

Faith

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[0 : 00] Galatians chapter 3 is where we are, so please come with me there. And here's what I want to do as we get into this this morning. I want to introduce us to the key words at the heart of this passage today.

By telling you about the love-hate relationship I have with Indiana Jones. Love is in what's not to love about Harrison Ford, right? Right?

Right? Actor of my childhood, the guy has not starred in a bad film. If you disagree with that, I will thumb-wore you at the back afterwards. That's my love, but here's my hate.

Watching one of those films gave me a faulty understanding of the word that's at the heart of our passage today. Do you know what the word is? It's the word faith.

That word comes up nine times in those 14 verses. You might have heard the rhythm of how this passage works. Question for you, what does it mean for somebody to have faith?

[1 : 04] Because there is that iconic scene in the Last Crusade, and 90s graphics here aren't the best for this kind of thing. But if you've ever seen this, there's this iconic scene in the Last Crusade, where Indy, in his pursuit of the Holy Grail, along with his dad, played by Sean Connery, one of his greatest acting feats, he comes to this uncrossable chasm.

And to get across, he has to kind of convince himself that there is, in fact, a bridge there that he can stand on.

And the whole thing is he needs to step out blindly, trusting that something's going to be there to catch him. And here's the faulty idea I had for so long of my life about what faith was based on that scene.

Faith was blind trust. Sentiments echoed by the late physicist Dr. Stephen Hawking. He said this, Religion is a fairy tale for those afraid of the dark.

Friends, in this passage, we're going to learn what true faith is according to the Bible. And whether you've been a follower of Jesus for decades, whether you've been a follower of Jesus for days, whether you're just here and you're scoping out this whole church Christianity stuff, we all need to know the answer to that question.

[2 : 29] Here it is in a nutshell. What is faith according to this passage? Faith according to this passage is hearing and believing.

Hearing and believing. And remember, this comes in the context of the debate that's raging in this region of Galatia.

Call it AD 50 or something like that, about how someone can be made right with God. The Jewish teachers are saying that Jesus is a great start, but you need to take that great start and you need to add to it your good works by starting to live like a Jewish person would live.

And that's the bewitching language he's using there at verse 1. Do you notice it? Really strong. These teachers, according to Paul, they're like the bogus gas man.

Their pitch to you is akin to that spam email from the businessman in the Caribbean promising you an investment for the ages. These guys have hoodwinked you, Galatians, and you need to see it because see in the language here in the first few verses, when we were with you initially, we put before you, your ears and your eyes, we put before you Jesus Christ and him crucified.

[3 : 53] So this is not novel for you. You know this stuff. We put it before you and you started so well to see in the verses there. You were even prepared to suffer for the fact that you thought it was Jesus alone.

But now you have been completely bamboozled. And last week we took in the theological heart of this letter, verses 15 and 16, the middle of the Galatians mind map.

Do you remember we thought about that? In the words of my good friend Liam Garvey down at Charlotte Chapel, here's the summary. You can't get into God's good books by doing good deeds. One night again.

You can't get into God's good books by doing good deeds. We are justified in that word we thought about last week just means to be declared right in the sight of this God who created us and made us.

We are right in his sight by faith, which begs the question, doesn't it? If that's how we've defined faith, hearing and believing. Faith in what?

[4 : 58] Faith in what?

If we don't, what we drift into thinking is that God is just a bigger and better version of us. He operates on our terms. He is the biggest bully in the playground.

And it works with him like it does at your work, performance related pay. Here's a great insight from Jen Wilkin in the States.

If you've not read Jen Wilkin, then go and Google her afterwards or listen to her. She's great. Here's what she says. The first thing that comes to our minds when we think about God can sometimes be more heavily, heavily influenced by our background than by the Bible itself.

Isn't she right? Isn't she right? Isn't she right? More influenced by our background by the Bible itself. So here's my invitation to you, whoever you are here today, right?

[6 : 20] Don't settle for speculation. Don't entertain your imagination. Come to the Bible and revel in his revelation.

Come and see that this God is both merciful and mighty. That he is the God who can and he is the God who cares.

And in particular today, see today that he is the God who is in the business of making promises and keeping promises. So faith isn't blind.

And faith, according to the Bible, is hearing and believing the promises of God, particularly as they center on Jesus. Now, you with me?

Yeah? Okay, we're going to go with it. Here's two things about faith that this passage tells us. The first one we take in is verses 1 to 9. Here's number one. Friends, faith is just always the way it's been.

[7 : 24] It's always the way it's been. And to make his point in genius fashion, Paul introduces us at verse 6. Do you see in the text? To an Old Testament legend. A man called Abraham.

