

Romans 4:13-15

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 06 June 2021

Preacher: Paul Levy

[0 : 00] Turn to Romans chapter 4. So let me just say to the children, we're going to move Sunday school from Saturday night back to Sunday morning.

! So Romans 4, I want us to look just at, from verses 13 to 15, I've got a very simple question that comes in Romans 4, and Paul is contrasting as neat the way of obedience and the way of promise, the way of faith.

And so the question is this, do you understand the gospel? Do you understand the good news of God? Some of you might be offended by that.

You say, I've been coming to church for years. Of course I understand the gospel. Don't be offended by it. Think about it. Do you understand the gospel? Where has Paul been going in Romans 4?

He's told us about the call to faith and not to works. We've grasped something of the contrast between circumcision of the flesh and circumcision of the heart.

[1 : 37] the work of the Holy Spirit. And so we understand the gospel. So that leads us to another question this morning. And that question is, is there a gospel gap in your life?

Is there a gap between your life and the gospel? You know you go out in the tube and there's those signs on there, please mind the gap. And there's a little gap between the platform and the tube.

And so is there a gospel gap in your life? It's a different question. It's a little bit more difficult to answer, isn't it? So what do I mean by a gospel gap? You say, I think I know and I think I understand the gospel.

And you may be able to summarize it for me in various ways. You may say, I understand that the gospel is all about the work of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross. And by that work of Jesus, God forgives my sins.

The gospel is all about forgiving sinners. It's about the hope that is given to us of heaven. It says in our text, doesn't it, in verse 13, of being an heir of the world.

[2 : 44] The gospel is all about God's transforming work, changing you and I day by day. So that we move from being self-centered and a self-worshipper to a God-centered, God-glorifying worshipper.

And so the question is, is there a gospel gap in your life? By which you say, well yeah, I know the gospel. I understand the gospel. I know what it means. I know what you're talking about.

But there's a huge gap between what you know and how it affects your life. How it affects you on that Monday morning when you go to school. Or when the alarm goes off and you go into the office. And there are people that you find really difficult and you actually don't like very much. How does the gospel affect you in the way that you relate to that awkward boss when things do not go your way? How does the gospel affect you in the way that you react to suffering or when the cancer diagnosis comes?

Or the way that you react to traffic, now traffic is back. How does the gospel affect you in the way that you care for your neighbor, those in need?

[3 : 59] How does the gospel affect the way that you treat your wife? Or the way that you submit to your husband? Or the way that you parent your children? Is there a gospel gap in your life?

Do you think about the gospel on Sunday morning? And then it falls out of your head. And so you have this kind of gospel amnesia that doesn't make a difference to the rest of your life.

When the difficulties and the storms of life come, whether it's at home or at work, in the family, does the gospel bring anything to that?

And one of the reasons that we suffer from gospel amnesia, if I can put it like that, is that we often base our relationship with God on our performance. And when we do that more and more, it leads

to a huge and growing gospel gap.

When we base our relationship with God on our understanding of our life and what God is doing in our life and at work and at home and school and amongst our neighbors and in church, when we base our relationship with God on our performance, the proper name for that is legalism.

[5 : 20] That we approach God in a legalistic way. We often think of the legalistic person as somebody who's got a lot of rules.

We think of the legalistic person as somebody who doesn't like change, who's very particular. But legalism is far, far more subtle than that.

Far, far more subtle. Here's a simple definition. Legalism is seeking to achieve forgiveness from God and acceptance by God through obedience to God.

Did you get that? Legalism is seeking to achieve forgiveness from God and acceptance by God through obedience to God.

So legalism has got its origin in self. And self-worship. And so if people are justified, if people are declared right with God by their obedience to the law, then they merit some praise, don't they?

[6 : 32] Well done. Legalism, in other words, means that the glory goes to people rather than to God. and it's a trap.

We can speak about it as the performance trap. It's one of, isn't it, if not the biggest problem in the Christian life. And I don't know about you, but we never seem to fully escape from this performance trap.

We think to ourselves over and over again that there are things that I must do, but things that I have to do that will make me more acceptable to God. And we base our acceptance, our understanding of our acceptance by God on things that we do.

And so when we fail and when we don't do those things, the trap becomes extremely painful and disheartening and discouraging and distressing and devastating.

It's living the life, the Christian life, like a plate spinner. You know the plate spinner, don't you?

When you kind of go to the circus and there's somebody with a pole and they spin one plate and then they get another one and they spin another and they have a load of line of plates and they keep going down the line, keeping them all going.

[7 : 58] But if they stop spinning the plates, what happens? The plates fall. And so you've got to keep on going frantically. And there are many people that live the Christian life like that.

