

## **Romans, Part 21** 11-6-22

### **You Can Have The World**

The comedian, Stephen Wright says, *you can't have everything where would you put it?* But I am here today to announce that, in fact, you can have it all. The world can be yours? For just \$29.95 I will share the secrets that will make the entire world your oyster. Or, you can hang with me in Romans 4 for the next half hour.

In this chapter, the apostle Paul is elaborating on his great assertion that Jews and Gentiles can be justified by faith in Christ alone, just as Abraham was. He has opened up to us the gracious promise in Genesis 15 that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness. He has gone on to show that this occurred well before Abraham was circumcised, so that we know religious ceremonies are not the way. That is where we left off last Sunday. So today, we join with Paul to continue this line of thought – So many lessons from the life of Abraham who was promised by God that he would be the father of many nations, that he would bless all people, that he would inherit all the land around which he journeyed and live. Today then – Romans 4:**13-17** *For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith. <sup>14</sup>For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified; <sup>15</sup>for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, there also is no violation. <sup>16</sup>For this reason it is by faith, in order that it may be in accordance with grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, <sup>17</sup>(as it is written, "A father of many nations have I made you") in the presence of Him whom he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist. Our passage reminds us of the promise, made to Abraham 1,800 years before Paul wrote. But this promise is regarded as highly relevant because it applied not just to the patriarch, but to his descendants as well. The Jewish people regarded themselves as the heirs to the promise, but the apostle has been trying to persuade us that the real heirs are not Abraham's kindred by blood, but by faith, in the realm of the spirit. Those who share the faith of Abraham are the partakers of the promises. But what are those promises? Many descendants, the land of Palestine and a friendship with God. Verse 13 then surprises somewhat when it refers to the promise that the children of Abraham would inherit the world. In Greek that is the *cosmos*. And so, we come face-to-face with this seldom-noted*

promise to believers that we get the world – the whole thing. All of it. Yes, you can have it all. Turn to your neighbor and let them know. You can have it all. This passage is not alone in affirming this – A few chapters later, Romans 8:17 says that we are fellow-heirs, joint-heirs with Jesus. In other words, what Jesus gets, we get. And there is no limit to what Jesus gets – So Romans 8:**32** *He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?* All things – presumably all good things are coming our way because of our connection to Jesus.

Some folks, with a certain view on the end-times want to make a big deal about the land of Palestine. They even think that Israel going back there 75 years ago is greatly significant in terms of Biblical prophecy. I doubt that is the case. The promise of the land was really just a foreshadowing of the greater promise of God to give us the whole earth. Remember Matthew 5:5? The meek shall inherit – not the land – but the earth. All of it. The land promise in Abraham becomes the earth promise in Christ. There is plenty more on this. Hebrews 1 says Jesus is the heir of all things. I Corinthians 3:**21-22** *Let no one boast in men. For all things belong to you, <sup>22</sup>whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come; all things belong to you.* The apostle writes as if this is a present reality, but we understand him to mean this more precisely as a promise. This inheritance is coming into our possession, in due time. This is a wow. And, I need to remind you just who the heirs are again. All believers in Jesus – the spiritual descendants of the man of faith. Remember what Paul said in Romans 2:**29** (NLT) *A true Jew is one whose heart is right with God. And true circumcision is not merely obeying the letter of the law; rather, it is a change of heart produced by the Spirit.* Someday we will study Romans 9:**8** *It is not the children of the flesh who are children of God, but the children of the promise are regarded as descendants.* John Piper writes about an editorial in his local paper on Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish new year. The editorial was in response to a Southern Baptist initiative to call Christians during the holy days to pray for the Jewish people to receive Jesus as their Messiah and be saved. The editorial in the paper said this was arrogant of these Christians. It quoted Abraham Heschel who wrote: *Christians must abandon the idea that the Jews must be converted.* This idea, that Jews need to trust Jesus too, is, he said, *one of the greatest scandals in history.* Our capacity for overstatement seems to have no end. I mean, Hitler's death camps were bad, but now these awful Christians want to lead Jews to put their faith in Christ – What a scandal! But, oh, may we see this actually occur. Still, what seemed to go on in the

apostolic age was that the Gentiles, by faith, were becoming Jews and the Jews, by their unbelief, were becoming lost as Gentiles. Paul was grieving for the Jews, but rejoicing in his privilege of announcing to the Gentiles their new-found inheritance.