Now, if you're a Jew in this day and you went on Ancestry.com, just run with it. You traced your lineage all the way back physically. You'd eventually arrive at him.

So Abraham is the granddaddy of them all, right? Two things you need to know this morning about Abraham. Two things that he was not when God called him. Number one, he was not a good man.

Abraham was a nobody. In fact, more than that, he was a pagan nobody. So it's not as if Abraham, as we meet him in the Bible story, Genesis 12, it's not as if God picked him because he won a holiness competition.

God is not Simon Cowell rewarding Abraham for his best pitch. He was a man with all sorts of baggage, all sorts of mess, all sorts of things going on in his background in life.

[8 : 39] And if you're here today and that resonates with you, can I invite you to let Abraham show you that your background is no barrier to faith? Second thing he was not, friends, he was not a young man.

He's probably 75 when we first meet him in the Bible. Now listen, I realize that some of us here, and you tell me this all the time, you are not spring chickens anymore.

I heard a term somebody use this week called people who are known as afternooners, which I think is the most British polite thing I've ever heard.

I love it when we live up to our stereotypes, afternooners, right? But some of us are here and we're thinking, and I've heard people articulate this, that I haven't grown up in church. I've got no idea about all of this language, all of this Bible stuff.

Listen, it is too late in the day for me. And let Abraham show you that your age is no barrier to faith. Here's the thing about Abraham.

[9 : 41] God made this nobody promises. He made him promises and promises that you can read about in Genesis 12 and 15. Promises of a people.

And promises of a place. And promises that through him, all the families of the earth, all the peoples, all the nations would be blessed.

Hold on to that thought. The ultimate promise, these all come together. He says in Genesis 15 to Abraham, Abraham, I am your great reward. So the blessing that's coming to Abraham is that through his line, people are going to know God himself.

We're going to know God himself. And God is the one who's going to do this. God is saying here, I'm going to do all this. In the words of Don Carson, he is the God who writes his own agreements.

And right there in Genesis 12 and 15, Paul says, verse 8 of our text, God was preaching, do you see it? The gospel to Abraham.

[10 : 59] Wow. Wow. Which means that the seeds of how God will save people in generations to come, through sending his son Jesus, the seeds of that promise are right here.

In Genesis 12 and Genesis 15. Now let that stretch you. It's not being so good, Galatians, for stretching us. For me, this is what this has done devotionally.

Last week, the question is, how deep is your gospel? Paul said that Christ lives in me. I no longer live the life and I live in the body. I live by faith in the son of God who loved me and gave himself for me.

Wow. How deep is your gospel? It transforms us internally. This week, how old is your gospel? Do you see here how this is no novel New Testament idea?

It goes all the way back. Why is Paul using it? I imagine it's because the Judaizers in Galatia are likely saying to these young believers, hey, do you know what?

[12 : 13] See if you get circumcised. You can join Abraham's family tree too. That's what God told Abraham to do in Genesis 17, right? Isn't that the defining marker?

And Paul's response really is like any good detective in a whodunit. If you're into murder mysteries like we are. It's all about working out the timing.

Right? I've watched enough episodes of Murder, She Wrote, In My Time. And Death and Paradise to know it's all about the timing.

It's all about working out who did what when. Right? Who did what when? Paul says it's a question of chronology here. Right? Is it faith or is it circumcision and keeping the law which justifies someone before God?

That's the argument. Friends, what Paul is saying here is that that question is not akin to which came first, the chicken or the egg. Paul says really simply, Genesis 12 comes before Genesis 17.

[13 : 25] It's as simple as that. And that's why he quotes Genesis 15 at verse 6. There's a lot of Old Testament quotes going on here, but that's what he's doing to show the chronology. How was Abraham declared righteous before God?

The answer is not by being circumcised. All right, it's not by being circumcised. Then when was it? He was declared righteous before God way before that. The moment he heard, and you see it in the text, and he believed God.

The moment he heard God's promises and he thought to himself, do you know what? God is no flip-flop politician. I reckon you'll do exactly what he said you'll do.

And because I conclude that, I'm going to walk in light of it. So how can anybody, anybody be part of Abraham's family?

Not by circumcision, not by keeping the law, but by following the example of Abraham, the man of faith. Always been about faith.

[14 : 42] Now here's the thing, friends, as we apply. Do you realise today, if you've got faith in this Jesus, who you are related to? Do you realise who we're related to?

We're related to Abraham, but it's better than that. Do you see who we are related to? It's the wonderful thing about the Christian faith. It is both exclusive and it's inclusive.

