, **But where there is no law**, as in the case with Abraham, **there also is no violation.** When Abraham lived there was no Mt Sinai, no **Law**; that was still 430 years down the road. So in his situation there could be **no violation** because there was **no law** to violate. And so Abraham is an heir on some other basis and the only other basis is faith. Therefore faith and the promise are not invalidated but established.

As Paul says in verse 16, **For this reason it is by faith.** Literally the Greek says "out of faith," meaning that heirship springs forth from faith. When we believe as Abraham believed at that moment what

springs forth is our right as heirs of the world. This is a positional inheritance acquired at an instant of time, it is a legal right because it is connected directly to our justification. In other words, there is nothing that you can do that can cause you to lose this right to one day rule the world. The rule belongs to us. Turn briefly to 1 Cor 3:21. "So then let no one boast in men. For all things belong to you," all things, think of the breadth of that statement, "all things belong to you." "Whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come; all things belong to you, and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God." The Corinthians were, by position, heirs of the world to come and so are we. They took this too far in 4:8, so far as to think that they had already come into this reign as kings. Paul's point is not that we are presently reigning as kings but that we will in the future reign as kings when the King returns in His kingdom. This is part of our legal right as justified. We are to rule the world to come; we are to administer the kingdom under King Messiah and there isn't any king, president, corporation or military that can do anything about it. The world to come belongs to us. And how did it come to belong to us? By **faith** alone!

Why by faith alone and not by works? Verse 16 answers, **in order that it may be in accordance with grace!** You see that only faith is in accordance with grace. Works are not in accordance with grace. It is faith alone that is in accordance with grace and when we say faith we mean faith alone. Faith cannot be re-defined to include works or to be described as a faith that works. These are all manipulations of faith as the Bible defines it, simple trust, reliance, confidence in another. And it is by faith alone that we become heirs so that it may be in accordance with grace, otherwise it's not in accordance with or consistent with grace. What is **grace**? Unmerited favor. Once you introduce works it's no longer unmerited favor, but merited. Works are meritorious, which is why 4:4 said "Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as grace, but as what is due! So then only if it's by faith is it by grace because faith is nothing more than receiving something. It's not doing anything; it's accepting something. Therefore faith is not meritorious in any way. Faith is the hand of the heart that receives. And through faith you become an heir of the world. It is a gift of God. Like 3:24 where we are said to be justified as a gift by His grace! It's a gift because we didn't do any work for it. It's unmerited. As 4:5 says, "But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness." It's the ungodly who believe they are justified and by this we become heirs of the world. Of course, we will be resurrected at that time and no longer be ungodly. But those who work to try to please God are neither justified before God nor heirs of the world to come. This does not mean there is no work, it's just not your work or my work, it's the work of Jesus Christ on the cross. That is the only work that God is interested in because it is the work of the sinless, perfect Lamb of God. So then it is by faith in the Lamb of God that we become heirs so that **it may be in accordance with grace!**

It had to be this way, says Paul, **so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants**, it couldn't be guaranteed otherwise. If the promise was contingent on the Law then no one would be an

heir of the world because everyone is a Law breaker. Satan would win, God's plan would be finished, no man would fulfill the dominion mandate, and God's kingdom program would be defeated. So in order to guarantee **the promise** it is supplied simply through **faith**.

Now this should be no surprise since from Genesis to Revelation there is one and only one way for man to live and that is by faith! It has always been by faith; Adam and Eve were to live by faith, Moses was to live by faith, Nehemiah was to live by faith, Peter was to live by faith, Paul was to live by faith and you and I are to live by faith. So this should be no response that it is guaranteed through faith since that is the only response of man that God desires, and that faith is in Him because He is trustworthy. His character is reliable and so when we put our trust in Him we are putting our trust in the most reliable place. Every other object is less than Him and so to put faith in it is really foolish. But to put our faith in Him makes complete sense. And in accordance with this principle it is all those and only those who have faith that will enjoy the ultimate reign and dominion in the world. This goes for **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**. So whether one lived before the Law and was therefore at no point of their life under the Law, or after the Law and therefore lived under **the Law**, it makes no difference, since the promise was to **all those who are of the faith of Abraham**. It is really quite simple. All who believe, and only those who believe, are heirs of the world to come, recipients of the promise. So then this is a promise to all believers no matter how they may live their life after they believe, no matter what kind of sins they may commit after they believe, it is a promise for all believers period. It is part of the legal claim that we have as justified.

Verse 17, **(as it is written, "A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS HAVE I MADE YOU")**. Abraham is the father of many nations. Where was this written? Check your margin. Gen 17:5. What's the event in Gen 17:5? The re-naming of Abraham. What was his name before it was Abraham? "Abram." What does Abram mean? Exalted father. Apparently Abram came from an important or royal family through his father Terah. But when the Lord appeared to him and confirmed the covenant He changed his name saying, "No longer shall your name be called Abram, But your name shall be called Abraham." What does Abraham mean? Father of a multitude or **A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS**. Paul was looking at how Abraham was renamed such that His name captured his place in history as the father of us all. In what sense did Abraham become **A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS**? In two senses, one in that he is the physical father of many nations but more importantly, second, in that he is the spiritual father of all who have faith. That is what is in view here. Abraham is the spiritual father of all who have faith no matter what nation they belong to.

Even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist. The context is the promise to give Abraham a son through Sarah. At the time she was 90 years old. Her womb was dead, but God calls into being things which do not exist. He controls whatsoever comes to pass and therefore He can call a dead womb to life, which He did for Sarah and she gave birth to Isaac, a true

spiritual seed who also had faith. This is the way of our God; He rules history in a supernatural way in order to demonstrate He is in control of whatsoever comes to pass, not some abstract concept such as natural law. Natural law never caused anything. God's word controls whatsoever comes to pass.

Therefore what men consider impossible, calling a dead womb to life, God makes possible because He is the author of the womb and controller of the physiology of the womb. We have an awesome God.

Alright, what have we seen? We have seen in verse 13 that the promise to be an heir of the world was not through the Law but through the righteousness that comes by faith. If those of the Law are heirs then the faith of Abraham, who was not of the Law, is made void and the promise invalidated. For the Law brings wrath since no one ever kept it perfectly. But the good news is that where there is no law there is no violation and therefore Abraham was justified apart from the Law. This occurred on purpose because faith is in accordance with grace. It is always by grace, apart from any merit. This was the only way to guarantee the heirship of the world to all descendants, not only those who lived under Law but also to those who did not and simply had faith like Abraham. As such Abraham is the father of all, beginning with his son Isaac who was born through the dead womb of Sarah which God made alive.

So then we are heirs, heirs of the world to come in the millennial kingdom. We will rule as kings on the earth, it is our legal right and there is no one who can stop us. We may struggle now in the times of the Gentiles with kings and tyrants but the future is ours! We are more than conquerors in Jesus Christ!

¹ Alva McClain, *The Gospel of God's Grace*, p 116.