

HEIRS OF THE PROMISE

How Justification by Faith Gains Us the World

Romans Series
PBC 2025

Text: Romans 4:13-17a

In the first half of chapter four, Paul highlights the great blessing that God has given to everyone who has been justified by faith, ***which should inspire unquenchable joy in us*** (4:1-12).

Often, **our justification fails to bring us joy** because we view justification by faith mainly as a doctrine we must believe, rather than a truth we must experience. Consequently, we never experience the immense joy that David found in being justified, described in Psalm 32 and referenced earlier in this chapter (4:6-8).

However, there is a second danger Paul discusses in 4:13-25: *because we haven't seen the full extent of the blessing that comes when we believe, **our justification does not give us hope to sustain us in this life.***

The source of hope Paul points to in these verses is a “promise” mentioned 5x in this passage (vv. 13, 14, 16, 20, 21). God made a promise to Abraham (Gen 12, 15, 22), in which He guaranteed that Abraham (and his descendants) would inherit the world. Paul stresses this promise because he wants his readers to understand that when they are justified, ***they also become heirs of this same promise God made to Abraham.***

Paul's point is that ***the promise changes everything for believers.*** We might face poverty and hardship on earth, but that poverty is temporary, and our suffering is momentary. One day, we will inherit the earth and rule over it with King Jesus!

The truth of this promise will ***empower us to live confidently, joyfully, and purposefully as heirs of the world***, not as impoverished spiritual paupers who have no idea of the immense wealth that is ours!

Illustration: Story of Tim Gray

- On a Thursday in December 2012, a group of children sledding near an underpass in the small town of Evanston, Wyoming, discovered the frozen body of a homeless man.
- The body was identified as a 60-year-old homeless man named Timothy Gray, who apparently froze to death under the underpass where he sought shelter from the subzero weather.
- As the coroner and law enforcement officials began investigating his death, they made a shocking discovery about his true identity – far from being the homeless pauper everyone thought he was, Timothy Gray was actually an heir to a huge fortune worth over 300 million dollars, and his share would have been more than 20 million.
- As it turns out, Timothy was a great-nephew of the reclusive heiress Huguette Clark—whose father, William Andrews Clark, made a fortune through copper mining in Montana. He was one of the founders of Las Vegas and became a U.S. Senator. His daughter, Huguette, died in 2011 at the age of 104, leaving her share of the family fortune (300 million dollars) to be divided among her 20 living heirs, including Timothy.
- Because she had no children of her own, the fortune went back to her father's line and his descendants. What makes the story even more interesting is that, when he was five, ***Timothy Gray was adopted into the Clark family*** by one of William's granddaughters, making him an heir to the vast family fortune that was passed down through his great-aunt Huguette.
- However, ***Timthoy never knew about his inheritance***. When the lawyers handling the estate tried to notify him, they couldn't find him. He had been evicted from his apartment and left no forwarding address. His brother, Gerry, told an ABC News reporter that no one had contact with Timothy for nearly 25 years, since his mother's funeral in 1990. He summarized his brother's life and tragic death with these words, "It is universally and enormously sad. Everyone dies, but it's not the kind of death anyone in the family would want him to suffer."
- He lived and died as a wealthy pauper!

Timothy Gray's story is so incredible that it almost seems unbelievable.

In many ways, Timothy Gray's story reflects the experience of countless Christians unaware of the true riches they possess in Christ. Let me explain. When they were justified by faith, all they believed happened was that they moved from one side to the other – from the “going to hell forever” line to the “going to heaven to live forever” line. Some who are a little more theologically astute might even be able to explain that justification is a legal declaration that puts us right with God.

This is why ***many born-again believers spend their entire lives as spiritual paupers***, living in spiritual poverty, desperately grasping for the tiny scraps the world gives that bring fleeting, temporary pleasure.

And when this happens, we end up scraping by in life, weighed down by cares, worries, fears, sorrow, and hopelessness. We come to church to sing, pray, and serve in hopes of finding a small piece of joy and peace before heading back into another week where we hold on with all our might, hoping and praying that nothing goes wrong because we are at the end of every resource we have. ***And we live our lives without realizing the immense wealth that is ours—not someday in the future, but right now!***

I want to use Paul's words in this passage to give all the “Wealthy Spiritual Paupers” in the room unimaginable, unshakeable, joy-producing, life-sustaining hope because of the immense wealth that was given to you when God justified you because of your faith! When God justified you:

- You got all the righteousness of Christ credited to your account.
- But you also received the full inheritance God promised Christ!