They think, if I keep all these plates spinning of obedience to God, then God will accept me. And that's exactly what Paul speaks against in these verses. So look with me at verse 13 of Romans 4. 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, the listeners of the law who are to be the heirs, faith, well it's null and the promise is void. For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.

And so one reason for a gospel gap is that we do not rest on God and rest in God. And so we end up resting in ourselves and in our own works and in our own deeds and it becomes fruitless and futile and distressing and discouraging and self-centered and self-absorbed and we become more miserable.

The performance trap is the obedience to the law as opposed to the firmness of the promise by faith in Jesus Christ.

[9 : 22] And so what Paul is saying in these three verses is there are two ways to live, there are two ways to approach God. And he's been saying it over and over and over again in Romans. There are only two ways that you can approach God.

One word is law and all the words associated with that. Obedience, performance, your work, your effort, your duties.

That is one way that people try to approach God. But then there is the other way which is promise. And the family of words there are faith and gift and God's work.

So the law way, what does he say about that? About obedience and performance and the work way? He says, if you live like that it absolutely destroys the gospel.

To live in that way is to live utterly contrary to the gospel. And if you think that is the way that you're going to be accepted by God, do you know what you do? You make faith null and the promise void.

[10:29] You make them empty. And it not only destroys the gospel, when you look at it, it's absurd. Because the law and the performance way, what does it bring?

It brings, can you see it? It brings wrath. It brings the wrath of God upon you. The plate spinning way, the performance way, it does not bring acceptance by God.

But what does it say about the promised way? It says the promised way, well, is by faith and that it's a free gift and it's by mercy.

And this promised way leads to inheriting the world. The law way leads to wrath and destroys the gospel.

The promised way leads to faith and inheriting the world. And it leads to joy and to peace and to glory and all of the blessings that come to us in Jesus Christ forever.

[11:37] It is the promise. It is the gift of Jesus Christ that breaks those depressing chains of frustration and failure of the performance driven life if I can call it that.

What does the performance driven life do to you? You become obsessed with your own efforts. And so when life doesn't go the way you want you are utterly devastated.

And life becomes an obsession with have I done enough? Have I read my Bible enough? Have I prayed enough? Have I kept spinning those plates of good works?

Have I kept spinning them? And the performance plate spinning driven life makes you into a Pharisee. The promise driven life it makes you into a worshipper of someone else other than yourself.

It drives you away from yourself and so that you become someone who lives to glorify God and enjoy him forever. In the words of the New Testament you become a saint that is a separated one.

[12:54] Someone who is holy because the promise driven life leads you to Christ. And the plates of performance they can fall. They can be taken down.

It's not saying you don't read your Bible. You don't do good works. but it is saying that your acceptance by God is not based on any of them. It is based on faith and the righteousness that comes through Jesus Christ and Jesus Christ alone.

And so let me ask you a question. Do you understand the gospel? And is there a gospel gap in your life? I'm asking are you living the performance driven life?

Or are you living the promise driven life? One is the way of the Pharisee. One is the way of joyful worshipping of Jesus Christ.

And Paul sets this out in two ways. Two points. First of all you are not accepted by God through law but faith. You are not accepted by God through law but faith.

[14:14] This is what he says. It's not the law way. 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.

Now remember what Paul is doing in this context. He's giving us a real life example isn't it of what faith looks like. He's showing us Abraham and the Jews thought of Abraham as the model religious man.

I think that's true. The Bible picks up on that. He's the prototype believer. He was a model religious man and they thought he was the model religious man because he was a law keeper.

And Paul is very gently saying that is wrong. He started out didn't he by saying take the example of circumcision. look at that. How the Jews came to look at that as the very first work that puts a person right with God.

The very first thing that would be impressive to God. And they thought that Abraham was the model religious man because he was the first to be circumcised. And Paul just sweeps that away and he says how long had Abraham been accepted by God before he was circumcised?

[15:30] It was a long time afterwards. It was 14 years. His acceptance is nothing to do with his circumcision in that sense. And then he carries it a little bit further because the Jews saw circumcision as the first sign of obeying the law.

Of law obedience and performance. So he picks that up. And he speaks simply of the law in general. Not only the law of Moses.

He could have used that same argument couldn't he? He could have said when did the law of Moses come? You think Abraham is the model religious man because he kept the law of Moses.

How long after Abraham did Moses come? About 430 years. He could have said that but he doesn't. He meets it in a different way. He says let's think about this question about law.

That God has given his demands. why does that not work in Abraham's life? Why is it that that is not the way that God saved him? That God accepted him?

