Sermon Series: Fruit of the Spirit

Sermon Title: How the gospel works

Scripture: Galatians 2.15-21

Pastor Thomas Heotzler

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Last week we took the necessary first step to understanding the fruit of the Spirit: we declared the true gospel. The Galatians were believing what I called the “Jesus and…” lie, which is the lie that we need Jesus and then something more to be saved. That something more is often some form of good works as we try to make ourselves worthy of salvation. But that’s not the gospel. Our gospel definition from Galatians is that Jesus Christ gave Himself for our sins to deliver us from the present evil age according to the will of God the Father who raised Jesus from the dead. Only by believing this gospel can one be saved from sin and death.

We also made the vital observation that the gospel has everything to do with what GOD does FOR us; it’s about His work as He calls us and as the Holy Spirit reveals the gospel of Jesus to us, and as we saw from Paul’s salvation story, once Jesus is revealed to a person’s heart the only response is to believe.

This gets us closer to the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5, but we’re not quite there yet. The heart of Paul’s letter to the Galatians, chapters 2-4, remains as a mountain for us to climb, and only when we’ve climbed the mountain will we be able to see to the other side where the fruit grows. I hope that we will climb most of that mountain today, although I can’t make any promises.

You know, promises are tricky things. If you stop to think about it, a promise can only be made if you are absolutely certain that you have the power to fulfill the promise. I made a promise to my wife that I would stay with her in marriage till death do us part. That’s a promise I have the power to keep. However, If I had promised that I would never make her mad at me at any point during our marriage, well, that would be a ridiculous promise because I definitely CAN’T keep it.

When I stop to think about it, there is very little that I have enough control over to make and keep a promise. But that’s not true for the all-powerful and all-knowing God of the universe! When God makes a promise, we can be sure that He will keep it! As it turns out, it’s a promise made by God that lies at the heart of the gospel and helps us understand how the gospel works and why people are saved by believing the gospel instead of doing good works. The explanation I’m about to attempt is a summary of Paul’s explanation in **Galatians 2-4** and I pray I do it justice.

To understand how and why the gospel works the way it works (by having faith in Jesus), we need to understand a promise God made to Abraham in Genesis 15. But to help with that, I’d like to first do something Paul didn’t do by going back to the first promise God ever made which is found in **Genesis 3.15**.

**A Promise God Made**

God created the earth and the whole universe and made humanity His crown achievement of all creation. Adam and Eve were the first humans created and they were to populate the earth with their children and rule over the whole earth as God’s appointed caretakers. However, Adam and Eve were tempted by the devil, that wicked serpent, sinned against God, and brought death into the new creation. It’s at this point God makes His first promise: the offspring of Eve would crush the head of the serpent.

Following the Argument: #1

God promised that a righteous offspring of the woman who would crush the head of the serpent.

We can’t dive into this too much, but there’s a huge unmentioned implication in this promise. Consider it with me: the devil is wicked and evil and everything opposed to God. If someone is going to crush the head of the devil, that someone must not be like the devil. Instead, that someone must be completely different; that someone must be righteous, which means having right and pure standing before God. Therefore, God’s promise that the serpent would be crushed by the offspring of the women was a promise that there would be righteousness found somewhere in humanity.

Fast forward now to Noah in **Genesis 6**. The whole earth was devoid of righteousness except for one man: Noah. God saved the one righteous man on the earth, along with his family, and destroyed the rest of unrighteousness humanity in an effort to preserve righteousness so that there would be a righteous offspring of the woman to crush the serpent’s head.

**A Promise God Gave**

Now we come to Abraham in **Genesis 15**. With His first promise in mind, God **chose** Abraham out of all the people on the earth and promised Abraham and his offspring a land in which they would dwell. By this promise to Abraham, God was making for Himself a people to ensure that righteousness would remain on the earth so that there would be a righteous offspring to crush the head of the serpent. Had God not intervened in this way, the world would have devolved again into total wickedness. However, by calling Abraham and eventually creating the people Israel, God made sure total wickedness would never again reign over all the earth like it did at the time of Noah and the flood.

Following the Argument: #2

God Chose Abraham and His Offspring to Receive the Promise; Abraham believed and was counted righteous.

Now notice this: God called Abraham and gave him this promise without regard for Abraham’s works, good or bad. However, in response to God’s promise, **Genesis 15.6** says “Abraham believed God and God counted it to him as righteousness.”