And to demonstrate that these remarkable blessings are genuine, Paul uses Abraham as the primary example of someone justified by faith.

When Abraham believed God's promise, his faith not only made him righteous; it also secured the promise of an incredible inheritance: ***God told Abraham that he would inherit the world! And this should give us unquenchable joy and unshakeable hope as we wait for God's Son!***

Since most of us don't think of ourselves as "heirs of the world," I want Paul to answer four questions today to help us ***understand our true wealth, encourage us in our current circumstances, and inspire us to live differently as heirs of the world.***

I. What does it mean to be an "heir of the world?" (4:13)

*For the **promise** to Abraham and his offspring that he would be **heir of the world** did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith.*

A. The nature of the promise – an irrevocable covenant.

- It is a formal agreement between two parties that is official, binding, and deeply relational.
- There are six formal covenants in the Bible that God makes with someone. The one Paul mentions here is the third one.
- He makes a foundational promise to Adam and Eve (Gen 3:15)
- He makes a covenant with Noah that there would always be an earth and a humanity for God to redeem and restore (Gen 9:8-17)
- ***And the third covenant/promise is the one He made with Abraham in Genesis 12, 15, 17, and 22.***

B. The content of the promise – a guaranteed future inheritance

1. ***A Seed*** – a son and a ***royal posterity*** that would become a great nation of royal rulers (Gen 12:1-3; Gen 17:1-14; Gen 22:15-18) who would one day rule the earth with Abraham's greater Son!
2. ***A Land*** – a ***royal kingdom***, better than Ur, whose builder and maker is God. (Gen 15:12-21; Gen 22:15-18) This kingdom would be established by God, marked by righteousness, flavored by peace, and would never be destroyed!
3. ***A Blessing*** – a ***royal prerogative*** from God to mediate blessing to the nations as their benevolent rulers. (Gen 12:1-3; Gen 22:15-18)

C. The future fullness of the promise – an eternal kingdom on earth

1. A city/temple whose builder and maker is God (Rev 21-22)
2. A kingdom that will fill the earth, be marked by righteousness and peace, and will stand forever! (Isaiah 11; Daniel 2, 7)
3. A Messiah King who redeemed us and now rules with us over the nations in a kingdom filled with blessing for the nations and glory and honor for King Jesus! (2 Timothy 2:11-13)

Note: This kingdom is global in scope, righteous in character, terrestrial in location, and instructive in mission.

D. The present enjoyment of the promise – blessing, power, and mission

1. We have been given every blessing there is to get from the Spirit in the spiritual realm in which we now live! (Eph 1:3)
Ephesians 1:3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places,
2. We have been given all things by God through Christ – everything that now belongs to him, also belongs to us! (1 Cor 3:22-23)
1 Cor 3:22-23 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours,²³ and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.
3. We have been made Royal Priests who belong to God and whose mission is to proclaim the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light! (1 Pet 2:9-10)
1 Peter 2:9-10 But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light.¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.
Even though we don't fully enjoy these blessings now, they are fully ours! And one day they will be physically present in our lives.

II. On what basis does “inheriting the world” happen and why? (4:14-16)

*For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the **promise** is void.¹⁵ For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.¹⁶ That is why it depends on faith, in order that the **promise** may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring*

Paul's argument here is this: If justification is obtained by faith, then so are all the benefits that come from that justification! Including being made an heir of the promise.

A. How the Promise is Obtained – through the righteousness of faith!

For the **promise** to Abraham and his offspring that he would be **heir of the world** did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the **promise** is void.¹⁵ For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.

- **Not by the Law**—because the Law brings wrath. And if we live within the **realm of the Law** and end up under wrath, then the immense promise God made to us through Abraham is nullified, because Abraham didn't receive these promises based on his good works but on his righteous faith.
- **But by the righteousness that comes from faith**—grace has removed us from the realm of the Law, where our transgressions were counted against us, and transplanted us into a very different realm, **the realm of Grace**, where our sins and transgressions are not counted against us (5:1-11; 8:1-4). In that realm, our transgressions have been forgiven and removed as far as the east is from the west! (Psalm 103:12).

