**ABRAHAM (#2)**

***Saved By Faith (saying “thank you”)***

It was Thursday, August 5, 2010 when the world first heard the horrible news of the disaster in the Atacama Desert in Chile, South America. Thirty-three miners were suddenly entombed 2,300 feet below the surface of the earth (the Sears Tower is 1,450 feet tall to give you a comparison). A shifting mountain had collapsed a mega stone that weighed 770,000 tons on top of them, trapping them into what most would call certain death. For 17 days engineers worked around the clock to drill through that massive stone in hopes someone might still be alive. To the shock of the world all 33 miners were found to be alive and well. That set dozens of engineering and construction companies into 24/7 work mode to create a hole large enough to send a capsule down to rescue them. It took another 52 days of non-stop drilling to create a hole large enough to send that capsule down to bring those men up. In a scene that was witnessed live by over 1,000,000,000 (that’s Billion) anxious viewers around the world, all 33 men were saved! It was a scene I watched and will never forget. I’m sure many of you saw it too.

Now, that said, if I were to ask Luis Urzua (the shift foreman who took charge down in that shaft), or Florencio Avalos, Yonni Barrios, Mario Gomez or Ariel Ticona (some of the leaders who kept everyone positive) how they were saved, what do you think they would say? Would they brag that they had heroically worked out a plan of rescue that propelled them through that massive mountain that was over 7 ½ football fields high? Would they boast of their greatness in riding up that capsule? Would they swagger and crow about their incredible strength to withstand the claustrophobia and lack of food?

Those questions are laughable. Not one of those miners would blow their own horn in thinking they had overcome all odds by their own wisdom and might. They knew, and all confessed, it was the providence of God and the genius and spirit of those above ground that saved their lives.

Abraham, says the apostle Paul in Romans (4:3), was saved by faith. And yet Abraham, says the prophet James (2:21-24), was saved by works. It seems at first reading there is a debate and an alleged contradiction. But “seems” and “alleged” are the operative words, for there is no debate, and there is no contradiction, between Paul and James. Just as “location, location, location” are the three most important words to a realtor selling homes, so “context, context, context” are the three most important words to a Bible student searching for truth.

Paul is arguing in Romans against the Jewish belief he grew up believing as a Pharisee. The Pharisee “worked out his salvation” through law keeping as he recited the 613 laws of the Old Testament Torah. He lived his life standing up so straight he bent over backwards as he attempted to obey every “Thou shalt” and “Thou shalt not” to earn his salvation. He believed he could work his way into heaven, pulling himself up by his own bootstraps (ok, Jews didn’t wear boots, but sandals). Paul, who used to live this kind of life, saw the error of his way and wrote Romans to correct that false doctrine. We are saved by faith, not works that men do to merit heaven. For if you break even one commandment (if you are not perfect) then you are as guilty as if you broke every command in the Bible (Jam. 2:10). Good luck trying that route to heaven.

James is arguing in his epistle that faith is a verb that demands action. The works we do are commandments from God, but we see them more as a “thank you” than any merit badges we earn like a Boy Scout. When we walk by faith we recognize our failures and seek God’s grace and forgiveness. Grace teaches us we will fail, but then get back up and “*live* *soberly, righteously, godly in this present world*” (Tit. 2:11-14).

James tells us Abraham was saved by a faith that works (Jam. 2:14-26). Faith is not a mental acceptance of God’s grace, but an active, obedient, grateful lifestyle that says “***Thank You***!” to God for His grace and mercy. Read that last sentence again. Grace is God’s gift to us. Faith is our “thank you” back to God. Saying “thank you” to a gift given is hardly worthy of a merit badge!

Paul is arguing that Abraham was not “owed” salvation by God. Jehovah was not indebted to Abraham for all his acts of obedience. God didn’t hand Abraham an IOU for all the good deeds he had done on earth. Abraham couldn’t stand before God with that IOU and demand “pay up!” Abraham knew full well that grace was the only way he was saved. And yet if he hadn’t worked by leaving his homeland, or offering Isaac, he would be no better than those of Sodom or Gomorrah (Heb. 11:8-10, 17-19; Jam. 2:21-24).

I’ve often wondered what Lazarus talked to Abraham about when this beggar died and was carried by angels to this patriarch’s bosom (Luke 16:19-30). My guess is they both spoke with excitement about God’s grace. Here was the great patriarch, the father of all Israel, hugging on this formerly poor, miserable beggar that likely accomplished almost nothing in his earthly life. Yet, here they were, together in Paradise, equals in every sense of the word. Abraham could not, and would not, boast to his new friend of his superior accomplishments on earth. He would simply embrace Lazarus and knowingly smile as he tearfully whispered, “Yeah, me too.”

Every one of those 33 miners in Chile had to do their part to be saved. If they had not cooperated as a team they would have died. If they had not done what was told by the doctors they would have been poisoned and died. If they had not kept up their hygiene they would have gone mad and likely died. If they had not stepped into the capsule and rode to the surface they would have died. In short, they had “work” to do to be saved, yet they were saved by faith by doing what they were told.

When those men stepped out of that capsule into freedom’s fresh air they all cried with joy as they hugged their loved ones and then hugged all those workers who had labored non-stop to rescue them. Every last one of them stepped to the podium and said but two words: “Thank You!” When we, like Abraham, walk by faith, all we are saying to God is “*thank you*” as we gratefully obey every work He has given us to do.

To God I say, “*thank you*.” That, dear friend, is salvation by grace through faith.

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