Stop. Let’s think about this.

God is working to preserve righteousness on the earth so that the righteous offspring of the woman could crush the head of the serpent. God promised to use Abraham and his offspring before Abraham was considered righteous. However, in response to the revelation of God and His promise, Abraham believed God and was thereby considered by God to be righteous, not because of Abraham’s good works but because of his faith in God and God’s promise.

At this point in the Bible and in history, righteousness is linked to faith and faith to righteousness. Therefore, the offspring of the woman who would crush the head of the serpent would also be the offspring of Abraham and would possess **faith-based righteousness.**

So, who is this offspring of the woman and of Abraham who would possess faith-based righteousness? According to Paul in **Galatian 3.16**, the righteous offspring is ultimately Jesus Christ.

**A Promise God Inherited**

Paul contends that Jesus is the true offspring of Abraham and therefore the one to receive the greatest expression of the promise to inherit the land.[[1]](#footnote-1) In **Hebrews 12.2**, Jesus is called the author and perfector of our faith. He’s the author because He is God, and it is in Him that our faith is to be placed. He is the perfector because He possessed and lived perfect faith, faith greater even than Abraham’s, while on the earth. Jesus became the perfect Abraham and inherited God’s promise to Abraham. Jesus is the New and Perfect Abraham.

Following the Argument: #3

Jesus, King of Righteousness, is the true offspring of Abraham and inheritor of the promise.

It was Jesus, the perfectly righteous offspring of the woman and of Abraham, whom God used to fulfill His promise and crush the head of the serpent at the cross.

But God is concerned with more than crushing the devil; He is also concerned with saving people, His image bearers, from eternal destruction because of our sin. He created Israel to be His people and they were governed by the Law of Moses which did not save them but only taught them how to **act** righteously; the law did not enable the people to **be** righteous.[[2]](#footnote-2) So there is still the problem of unrighteousness before God which, as we learned from the story of Noah, leads to destruction.

How then can people become righteous? How can people be saved? Just like Abraham: by faith as one believes in God and the One whom God sent to save the world, Jesus Christ.

**A Promise God Guarantees**

By simple faith in the revealed Savior and Righteous Offspring of the woman and of Abraham we become children of God. See, when someone responds to Jesus with faith, something happens. According to **Galatians 4.6**, God sends the Spirit of His Son into our hearts. The Holy Spirit, the very Spirit of Jesus, is given to those who believe, and within the believer He cries out to God saying, “Abba! Father!”

Following the Argument: #4

The Holy Spirit unites a child of God with Jesus to share in His righteousness and inherited promise.

What this means then is that we truly are sons and daughters of God if we have the Spirit of Jesus within us. By the Spirit who relates us directly to God as Father, we become no longer slaves to sin but sons and daughters of God, and if sons and daughters, then co-heirs with Jesus and the promise from God.[[3]](#footnote-3) [[4]](#footnote-4)

The Holy Spirit then is our direct and essential link to Jesus and promised eternal life. We cannot earn the Spirit, we cannot buy the Spirit, and we cannot coerce the Spirit to dwell with us. The Holy Spirit is a gift only to those who, like Abraham, believe.

**Conclusion**

All of this from God’s promise to Abraham to Jesus to the Holy Spirit describes why salvation is by faith and not by works. It began as a promise God made, it continues as a promise God gave, it was realized by a promise God inherited, and it is guaranteed as a promise God shares to those who believe.

Let there be no doubt that salvation from sin is from God and let there be no doubt that Jesus is the one who earned salvation for those who believe in Him. We see again as we did last week that the gospel is all about what God does for us.

We serve and belong to Almighty God who loves us so much that He orchestrated all of history so that He could solve the problem of sin and death we created by crushing the devil and making a truly righteous people to inherit all creation with Jesus. When confronted with this truth, what else can our hearts do but rejoice and praise God for who He is and for what He has done, is doing, and will do for His glory and our gain!

1. Instead of inheriting only the land from the river of Egypt to the Euphrates to the Mediterranean Sea (Genesis 15.18, Exodus 23.31), Jesus inherited all of heaven and earth! (Philippians 2.8-11) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Galatians 3.19 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Galatians 4.7 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. For a deeper study concerning the Holy Spirit, compare Romans 8.12-17 with Galatians 4.1-7. Notice these two passages the concepts of becoming a son of God and receiving the Holy Spirit are the same meaning one can’t happen apart from the other. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)