Exclusive in that there is only one way, friends. There's only one way to be right with God. Jesus said that he is the way, the truth, and the life.

Not our way, our truth, and our life. No one comes to the Father except through him. It's an exclusive claim. This is not, I'll take the high road, and you take the low road, and I'll be in heaven with you.

Friends, any road that we're attempting to travel on that isn't marked Jesus is a dead end. And we're going to see why there could only be one way to be right with God in a minute.

[15 : 46] But make no mistake, this is so radically inclusive. It's one of the buzzwords of our day, isn't it? Inclusivity.

Friends, see God's heart here. God's heart here is for the nations. Who are you related to? Do you understand who we're related to? By faith, by Abraham, yes.

But everyone who follows in Abraham's footsteps. This God's heart here is for the peoples of the world. This offer really is, if I could nick the name of a mobile phone company.

It is really for everybody everywhere. It is the most beautiful thing about Christianity. And if you're a believer today, this is for you.

Friends, if there was a red dot for every Christian on the world map, you would see that this is not geographically centered.

[16 : 52] You would see Christians from every continent, from every people, speaking every language, from every ethnicity, from every social status.

Think more about that in the next half of the chapter. Do you understand by faith who we're related to today? Do you know what passed on the Royal Mile the other day?

Ye old Christmas shop. You know the one? Which is always a bold business strategy, I think, going for the old Christmas shop. Every other Christmas shop in the world, you're hot for maybe one month, maybe two months of the year.

That Christmas shop seems to be hot every month of the year. See if you look in the old Christmas shop, here's what you'll see in the front window.

You will see snow globes. Have you ever thought about what a snow globe is? It is this miniature Christmas scene.

[18 : 00] It is Christmas in microcosm form. What does it do? We're meant to look at it and we think, I'm yearning for the ultimate taster of what Christmas is, right?

Microcosm of Christmas. Friends, have you ever thought about the fact that that's what the local church is? It is a microcosm.

Just look around today. Look around today. What is it that unites us together? From every people, every ethnicity, every skin colour, every social status.

What is it that unites us together? It's our... It's our faith in Jesus. Have you ever thought about the fact that the local church is a microcosm, it is a snow globe of what we read about in Revelation 7?

Just look around. Look around. Look around. What do we see in Revelation 7? We see a people worshipping the Lamb who was slain.

[19 : 15] And they're gathered. a people from every tribe, every tongue, every nation.

God has gathered them together. We won't all be speaking English in glory. He's gathered them together under the banner of his son, and he's transformed them into worshippers.

Friends, do you see who we're related to this morning? And how our church is a wonderful microcosm of the ultimate thing that God is doing. Listen, the greatest thing, the most exciting thing that is happening according to heaven right now on earth is Jesus building his church made up of believing Jew and Gentile.

This people gathered through the ages to worship him. This is a snow globe right here of that scene that we will be part of and we will see not by faith, but with sight at the end of the age.

Friends, do you see God's heart is to draw out for himself, create one people of God? One people of God made up of believing Jew and Gentile.

[20 : 37] One people animated by their love for Jesus gathered together. Do you see how radically inclusive the Christian faith is?

Can I breathe? Here's the second thing about faith. This will be a lot quicker. Verses 10 to 14. Oh, there's my snow globe. Friends, faith is the only way that works.

You know that scene in the Matrix where Neo is presented with the whole blue pill or red pill decision? God's people in the Old Testament are always presented with a similar decision.

And it's obedience or disobedience. It is, if you obey, God promises blessings. But if you disobey, God promises you curses.

And given Paul's Jewish background, he'd have been so familiar with that choice and about how God's people down the ages got it wrong and chose the wrong thing. And that's what he's talking about in these verses.

[21 : 46] Do you see verse 10? He said, cursed be everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the book of the law. Now, right there is the problem. Because none of us keep it perfectly.

We're not law keepers by default. We are law breakers. So what does that mean? We're not law breakers. Both Jew and Gentile are facing according to this passage.

They are facing God's curse. And what he's saying in the context of the Galatians, see if you turn back to the law and trying to earn God's favor, you are turning back to that curse.

Because if you try to do it, you'll just realize that you can. And verse 13 is the good news for law breakers and curse deservers like us.

Verse 13 is the good news that we need today. Do you see what it's saying? Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law. How? By becoming a curse for us.

[22 : 58] And there's that for us language again. We met it right at the start of chapter one. And what this says is it is a commentary on what's happening at the cross of Christ.

