

The Promise Fulfilled - Spirit, Scripture, Sacrament in Gal. 3

by Michael Flowers

The gospel is not ethnocentric, but rather it is for all nations and that the promise of Abraham is fulfilled through faith in Jesus Christ.

Duration: 26:22

Scripture: Genesis 12:3, Acts 2:1-4, Acts 2:38, Galatians 3:6-26

Topics: "Holy Spirit"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the grand narrative of the gospel, which is about rescuing and restoring creation. He emphasizes that the ultimate aim of the Christian life is not just going to heaven when we die, but the redemption and renewal of the earth. The sermon is divided into three sections: the first section focuses on the Holy Spirit and the indwelling of God within us. The second section explores the ancient roots of our faith, discussing the purpose of the law and the coming of Jesus. The final section highlights the power of baptism and how it brings us into the reality of being clothed with Christ, breaking down divisions of ethnicity, social standing, and gender.

Transcript

You can follow along with me in the New Testament passage today, we're going to tackle Galatians, chapter three. Yes. And what we're going to do is we're going to get in a jet plane today and we're going to take a ride way high over chapter three.

And so don't mind the details. Right. We're just going to hit some of the high points.

And so pray for me as we do that, because it's a very complex chapter and we don't want to make it that way. We just want to get an aerial view of the glorious gospel of Jesus. Many, many folks come to the Anglican Church for roots.

They want historical roots. And a lot of times we tend to stop as Anglicans in the Reformation. But Paul is going to take us back today to our historical roots in Abraham, in Israel, in the establishment of a people, the one people of God.

And that's really our roots. Those are the deeper roots. Right.

Amen. So, Lord, let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be acceptable in your sight. Oh, Lord, my rock and my redeemer.

Amen. All right. After Paul evangelized the region of Galatia, Jewish Christians have come in saying that Gentile Christians need to submit to the Torah.

That's the first five books of Moses. They're saying that in order to become a member of the one people of God and they're really hinting at ethnic in order to be Jewish. Right.

Not just the one people of God, but we want you to become Jewish. Faith and baptism are not sufficient. This is what Paul's gospel is teaching.

One must submit to the requirements of Torah. But these are Christian Jews coming in. And so it's Jesus plus Torah, Jesus plus Torah.

And that will make you a good Jewish Christian. And Paul is just adamant about this, this ethnocentrism. The gospel is not ethnocentric.

The gospel blows that out. And he is about now the nations of the world. Right.

He's about that's why we're all here. The nations of the world, the land has become that little strip of land over in the Middle East now promised to Abraham has now become the whole world. Jesus and the Great Commission is recapitulating the blessing and the promise given to Abraham, I will give you this land.

Now, Jesus extends that and says, go into all the world and take this gospel, take this message to all the nations, the ethnos, all the nations. And so it's really broadened out. Now, Paul covers three broad categories throughout this book.

And this is what I want to point out to you. So if you just if you want to peek, you can. The first five verses we're going to label that spirit.

And we talked about that about three weeks ago, that spirit. OK, he deals with the Holy Spirit. He deals with the promise being received, the Holy Spirit, the promise given to Abraham is actually culminating in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, God coming to us and living inside of us, making us his temple.

He's saying, did you receive the spirit by the giving of the law or by obeying the law or by responding and believing to the message that was heard? The first five verses are spirit, and then he's going to take the scripture next. He's going to take the scripture and he's going to take verses six through twenty six and he's going to deal with the ancient roots of our faith and he's going to tell us how we got the gospel. Where did Jesus come from? What's the purpose of the law? What's the purpose of all this? Why was it just temporary? And now Jesus is superseding him.

And then I'm going to label this sacrament. So we've got spirit, scripture, sacrament. He deals with baptism and it culminates in baptism because baptism supersedes circumcision and baptism is not just for males now.

Baptism is indiscriminately given. Right. And that's one of the points that he's going to make.

So spirit, scripture, baptism. What does that sound like? Sounds like the three. Streams of the Anglican Communion, the Holy Spirit, right, that's our charismatic roots, the scripture, that's our evangelical roots and then sacrament Catholic roots.

There's more than one sacrament. Right. We're going to celebrate another one today.

So spirit, scripture, sacrament is how I just kind of divided the chapter. He doesn't begin with scripture first. He begins with the witness of their experience when he came and preached the gospel to them.