A couple of months back Mark Sharpnack came to me with a fax that had come in to our office. We never get faxes anymore, but I guess we still have the machine. And this fax contained a letter to me from a law firm in Canada informing me that a third cousin had died without an heir and I was being left \$13,000,000 if I would just contact them. Turns out they had been looking for me for months. How about that! Janie Koska, our former receptionist, got a similar fax sent to her, but she is only getting \$8,000,000. Still, it got me thinking – what if something like this happened for real? That would be pretty cool. Well, here Paul is announcing to Jewish believers and Gentiles believers that we are heirs of all things. Now, if there is more than one heir, you have to divide it up, but infinity divided by ten billion is what? An infinity – so there is plenty to go around. Turn to your neighbor and say, “We be rich!” A year ago, Gerry Richardson says to me after a service, *Pastor, what’s the next thing you know?* I had no idea what he was talking about. He said, *Next thing you know ‘ole Jed’s a millionaire.* Yea, that was a line in the theme song for an old show some of us remember. I mean, today is like episode one of the Beverly Hillbillies. For those too young to know – that was a comedy TV show about a poor Tennessee family that finds oil on their property and became instantly wealthy. They move to Hollywood and the hilarity begins as they adjust to their newfound riches. You see, they were not able to instantly start living like people of means. They continued to hunt for dinner and make their own soap and so on. It provided a decade’s worth of entertainment for America. But it also serves as something of a picture of the Christian life. What are we doing? What is Christian growth about? It is about learning to live like a child of the king who has been adopted off the streets. We are fellow-heirs with Christ and the more we grasp that, the more we will live in his joy and power.

Alright, time to get back to Paul’s argument here as he covers for us the means for becoming an heir. And he says once again that it is not through our performance or our ancestry. He says the promise comes to us **13-14** *not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith.* <sup>14</sup>*For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified.* He sets these two paths against each other. In the context of Romans 4, I believe *through the law* has particular reference to the ceremonial law pertaining to circumcision. But, it could

also reference the idea that a hearty obedience to the law is the way of obtaining the promise. In either case, he says NO! That kind of law-keeping gets you nowhere. I thought Donald Grey Barnhouse offered a nice illustration of this. He notes that in California you will find the highest point in the continental US (Mount Whitney) and the lowest point (Death Valley). Barnhouse compared the state of California to our lost state as sinners. A comparison that, in recent years, has become more fitting than ever. He noted that it is impossible to get out of California by going up. A person who starts in Death Valley and travels up to sea level and then on to Mount Whitney may feel that he has made happy progress, and he has in terms of elevation. But he is still in California. Similarly, he says, what we need is not a higher moral elevation but a change of state. We need to be moved out of our lost state in which we are under wrath, and into a saved state. This only happens when one is made alive by the Spirit and turns to Jesus.

One of the reasons Paul puts forth, by which we know that righteousness cannot come through either circumcision or rule-keeping is that Abraham was declared righteous fourteen years before circumcision and 430 years before God set out the law through Moses. But that doesn't mean there was no law prior to Mt Sinai. There was – There was the internal law written on the hearts of those made in God's image. There were commandments given to Adam and Noah and Abraham. There was a great deal already understood before the ten commandments were given. But what did all these laws result in for humans? Verse 15 says *wrath*. It resulted in wrath not because of some flaw in the law, but because of some flaw in us. We are messed up. And the law has the role of drawing lines for us, lines that we obviously trespass. When I was at the Burkholder house for youth group some months back, I was playing basketball in the back yard. Ben has a nice hoop, but, as is usually the case in a back yard, there were no boundary lines for the court. So, we were playing a game and everything was technically inbounds – even if the ball bounced across the street. You can do that in basketball more easily than you can in football or baseball where lines are yet more critical to the game. Those lines are important – they show when you or the ball are out of bounds. The law performs that service for Christians. It does not perform the service of keeping the ball inbounds. It simply reveals what is true.

