**By Promise**

**Galatians 3:15-22**

Trinity XIII – September 11, 2022

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

What came first, the chicken or the egg? Yeah, it is a funny question. I’m not really sure why it is asked except to show that someone’s not really sure. But, the chicken came first – God made them and told them to multiply. See how simple that is?

So, which came first the Gospel promise or God’s Law? The Gospel promise did, in fact, according to our text, it came 430 years before the Law. You see, the promise came to Abraham 430 years before the Law. He inherited an eternal kingdom by promise. In fact, everybody who inherits an eternal kingdom, inherits it by promise.

Abraham heard the promise made to him by God, that through His offspring all the nations of the earth would be blessed. He had faith in the One which God promised would bless ***him*** – ***and all*** who believe the promise.

Adam and Eve were promised that Eve’s seed, Christ, would crush Satan’s head. Satan’s head is his power, death. They were saved because they trusted the promise God made – they trusted in the One God promised to send to crush Satan’s head. Again, saved by promise.

All the Old Testament saints who now abide in paradise, reside there because they had faith in the One God promised was going to come. Each and every one of them had faith in the Promised One of Israel, God’s Messiah, His Anointed One. This One whom God promised, was none other than God’s Christ, the One given to Mary to carry in her womb… the One Joseph, her husband, named Jesus.

Dear friends, you might say that all those Old Testament believers, having had faith in Jesus Christ, were actually Christians. They knew the promise! Their faith trusted in God’s promised One who was to come for their salvation, God’s Christ.

If it is by promise, what is the role of God’s Law?

Interestingly, even many of those who claim they are saved through faith in Christ Jesus still like to point to the law. You can hear this especially when talk is made about those who are deceased. Eulogies are about the person, remembering all the good things they had done, as if somehow people are trying to convince themselves that the one who has died is in heaven. Do they believe it is by promise of God, through faith in Christ Jesus? Or is it by their works – by the Law?

How many like to point at their keeping of the Law as evidence of their salvation?

Did you hear Jesus talking today?

You know what He is meaning, right? He uses specific example because of what people believed about those who held certain offices.

Of course, priests have earned eternal life, they are God’s servants, they are special in God’s sight…but the priest avoids the dying man, he does not show mercy. He walks the other side of the road.

Levites are the entire tribe to whom God gave the care of the temple. They do God’s work, they also have earned eternal life …but the Levite joins the priest, avoiding the dying man, showing no mercy, and walking the other side of the road.

Who is it who keeps Torah? Who is it who lives in perfect love toward God and cares for their neighbor? The Samaritan, the hated enemy of the Jews, the last one who would ever care for Jew.

That is why the lawyer tried to justify himself, why he tried to feel better about his life and asked the more pointed question, “And who is my neighbor?” Who ***MUST*** I love, and who can I get away ***WITHOUT*** loving?”

The world also has ideas about the Law, that people earn eternal life by their keeping of the law – or not! You see it again and again when people point at Christians and call them hypocrites because they see them sinning. They cannot be Christians because they are not keeping the Law.

Sometimes what they claimed to be Law may even have something to do with a portion of God’s law. Too often though, their ideas of God’s law are something of their own imagining – or the imaginings of others. Often, people try to make God’s Law attainable so that they can feel secure in their own hearts about whether or not they are good – whether or not God loves them – based upon what they have done.

As God’s Word from Paul clearly reminds us, God promised an inheritance to all those who ***trusted the promised*** inheritance of a kingdom that will never end, a promised land of perfect joy and peace.

Yes, you and I are to keep God’s Law. Our keeping of God’s Law shows the world that His Spirit dwells within us. Only by the working of the Holy Spirit can we do anything ***REMOTELY*** pleasing to God. And when we fail, when we sin, we are to repent of that sin and beg God to help us, knowing only God can work in us to do better. But what should we trust? In what should we place our faith?

If the Law came second, then why did it come? Because of sin! Without the law, there was no full understanding of sinfulness. While we might know something we are doing is not right – or, by the same token, we know that we should be doing something we are not doing. BUT, do we fully comprehend the severity of the sinfulness inherent unless the law brings it to light? No, we truly do not! All you need to do is look around and you can see there are many who do not understand the seriousness of their sinfulness.

Without truly understanding sinfulness, there is no need for God’s grace. The promise is hollow and meaningless if we feel that what the promise contains is something we can accomplish on our own.

Let me show you what the Law declares. There are days I love my wife and sons more than I love God – violating the 1st table of the Law. I enjoy satisfying the selfish desires of my heart, and often neglect to reach out in love to those in need around me – and I do it because it would mean I need to get out of my own comfort zone, or sacrifice something that I have grown to love and am attached to, such as money or belongings – violating the 2nd table of the Law.

I like to claim I am satisfied with what God has given me, yet I covet things that belong to others – sinning against both the 1st and 2nd tables. I stand here proclaiming God’s Word to you and know how I have at times neglected the study of it myself. I extol you to more fervent prayer, knowing how I have failed to pray as God instructs. These last two egregious violations of the 1st table of the Law.

God’s Law always accuses! Were I to place my trust in my keeping of God’s Law, I’d be fall into depression and doubt, for I cannot forget what I see in the perfect mirror of God’s Law – that I am a sinner – a slimebag, a worm.

Satan desires that you see only God’s law and your place before God based solely upon your works according to it, just as he would have me look only at my own. Finding us in this state is when Satan begins his most heinous attack, his greatest lie –that we are doomed because of our failures. He would throw God’s law in your face and show you your sinfulness as reason to despair.

Thankfully, God moved Paul to record His Word for us today.

*For if the inheritance comes by the law, it no longer comes by promise; but God gave it to Abraham by a promise. Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, until the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made … Is the law then contrary to the promises of God? Certainly not! For if a law had been given that could give life, then righteousness would indeed be by the law. But the Scripture imprisoned everything under sin, so that the promise by faith in Jesus Christ might be given to those who believe.*

Jesus Christ is the Promise. He loved His Father, obedient in all things, even when it hurt or impoverished Him to be so. He suffered greatly at the hands of evil men, putting aside the right to use His Divine power to execute justice in His own behalf. Christ endured the most vile treatment in order to suffer what we ***should*** endure for our disobedience to God’s Law.

The promise, given even before the Law. is still in effect. It is by promise given that you have life, for the promise is Christ. Christ was imprisoned, beaten, enduring the wrath of men upon His innocence so that by faith in him, you might be freed from death. He took into His own flesh the punishment of death, enduring hell, separation from the Father, so that you might have life – given to you by promise through faith in Christ Jesus.

By promise all that is Christ’s is yours, for you have been given faith in Christ – faith which trusts the Promise.

You and I can laugh in Satan’s face, “Yes, I failed God’s Law! You are right, Satan. I am filled with sinfulness! But God loves me still! He has promised great things to me, not on my own account, but because of His promise – because of His Christ. I am baptized!”

Baptism unites you to Christ – by promise you have the inheritance.

The Word proclaims to you the promised inheritance, working faith in you to trust that salvation is yours by God’s Promise –Christ Jesus.

Christ’s table is set before you, the Promise laid upon your tongue, the Promise poured between your lips, and the inheritance of an eternal kingdom fills you to life everlasting.

Dear friends all that God promised is yours by faith in Christ – salvation and life everlasting are yours through the forgiveness of sin. Thanks be to God in Christ Jesus our Lord. The Promise made – the Promise fulfilled – the Promise given to you. Amen.