They received by faith the Holy Spirit. Through believing, Paul is saying, so look at the truth of your experience of the promised Holy Spirit. And now today, and this is where we want to spend our time, he's saying verses six through twenty six, look at the truth of the scriptures.

Let's take a look at the scriptures now that we've verified that you actually became a temple of the Holy Spirit. You were justified through not obeying Torah, but you were justified through receiving the spirit by faith. Look at the truth of the scriptures prophesying the promise.

And so this is where Paul gets into the ancient roots of the grand narrative of the gospel. Paul is going to just widen it out and he's going to begin with Abraham, but it actually Abraham has a back story. The grand narrative of the gospel is, I would say, rescuing and restoring creation out of the bondage of death and decay.

And see, a lot of people would say the grand narrative, the gospel is going to heaven when you die. Going to heaven when we die now is only a temporary state until the resurrection of the body and the new heavens and the new earth come. And then we'll be here on a redeemed, renewed earth.

A lot of times the ultimate aim of the Christian life is if you die tonight, will you go to heaven when you die? And then we can have again, I'll come back to the earth and rule in the name of Jesus when he returns. It's got to be it's got to be more than just that. My soul being saved again, the grand narrative, the gospel is not just soul salvation.

The grand narrative of the gospel is rescuing and restoring creation. Romans eight, not just my soul. Praise the Lord for my soul.

But my soul has a body and it will be raised the way Jesus body was raised. He's not just the spirit. He was raised the spiritual body, but it is a materialized body in a resurrected form.

So he's not a ghost. He's not a phantom. These are all heresies that we had to deal with throughout the centuries of the church.

He was bodily raised from the dead, but it's a new substance that can walk through walls. You know, we've talked about this. Don't you want a body like that? I'm making all things new.

And if anyone is in Christ, new creation, it's a new creation that we're after. And the law and the Torah and the temple and all of these things that Paul is contending with here is a part of the old creation. It's a part of the flesh.

And so he begins with Abraham, but why Abraham? Why Abraham? Abraham and Sarah, I'm going to include Sarah, right? We've got a mother of our faith as well as a father of our faith. It's Abraham and Sarah. We wouldn't get Isaac without Sarah and no new Isaac will come forth without a Mary.

So here we go. Abraham and Sarah chosen, elected by God to become the father and mother of the one people of God. To become Israel, chosen to be a light and blessing to the nations.

And so all these ethnic boundaries and the racism that we're suffering from even this week, we're still in shock. We have the answer to this, if the church can actually live out the baptismal vows that we take, you see, that the gospel is the solution, that Jesus Christ is that one new human being who has overcome death and decay. And he gathers us up into himself, making us one people in him, in Christ.

Now, Abraham was chosen to be the father of a people whose seed, that word seed offspring that we heard today, the Greek word is sperm, it's sperma is the actual word for seed. He's the father of a people whose seed, singular, would undo the consequences of Eden, the rebellion in Eden, and to reverse the division, the disintegration and the disorder that came through the curse of Babel. Previously, we had the curse of Babel where the scrambling of communication happened.

And so Abraham has been chosen to reverse all of that that happened from Genesis 1 to Genesis 12. Now, Abraham is not the perfect one that's going to unscramble all of this, but he's the beginning who will carry the seed throughout the centuries until it culminates in that womb of Mary, where the Messiah is supernaturally born by the conception of the Holy Spirit, through a daughter of King David, through a daughter of Abraham. And so everything that happened in between was for that purpose.

It's beautiful. And of course, you know what feast actually was the culmination of the promise of Abraham and the undoing of the communication problem, what feast would that be? Starts with a P. Pentecost, Pentecost, they came down from the upper room speaking in languages that they did not know so that those listening could understand communication restored through what? Through the coming of the Holy Spirit. You see that big picture, we're flying high now.

This is it. And so Pentecost is the fulfillment of all of this. The promise, the spirit comes and reestablishes communion, more than just communication, he reestablishes communion that we lost in the garden.

He reestablishes that and lives inside once again, where Adam breathed in the life of God. You see that image of of the Lord God coming and blowing his breath into Adam, he exhaled it in the fall, he exhaled that breath. And now we are breathing that back in.

And Jesus in the upper room in John 20 received the Holy Spirit and he blows into their nostrils. It's a picture of what was lost in Genesis. Jesus is enacting the second Adam and he is the one coming to restore and blowing into the nostrils of the disciples and says, go, go, go and blow up on other people, blow up on other people.