So then, we get to verse 16, which I love, for it says 16a *For this reason it is by faith, in order that it may be in accordance with grace*. Not by merit, not by law, not by sacrament. The key words are grace and faith – right? Paul keeps pounding this theme and I think he does because the impulse to want to earn our

way to heaven is deeply engrained in most of us. This flows out of our pride. Some of you will know who Steve Young is. He is one of the greatest quarterbacks in the history of football. His greatest success was with the San Francisco 49ers. Steve is an interesting guy. His autobiography is a terrific read because he lets you into his mind and he has a very peculiar mind, partly due to his strict Mormon upbringing. My favorite story from the book is about the time when he was backup to Joe Montana. Steve was brought in by the 49ers to back up the hall of famer and, as a result, he did not play for quite a while. He just held a clipboard on the sideline and watched. During this time, he was going somewhere with his closest friend on the team, in Steve's car. His friend opened his glove box and found a bunch of checks. He pulled them out and saw they were his paychecks from the 49ers. His friend asked why he had not deposited these large checks, when Steve replied that he didn't think he should since he wasn't playing. There was four million dollars in undeposited checks in his glove box. Why? He didn't feel he deserved the money. He had not earned it as he saw it.

Pretty strange – but a lot of folks bring that mindset into their disposition toward the Lord. They just won't accept grace --- but the refusal to do that is far more foolish than what Steve did – and far more deadly. If we are to be right with God, it is by looking to His grace, His unmerited favor, and trusting His promise. Grace through faith. You see, there are a variety of ways by which one can become wealthy. Let's compare becoming wealthy to becoming righteous. How can you be rich? One way is to be born into a wealthy family. Does that work in the spiritual realm? Not really. It helps, but it guarantees nothing. Paul has been telling his Jewish friends this, that their heritage does not make them righteous. What is another way to gain wealth? Well, you work hard and smart and you make money. You earn it. Is that the Jesus way? Again – no. That is way outside our abilities. So, what is another way to become wealthy? You can marry into it. My dad often reminded me that it is just as easy to fall in love with a rich girl as a poor girl. Some folks are very intentional about this – If you read Jane Austen books it seems there was a lot of this going on. How does this approach fit the gospel? Well – curiously, not too bad. When you marry someone, you make a lifelong heart commitment to that person. What is theirs become yours and the two of you become as one. That is very much what happens for us as Christians. We are the poor girl, lifted up from our poverty and blessed to marry the Prince. Cinderella is sort of a gospel metaphor. Jesus proposes marriage to us. And when we say “yes” all his goodness and wealth, his vast stores of righteousness are credited to our accounts.

Let's finish by thinking about what this means for us. First, it has to mean joy. Oh my! What bliss is ours. We are made one with the one whom we love, who loves us and who is the heir of all things. Romans 5:2 *We exult in hope of the glory of God.* All belongs to Christ. Christ belongs to us. Are you rich, brother? Are you rich, sister? Oh yea, we are. Many reasons here for joy.

Secondly, this means that we can be secure in affliction. Until we are done with this life, we are still in the stage of the Cinderella story where we are living with the wicked stepmother and those obnoxious stepsisters. But how much more bearable that season is when we know how the story will end – right? You can persevere. You can love your enemies. You are the heir and your Prince is coming.

Thirdly, this all means that we can take risks in ministry. You know things are going to turn out well ultimately, so boldly set forth to serve Jesus without fear. That could mean going far away for Jesus. It could mean speaking to a neighbor for Jesus. It could mean trying to love some kids for Jesus. In Romans 12 it says *serve the Lord, rejoice in hope, persevere in tribulation.* These are all related to knowing we are heirs of all things in Christ.

And finally, fourthly, this truth of how we are made joint heirs of all things with Christ inclines us to give glory to God. Barnhouse writes this: After saying that someone who seeks righteousness through the law is walking in darkness, he says: *But the man who walks by the promise of grace walks in the broad day. His footsteps echo against the light of the promises of God, and he feels himself to be surrounded by the angels of blessing. His eager steps press forward to claim the blessings...If he stops he finds himself in green pastures and beside still waters. When he walks again he is in the paths of righteousness. He hastens on to the golden city, and the brightness of its prospect takes away any sense of fatigue that might naturally rise from the length of the road. And then the road ends, he finds that he has been supplied with grace at every step and brought on to the triumph of life eternal.* And when that is your story you give God all the glory. Rejoice in hope. Be secure in affliction. Minister boldly. Give glory to God.