[16:32] Why is that not the way that God accepts people like us? And he gives two reasons. Look at verse 14. He says for it is the adherence of the law who are to be the heirs. For if it is the adherence of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void.

For if that was the way, the way of faith is destroyed. If our acceptance with God is based on our performance, then the gospel is useless.

And he's saying therefore if that is the case, faith is null and the promise is void. If you're saying that obedience is the way to God, then faith is a waste of time.

The gospel is a waste of time. It was a waste of time for Jesus to be born and to live and to die.

That's the point. And so can you see what the performance driven life does?

That legalism, it claims that the death of Jesus was either unnecessary or insufficient. The performance performance driven life says essentially to God, you're planned and work Lord.

[17:54] The cross is not enough. And I need to add my good work so as to be saved. Do you see what that means? God is not way.

Why is it not this obedience way that makes a big impact on God and impresses God? Because that way is the way of trusting in yourself. God has set it out in another way.

God says I will accept you, I will welcome you when you trust my son. And trusting my son means you stop trusting yourself. And trusting my son means you look away from your own performance and you stop measuring yourself up before me.

it's Jesus Christ. And he says now here is the gospel. And he's saying if this is the way there's no reason to trust anyone else.

What did he send Christ for? Why is he spoken of as the lamb slain before the foundation of the world? If the way to God is the way of performance and the way of plate spinning and the way of working harder, it's a massive mistake on God's part.

[19:20] The whole gospel thing, the promise is nullified. It means it's not by free gift, it's not by God's mercy, it's just a paycheck that you're getting. The promise is nullified, faith is of no effect.

Do you see what Paul is doing? He's saying you cannot have it both ways. It cannot be grace and law. It cannot be promise and obedience. It cannot be both.

One way destroys the other. this way of performance driven over rules, this way is being necessary. If it's by law, then it's not necessary that Jesus should die. If it is by Christ, then it is not necessary for you to obey the law, so to be accepted by God.

They are mutually exclusive when it comes to our acceptance with God. And our standing in God's sight. And he gives a second reason that we are accepted by God through faith and not by law.

[20:29] Verse 15, for the law brings wrath. But where there is no law, there is no transgression. I think Romans is like sometimes it's written in shorthand.

And so there are words that we hear from Paul and we think, I wish he'd said more. They're files that you get in your email and you open them up and suddenly you've got loads of information to digest.

What does he mean here? It means where there are no laws. So here's a line and you're not allowed to go over it. But you transgress it because there was no sign saying please don't go over the line.

you didn't know that you were doing something wrong or not. But where there is a law there is deliberate transgression and there is deliberate rebellion.

And when you transgress the law the wrath of God comes upon us. You could be saying that is the nature of our being sinners. When there are laws we transgress them.

[21:45] We push against it. Or specifically that it is the law of God. When God lays down a law because we are rebels because we are wanting self worship and self adoring and self we hear God's law and we just transgress it anyway.

We'll just walk over it. And so God's wrath comes. He is saying to you and I you are not accepted! by God through law. Because however impressed you might be this morning with your performance God is not. What does it produce in God?

It produces wrath. Because tragically everything you do and everything I do is mixed with sin. Every good deed we do is flawed with sin.

We are sinners. And so again and again Paul is saying you are not accepted by God through your performance. And that destroys the gospel and it is contrary to it.

[22 : 55] And see where your performance driven life will lead you. It will lead you down a road that ends in destruction. Abraham was not accepted through his obedience or his performance.

Abraham was accepted through his faith in Jesus Christ. And in all that Jesus Christ had done. And that's the second and the final point.

You're not accepted by God through law but by faith. The second point is this. You are accepted by God through his grace through his promise of mercy. Through his grace through his promise of mercy.

Look what it says again. By the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be! of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith.

There is a promise. There's a promise that's been made to Abraham and that promise has been made to his descendants. And we know don't we from the context of Romans 3 and 4 that he is speaking of those who are true descendants of Abraham.

[24 : 09] Those who follow in Abraham's footsteps of faith. that is to say you are a true descendant of Abraham if you believe and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

You are a child of Abraham if you are following in his faith of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus said didn't he Abraham rejoice to see my day.