And then 50 days later, you see, Pentecost occurred. And the promise of Joel, the promise of Ezekiel 37, Jeremiah 31, it was all coming to bear on that day of Pentecost, the Feast of Harvest, who are Abraham's children. Verse seven is the thesis statement, those who believe are the children of Abraham, those who believe.

Who are the heirs, Paul says, it's those who believe irrespective of nationality. And so in that section of verses six through nine, let me just point out a few things and then we'll jet right on down. So those who believe in verse seven, it says, are the descendants of Abraham.

And the scripture, he's speaking of the Old Testament and the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, declared the gospel beforehand to Abraham. Is that amazing? What is that? What

was declared? What is the gospel? Saying all the Gentiles, all the nations shall be blessed in you. Ultimately, in Christ, the seed that was protected from Abraham to Mary, and you see the history of Israel, where so much was coming against Israel, what were what was the enemy after? It was after the seed, destroying the seed, destroying the seed.

Destroy the seed, the seed could not be destroyed through all the exile, through all the attack, through all of the issues, the seed remained. Yes, and it culminates in Jesus Christ. And so those who believe are the descendants of Abraham, the scripture foreseeing all the Gentiles shall be blessed in you.

For this reason, those who believe are blessed with Abraham, who believed circumcision is one of the issues that's being contested here. You have to be circumcised to be a full member of the one people of God. These are Christian Jews saying this.

And so Paul is pulling out Abraham and begins with chapter 12 through 15 pre circumcision. Circumcision was introduced in the line of Abraham in chapter 17, but he doesn't quote from there yet. He quotes from 12 through 15, where before circumcision, this is Paul's rationale, before circumcision, Abraham was already given the promise and Abraham was justified because he believed it.

So circumcision did not bring that about. And this is the genius of Paul, and it's a very radical move on his end to reinterpret Genesis through the lens of Jesus. And it's like St. Augustine said a long time ago, the new is in the old concealed and the old is in the new.

Revealed. The old is in the new revealed. You take out all of the Old Testament, the New Testament, you won't have much left.

In order to understand the new covenant, you've got to understand the Old Testament, the Old Covenant and read it through Christological eyes, as the church fathers did, reinterpreting what was going on. One example, Jesus said, destroy this temple and I'll raise it up in three days. They thought he was talking about the physical temple.

No, he wasn't talking about that at all. He's talking about his body, right? He's reinterpreting the Old Testament. And so that section between 10 and 14 is talking about the law and cursed is everyone who doesn't doesn't observe and obey all the things that are written in the law.

Now, he's evident no one who is justified before God by the law for the one who is righteous. And this is out of Habakkuk. This is talking about Jesus Christ himself, the righteous one.

The one who is righteous, Jesus himself, will live by faith, but the law does not rest on faith. On the contrary, whoever does the works of the law will live by them. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, as it is written.

Cursed is everyone who hangs on a tree. In order that in Christ Jesus, the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, the nations so that we might receive the promise of the spirit through faith. And so we have to have that understanding of justification is not just some legal declaration over us.

Jesus is the justified one. He's the justified man, the new humanity who shares that justification in us by giving us the spirit. And so it's not just a forensic declaration over us, but it's actually remaking us in the promise of Abraham, which is the promise of the spirit.

So that's what Paul is trying to get at. And it's throughout this book is the hope, the work of the Holy Spirit in our redemption. And so Jesus becomes a curse.

His crime was blasphemy. He was he was tried as a lawbreaker. Can you imagine that as a blasphemer? And yet the curse, as Gordon Fee points out, and there's different ways of looking at this, but the curse of the law is actually having to do the law because the law can't bring life.

The law was never meant to be a permanent installment in the people of God, Paul is saying. It was a pedagogue, a custodian. A disciplinarian, this New Revised Standard Version.

What does that mean? I mean, the law was set in place to become almost like a fence around humanity just to sort of keep them in check and to teach them, to teach the nations. And it turned inward on them and it became a curse to them. And they were sent into exile time and time again for idolatry.

So they weren't able to keep it. Cursed is the one who hangs on a tree and Jesus redeems us from the curse of not being able to keep the law. This was in God's plan, you see.

And so it was a temporary custodian. And now, you know, if you get into the pedagogy, the word there, it's it's talking about a slave, actually, that would be hired into a family and the pedagogue would actually be like an au pair. The law was there hemming in humanity, those who would come under it until we could come in to Jesus.

It was a pedagogue. It was like this slave who would actually look after and make sure that a person until they came to puberty would be OK, they would be trained somewhat, they would be taught certain basic things. But it wasn't like academics.

