

Bringing Life to the Dead

By Linda Rex

February 25, 2024, 2nd Sunday in Preparation for Easter or Lent—In my current studies with Grace Communion Seminary, one of my assignments was to read and write a reaction paper on the book *Transformed by Truth* by Joe Tkach. Having read this book years ago, it was interesting to see all the little nuances I had missed in the first reading, and to realize anew how profound the change has been in my life since the events of the 1990's in my denomination.

So much of my early years were focused on trying to get everything exactly right so I could receive God's blessing and his love. There was a realization that when I sinned (which seemed to be very often, especially with all the rules I thought I needed to keep) that I was under God's wrath, due to be corrected, punished, or worse. Every little thing came under scrutiny—what I wore on Sabbath, what I did or did not do on Sabbath or holy days, what I ate or did not eat, what I read or didn't read—to the point that I was crushed under the realization of how awful a person I was. I believed I was a failure and only worthy of rejection and condemnation.

I am so grateful that in God's mercy, he brought me to grace, to the Lord Jesus Christ, into a saving relationship which has transformed and healed me and my life. I am still dealing with the consequences of so many years lived in a legalistic, life-draining environment, but now I have a closer walk with the Lord where every moment can be a life-giving conversation with him through the Spirit and an ongoing experience of love and grace.

In our New Testament reading for today, Romans 4:13–25, the apostle Paul explains that the law brings wrath. Due to having given ourselves over to sin and evil, we as human beings were returning to the nothingness out of which we had been created. Death was our future, but Jesus Christ brought us up into life. It is so essential for us to understand who God is as the One who spoke into nothingness and created all things. Apart from God's merciful intervention in our circumstances through the incarnation, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ, and his giving of his own Spirit, all God had created would have returned to the nothingness from which it came. This same God is the One who by his Son entered into this place, our death, and brought us eternal life. It is God who gives life, and this is a gift given to us, which we receive and participate in by faith in Christ.

The apostle Paul uses the story of Abraham and Sarah to illustrate this in another way. Abram and Sarai were well beyond the ability to have children. Abram's body was as good as dead and Sarai's womb was essentially dead and unable to bear children. There is no way, from a human standpoint, that conceiving and bearing a child was possible for them. But God came to them and said that he was changing Abram's name to Abraham and Sarai's name to Sarah—both new names pointing to the reality that one day they would be the father and mother of nations and peoples. In the place that was dead, God spoke life. And thereafter, as they addressed each other by their new names, they spoke that promise to one another (see *Mirror Bible*).

It took time, and a failed attempt through human means (Hagar and Ishmael), for Abraham and Sarah's faith to grow. In time, they did have a son named Isaac, through whose lineage the Messiah eventually came. And from our Lord Jesus Christ have come many children of God, for he laid down his life for all, not just for his own people.

And this was the point Paul was making. It was not the law or the keeping of the law which saved the ancient Jewish people. And it is not the law or the keeping of the law which saves us. It is the Messiah who saves. He, as a descendant of Abraham and Sarah, is a fulfillment of all of the promises made to Abraham and Sarah. And, as the Son of God, he is the only one who could, and did, bring all of humanity back home into right relationship with God. It is Jesus' own right

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relationship with his Father in the Spirit that every human being participates in, and we do that by faith, not by lawkeeping or works. We trust in Jesus' perfect work, not our own perfect work. We allow his Spirit to live in and through us, and we find that we begin living life the way we were meant to live it—in righteousness, in right relationship with God and one another. We do not trust in our own righteousness, but in Jesus' perfect righteousness, in his death and resurrection, and in his gift of the Spirit. It is his life in us that is life-changing, transformational, and healing. And in the end, God gets all the glory. Amen and hallelujah!

Thank you, Father, for all you have done to make us right with you through your Son and in your Spirit. Grant us the grace to turn away from our own futile human efforts to earn your love and acceptance, and instead, to simply trust in your love, to trust in your Son Jesus Christ and in his work in our place on our behalf. Enable us then to live the life you created us to live in the way you have determined—through Jesus Christ our Lord and by your Spirit. Amen.

“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. For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified; for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, there also is no violation. 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, (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. In hope against hope he believed, so that he might become a father of many nations according to that which had been spoken, ‘so shall your descendants be.’ Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah’s womb; yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform. Therefore ‘it was also credited to him as righteousness.’ Now not for his sake only was it written that it was credited to him, but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.” Romans 4:13–25 NASB