Abraham was looking to the Lord Jesus Christ and all that the Lord Jesus Christ would do. And there is a promise that is made to Abraham and that promise is according to verse 13 of Romans 4 that he would be the heir of the world and his descendants those who are trusting in Christ would be heirs of the world and you don't inherit the world because you do something for God that impresses him you don't it's a promise it's a free gift it's not a performance orientated thing that he responds to it's a free gift to you that as you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ well what does that mean what is the promise that he would be an heir of the world there are some people who come to this verse and they say well actually back in Genesis that's not what God said to Abraham in Genesis it said that Abraham would inherit the land!

he died that's what Hebrews tells us he died and he didn't come to possess the land because it was pointing forward to something more and so there are some that take these promises and they say we've got to get out to the Middle East and we've got to put those stakes that mark out the land of Israel in the Middle East and we've got to find those borders it is saying that Abraham and his descendants received this promise that they would be heirs of the world and there's at least two parts to this first of all it points forward to the resurrection Abraham died but the promise is still to him that he would be heir of the world so it points to the resurrection and Jesus picks up on that and he says is God the God of!

is he the God of the living he's the God of Abraham Isaac and Jacob and there's a sense in which Abraham is still alive but it's also pointing to the further future to that enjoyment of the blessings of God in a real way it's pointing to the resurrection to new life so Abraham is dead and buried but the promise is null and void just because he's dead and that is the glory of what God is doing it is not based on the performance of the man he is dead and yet the promise can still come to him because the promise has in its heart the promise of rising again from the dead and a new creation and I think secondly it has the promise of dominion or better still the promise of triumphing there's a promise of triumphing here over all the enemies because he will inherit the world it is a triumph over all that has become opposed to

[27 : 47] God and fights against God and Abraham and his descendants will inherit this in Galatians Paul speaks of this word offspring or descendants and he points out that it's singular and he shows us that it's speaking of Christ and that means that the promise that comes to Abraham comes through Jesus Christ through Christ that Abraham comes to rise from the dead and it is through Christ that Abraham comes to rule over the world because it is Christ who triumphs over all his enemies and it is Jesus Christ who rules and we are seated with him in the heavenly places and we rule with him and we are inheritors with him of all that the father gives to him and we share his glory and so this is so difficult isn't it for people to grasp that the promises of the land in the Old Testament find their fulfillment not in the land in the

New Testament but in Jesus Christ in the New Testament the promises of the land in terms of the Old Testament kingdom find their fulfillment in Jesus in terms of the New Kingdom the land in Old Testament money is to be in Christ in New Testament money and so where are you this morning if

you've trusted and believed in the Lord Jesus we are in Christ we are in his kingdom and because we are in him the kingdom is not of this world in God and in his grace and in his mercy these are the gifts that are given glorious promises did you hope that by your performance you would inherit the world what kind of things have you got to do to do that they would need to be staggering things wouldn't they what kind of things are you planning to do that would merit you inheriting the world look what

Christ has done and see why this promise comes to Christ and therefore in Christ comes to Abraham and to everyone who is like Abraham a believer in the Lord Jesus Christ gifts of the most enormous state become ours we'll rise from the dead we'll enter into the new heavens and the new earth we'll be surrounded by the glory of God that enables us to enjoy those things in his presence forever because the promise was based on faith and not on performance and law you could never in it and so this morning as we look at this passage we thank God that he doesn't call you to earn it he calls you to believe it and he calls you to receive it by faith and what that should do is that should eradicate the gospel gap in our lives between the 30 or so minutes that we think about this on a Sunday morning and the rest of our lives the gap should be becoming smaller and smaller because it means when I go to work and when I go to school

I know that the promise is mine and no matter what that day holds for me the promise is still mine and I can help others and I can point them to Jesus so that they too can become a worshipper of the father and it should fill us with hope and fill us with joy so that when like the apostle Paul we find ourselves persecuted and cast out and hurt and disappointed this hope of the promise is never removed from us and it should fill us with courage to endure in our suffering so that when illness or cancer or depression comes or when we're under pressure in work and our colleagues are difficult and our children are hard work whatever it may be that causes us suffering or pain we know that the present suffering is not worthy of comparison with the glory that will be revealed Romans 8 18 and the promise enables us to serve him joyfully and when we go through the grind of work we can lift up our hearts and say

I am not just a cog in the machine I am a servant of the great king I'm an heir of the world and it teaches us to do everything to the glory of God and so do you understand the gospel are you living the performance driven life if you are this morning see where it leads you to the wrath of God or will you live the promise driven life where we're called to love and obey him and so make no mistake we are never called to approach him on the basis of what we've done but we always approach him in and through the Lord Jesus Christ we approach him on the basis of amazing grace so that whatever circumstances we find ourselves in God can forgive sin my sin your sin whatever situation we find ourselves in we can know that

[33 : 35] God can continue to work for his glory in our suffering in our work in our home in our church performance driven or promise driven yourself or Christ one ends in destruction one ends in glory let's pray together