Now if you're an Old Testament Jew, you know Deuteronomy 21. Cursed is anyone who is hanged on a pole.

So no wonder that people in Jesus' day looked at him suspended on that cross. And what did they conclude? They married what they're seeing in front of them with that quote from Deuteronomy.

And they conclude that Jesus is receiving what? God's curse. And Paul writes here that they were absolutely right to conclude that.

But the question is, whose curse is he taking? Because it can't be his. His life was perfect. He deserves the blessings of God, not the curses.

[24 : 04] And yet he's there suspended. What is going on? He has taken the curse that we deserved on himself in our place.

And in turn, the blessing that he alone deserves through his victory, he now shares with all those who would have faith in him. And this answers the question, just in case it's one that you're thinking about.

It answers the question of how were people in the Old Testament saved? Is it different from the way that people in the New Testament are saved?

Friends, Abraham and every Old Testament saint is saved in exactly the same way that we are. The only difference is that Abraham and the Old Testament saints, they looked forward by faith into the future and believed that God would send the Messiah to save them.

And we, by faith, are looking backwards to the Messiah God sent, except that we have way more information. And we know that his name was Jesus.

[25 : 17] So if you're asking yourself, how can anyone be justified before the throne of God? How can anyone be made righteous in the sight of God?

How can anyone be filled with the Spirit of God? How can anyone be adopted into the family of God? How can anyone hope to have an eternal future with God?

How can we know the blessings of God? All of that is contained in the answer at verse 14. By hearing and believing.

Hearing and believing. That's what faith is. Hearing and believing. And in that moment, we receive, what do we become? Because, Blinken, you might miss the preposition that tells us who we are and how we know those blessings.

Do you see it? It's the word in. In Christ Jesus. United to him. That's how we know the blessings of God. He takes our curse.

[26 : 24] We share his blessings. We are declared righteous before God. Those blessings are only ours by hearing about and believing in him.

And that brings me just as we close to the most annoying question you can be asked on a car journey.

As a family, we so often do that whole M6, M5 drive down from Edinburgh to Bath and we don't make it 30 minutes to bigger before that inevitable question comes from way at the back of the car.

Do you know what it is? Are we there yet? We found the trick really simply. It's a thing called audio books. It's great. Works for about an hour and then we're back to that question.

Friends, here's the thing. See the life of faith that Paul is wooing the Galatians and us to embrace. That's actually a question that we should never stop asking each other.

[27 : 33] Not in a perplexed, frustrated kind of way, but in an encouraging kind of way. And here's what I mean.

Do you know what Hebrews 11 tells us about Abraham? It tells us about the place that God promised him. That he wasn't hoping in a bit of real estate in the Middle East.

No, he was looking forward to a city with eternal foundations. A city designed and built by God. In other words, Abraham was living by faith in heaven.

And friends, we too are looking forward and walking by faith, trusting in the promises of God for that future. And it's such a helpful question to keep asking each other, are we there yet?

And here's why. Because for this life of faith, many of us will be limping towards it. Carrying all sorts of scars, dealing with all sorts of baggage, suffering from all kinds of grief, struggling with our mental health.

[28 : 43] All of these things we are making it towards. And that question of, are we there yet? The answer is no. But you know what? In Christ, it's ahead of us.

Truly because of this, we can say in faith that the best is yet to come. When our King returns that we've been singing earlier, all of these things become a distant memory.

Death will be banished. Sin will be banished. Tears will be wiped away. Evil will be dealt with. Are we there yet? No, we're not.

And so friends, if you're walking by faith, I want you to know this morning in walking by faith in Jesus, then not only are you standing in the footsteps of a long and beautiful tradition, but know that you are part of the most multi-generational, multinational, multilingual people that there will ever be.

And one day, on that day, will see it. Because Father Abraham did have many sons. By faith, I am one of them and so are you.

[29 : 58] And so let's all praise the Lord. Psalm 67, may the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you rule the peoples with equity and guide the nations of the earth.

May the peoples praise you, God. May all the peoples praise you. And Lord, we thank you today really simply that you are a God with an international heart.

and we thank you, Father, for sending your son who did it all on that cross. Thank you that he is no longer dead, but he lives at your right hand and he is gathering from all of the generations, all of the nations, a people who will worship him.

And so Father, we thank you for each other today. We thank you for the stories, the many stories of faith that we will have between us. And so Lord, I pray that this morning would be a great encouragement to many of us, particularly, Lord, if we're here today and we're struggling in many ways.

May your spirit today remind us of the future that Jesus has won for us. May the peoples praise you, Lord. May the peoples praise you.

[31 : 19] Amen.