It was more like manners to make sure that, you know, that you don't get too out of control while the parents are doing other things at work or whatnot. That's what the law is like. It's like a slave trying to keep us in check while we're children, immature children.

And until Jesus comes and fulfills the law as the new Israel and he brings us into himself, who is the fulfillment of the law and we get to share in his sonship now and sonship is inheritance language. Right. Who got the inheritance in the old covenant? It was the son, the firstborn son, even though there's a few contradictions to that when we use son, son of God, son, we're all sons of Abraham, we're all sons of God.

It's translated children of Abraham. But the actual word is son. I think it's more powerful because then that underscores the last paragraph of the text when he gets in and he says there's neither male and female anymore.

And so he's using the word son. And then he explains what baptism does is gaining that inheritance in the son, Jesus Christ himself. See, there's one son.

We are just sons. Abraham has many sons and daughters and I'm going to keep saying sons and daughters, but you've got to get that biblical narrow view that only the son could have the inheritance and in baptism. Right.

No more circumcision and male and female come together equally enjoying the full rights of their inheritance. That's what that's all about. And then we get to the culmination of what is the transition moment? It's the cross and the resurrection and the sending out of the Holy Spirit upon all flesh and the

preaching of this gospel over time and people coming to be reconciled in God through the hearing about the faithfulness of Jesus Christ.

Right. We are saved. We are rescued through the faithfulness, the faith of Jesus Christ himself who went before us.

And now he is the author and the finisher of our faith because of his faithful. Yeah, because of his faithfulness. And so let's move to the third section.

There's a lot more to talk about. Sacrament. What is a sacrament? Anybody? I like that.

I like that the moment that grounds reality, reality's got a bad word. Glenn, I'm back to reality. Right.

Absolutely. Absolutely. We've got to reclaim reality.

That's it. And it's real. That's why it's called reality.

Right. The scene in the unseen being redeemed and caught up in Jesus Christ. It's the only reality that will remain.

One day God will be all in all, Paul says. That's that's where this thing is going. Yeah.

So it's the power of baptism now, Paul is saying, that brings us into this reality. Brings us into this reality, as many of you, as were baptized into Christ, have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, that's ethnicity, there is no longer slave or free social standing, status positions.

So it's not no longer male or female, it's male and female, very significant for all of you are one now. So that the gender divisions have been broken down in the cross as well. Now we have to live this out and work this out.

In the power of the spirit, that's where it's going. For all of you are one in Christ, that's a declaration over us that we get to live out. That's why Jesus prays, Father, make them one.

Paul says, maintain the unity of the spirit. You don't create the unity of the spirit. It's already there in the Holy Trinity that we've been brought into in Christ through baptism.

And so we can only hope for a congregation that strives for this. It strives for unity, strives for ethnic divisions being broken down and class divisions being broken down in Jesus and male and female divisions being broken down in Jesus. Now, this is not calling for an androgynous humanity.

This is calling for equal standing before receiving the inheritance in Jesus Christ. That's what it's what it's calling for. So it's both egalitarian and it's both complementary.

That's the paradox that I see in this, because Paul does not abolish certain gender roles. He doesn't in the rest of his writing. So he's not talking about that here.

He's talking about equal status in the inheritance, his children of God. This is so misapplied. There is no longer Jew or Greek.

There is no longer slave or free. There is no longer male and female for all are one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's.

Here it is, seed, offspring, children, sons, sons and daughters now, heirs according to the promise, heirs according to the promise. What is the promise? The Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit indwelling us, renewing us and restoring us and connecting us to the father and the son. And the Holy Spirit is the spirit of Jesus Christ.

That's why Paul can say Christ in you. How can Christ be in us when he ascended to the right hand of the father? Through his spirit, Christ in you, the hope of glory, the resurrected Christ, though, is at the right hand of the father and he must remain in heaven until he restores all things. That's what Acts chapter four says.

Jesus must remain in heaven. Christ in you, the hope of glory. It's Paul interchanges this Holy Spirit, spirit of Christ throughout his writings, because to be connected to the Holy Spirit, he's fully God and he is the person of the Holy Spirit.

But he can't be separated from the father and the son. They're co-substantial and co-equal. When you have the indwelling Holy Spirit, you've got the father and the son right there in communion, because here it is and this is the way I'm going to end this message.

May the love of the father. And the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. And the fellowship, the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you in the name of the father and the son and the Holy Spirit.

Amen.

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