B. Why God designed it this way: so that the promise would rest on His mercy (grace) rather than Abraham's merit (4:16).

in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all,

- ***So that the promise may rest (be established and grounded) on the foundation of merciful grace and not human merit.*** Because if inheriting rests on human effort or merit, no one gets it!
- ***So that the promise would be guaranteed to all of Abraham's descendants,*** regardless of their spiritual or ethnic identity. Paul is reminding us that when God promised this great inheritance to Abraham and his descendants – it wasn't just Jews who were the intended recipients. It also included Gentiles!
- ***I know how Abraham's physical offspring, the Jews, share his inheritance(because of their relationship to Abraham), but how do Gentiles get in on this?***

III. Who gets this amazing inheritance and how? (4:16)

in order that the **promise** may rest on grace and be **guaranteed to all his offspring**—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all,

- To receive Abraham's inheritance, you need to be related to him! You must be a descendant who qualifies as an heir.
- Often, an inheritance will have a condition attached that must be fulfilled by the heir. And that is the case here. ***There is a solitary condition God puts on the inheritance.*** The heir must share something in common with Abraham!
- On hearing this, all of Abraham's physical descendants perked up because they had physical proof of their association with Abraham in their circumcision. Because they shared his circumcision, they believed they qualified to inherit His promise!
- ***But Paul does not point to sharing Abraham's circumcision as what qualifies a person to inherit the promise. He points to Abraham's faith! In other words, only those who share Abraham's faith will inherit – whether Jew or Gentile!***
- And when you and I believe in God like Abraham did, not only is righteousness credited to us, but we also become heirs of an enormous inheritance (the world) that God promises to us!

IV. How do we know the promise will be fulfilled? (4:17)

as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations"—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

- ***How do we know that the promise will come true in the end?***
- Paul points us to three things that gave Abraham confidence in the promise and that will do the same for us: ***God is good at making the impossible possible!***

A. ***The promise is recorded in Scripture – "as it is written"***

B. ***The promise was made in Person*** in the context of a personal relationship – *"in the presence of the God in whom he believed"*

C. The promise rests on God's power, not just on His mercy – "I have made you the father of many nations"

- Note the perfect tense – "I have made you"
- At the time of the promise, nothing yet existed but an 85 year old man and his 75 year old wife!
- And in a heartfelt conversation with God, Abraham said,
Genesis 15:2-6 "O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?"³ And Abram said, "Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir."⁴ And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: "This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir."⁵ And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."⁶ And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.
- Fifteen years passed without any of God's promises coming true. By then, Abraham and Sara were 100 and 90 years old—well past the age when their reproductive systems were active.
- And Paul, looking back on the history of Abraham's story, tells us **two important realities about God** that are the reason He is good at making the impossible possible, not just for Abraham, but for us!

1. The God of Abraham brings to life what is dead! (v. 17)

2. The God of Abraham calls into existence things that don't yet exist! (v. 17)

- When God told Abraham he would be the father of many nations, none of those nations yet existed! In fact, Abraham didn't even have a son!
- It must have seemed unbelievable to Abraham when God told him to count the stars and number the sand to understand how large his offspring would become. But 430 years later, Moses led some 2 million of them out of Egypt. A 1000 years later, David ruled over even more of them. Many more were scattered throughout the Roman Empire in Paul's day, 2000 years after Abraham. And many more of those descendants exist in our own day! ***God is good at the impossible! He calls things into existence that don't yet exist!***

- ***But that still doesn't answer the biggest question of all – for an inheritance to be enjoyed, **the heir must be alive!** But Abraham has been dead for 4000 years! So, **how will he inherit and enjoy the full promise God made to him?*****
- ***Paul's answer to this question is that God gives life to the dead!***
 - He brought Sara's dead and barren womb to life.
 - He brought Messiah Jesus' dead body to life.
 - He brought a Paul's spiritually dead heart to life (and ours).
 - He will one day raise up physically dead bodies to life (Abraham's and ours) to receive and enjoy the fulfillment of this promise! (1 Corinthians 15:50-58)

Conclusion: How should we live as “heirs of the world”?

1 Cor 15:58 *Therefore, my beloved brothers, be **steadfast, immovable, always abounding** in the work of the Lord, **knowing** that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.*

- We should be steadfast in our faith – strong/firm in our belief!
- We should be immovable in our joyful confidence – unwavering!
- We should be fervent in our labor and abounding in our effort in accomplishing the mission of the gospel – actively engaged!
- We should be confident that using our lives in this way is not empty and useless, but rather abundantly fruitful in both this life and the next.