

ROMANS 4:1-12 "Blessed is the Man Whose Sin the Lord Will Never Count Against Him."

Romans 4:1-12 ^{NAU} What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? ² For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. ³ For what does the Scripture say? "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS." ⁴ Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. ⁵ But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness, ⁶ just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: ⁷ "BLESSED ARE THOSE WHOSE LAWLESS DEEDS HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN, AND WHOSE SINS HAVE BEEN COVERED. ⁸ "BLESSED IS THE MAN WHOSE SIN THE LORD WILL NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT." ⁹ Is this blessing then on the circumcised, or on the uncircumcised also? For we say, "FAITH WAS CREDITED TO ABRAHAM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS." ¹⁰ How then was it credited? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised; ¹¹ and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, so that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be credited to them, ¹² and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised.

Up to this point Paul has been addressing the Jews and showing them how a person may come into a personal relationship with God. He has demonstrated how the scriptures do not speak of earning favor with God through keeping the law, or any other means, except through faith in the Messiah.

Towards the end of chapter 3 he reminds his Jewish listeners that God is the God of both the Jew and the Gentile and that both groups can only be justified before God by faith apart from the works of the law.

And then, as he closes chapter 3, he points out that though one is not saved by the law, we don't nullify or deem the law to be idle or without effect, in the sense that it points sinful man to his sinful

condition. In fact, Paul says, we establish or uphold the law and its usefulness to point us to Christ.

But Paul is not through driving his point home about how one is justified, declared not guilty, before God. He knew that every Jew pointed to one man who was seen as righteous and justified before God.

His name was Abraham. Abraham was seen as the father of the Jewish nation. There wasn't a Jew who didn't look to Abraham as the supreme example of what it was to walk with God, and as God Himself testifies in Isa.41:8, 'Abraham was a friend of God.'

Every little Jewish boy and girl grew up hearing about father Abraham and what a great example he was to follow. And so, Paul chose Abraham, knowing that every Jew was enamored by his faithfulness to God. Paul also knew that every Jew would have to admit that Abraham was declared by God Himself as one who was obedient to God.

Gen 26:3-5 where the Lord is speaking to Isaac, the son of Abraham, "Stay in this land for a while, and I will be with you and will bless you. For to you and your descendants I will give all these lands and will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham. 4 I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring [Or seed] all nations on earth will be blessed, 5 because ***Abraham obeyed me and kept my requirements, my commands, my decrees and my laws.***"

Herein lies the dilemma. Charles Hodge puts it this way.... "Paul proposes to decide the question by reference to a case about which no one could doubt. All admitted that Abraham was justified. The only question was, how?"

Was Abraham justified by obeying the law or by some other means, like faith in God alone?

William Barclay comments: "Paul has just been seeking to prove that what makes a man right with God is not the performance of the works that the law lays down, but the simple trust of complete yieldedness which takes God at His word and believes that He still loves us even when we have done nothing to deserve that love.....

.... The immediate reaction of the Jews was, 'this is something entirely new and a contradiction of all that we have been taught to believe. This doctrine is completely incredible.' Paul's answer is,

'So far from being new, this doctrine is as old as the Jewish faith. So far from being an heretical novelty, it is the very basis of Jewish religion.' That is what Paul is going on to prove."

Keep in mind that the average Jew of Paul's day looked to Abraham as their father and agreed that because he obeyed God that he was declared righteous or not guilty of the penalty of his sin before the Lord.

Paul says, 'this isn't so. Nothing Abraham "did" through "obedience" accomplished his salvation. And so, he introduces this most honored of all men into the picture as he explains to the Jews how one is declared to be justified before God.

Rom.4:1-2 "What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? 2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about; but not before God."

Notice that Paul includes himself in verse one by admitting that Abraham was also his forefather according to the flesh. Paul was a Jew and therefore was very sympathetic to the fact that he, along with every other Jew, claimed Abraham as their own.

But, he goes on to put forth the proposition that if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about. And that's true. Pastor Chuck Smith writes: "If Abraham was justified by obediently leaving his home in Babylon to look for the Promised Land or by offering his son Isaac as a sacrifice, then he would have been able to boast in himself. He could have said, 'I left my home and was willing to give up everything, even my son, to follow God. I'm really righteous!'"

The problem is that God Himself tells us that this is not the way Abraham was declared righteous.

Rom 4:3 "What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." [Gen. 15:6; also in verse 22]

That portion of scripture was taken from a conversation Abraham had with God back in Genesis 15.

Gen 15:1-6 "After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield; your reward will be very great." 2 But Abram said, "O Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?" 3 And Abram said,

"You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir." 4 Then the word of the LORD came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir." 5 He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars--if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." 6 ***Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.***"

The righteousness here is meant a right standing, a right relationship with God. And what does God say accomplished this? Abram's belief and trust in God's word. In other words his faith in God's promises.

Rom 4:4-5 "Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. 5 However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness."

Paul brings up a good point. When you and I go to work and we put in our 40 hours or so, at the end of the week our employer can't say that the money he gives us is a gift because we know that a gift is not something we're required to work for any more than we would receive a birthday present only if we perform some task to receive that present.

A gift is simply that, a gift given to us even if we didn't do something to deserve it. Paul's point is that when you put in your 40 hours you exchange those 40 hours for money. You earned it, you deserve it.

However, to suggest that we can go to God and say, 'look at what I've done to earn my salvation. I've put in my time and now you owe me.', is not what enables us to receive our salvation.

God say's, 'no you don't understand. My salvation for you is a gift. You can't do anything to earn a gift. In fact, if you think you could do something to earn such a gift, it would cease to be a gift and would then be a wage you deserve.'

'You shouldn't be coming and asking for what you deserve from Me because if I gave you what you deserve you would receive My wrath. No, I do not give you what your wages have earned you, instead I give you a gift.'

And how is this gift received?

Rom 4:5 "However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness."

In other words, the man who doesn't try to earn his salvation by keeping the requirements of the law but instead, like Abraham, simply believes in what God says about our condition and the solution to that problem, that will be reckoned or credited to us as righteousness by God Himself as we embrace the righteousness of Christ by faith alone.

Now, don't misunderstand. By all human measurements Abraham was quite the example of piety. But, Abraham realized that all the piety in the world would not earn him God's favor.

This is good news for all of us who may not have been so pious. In fact, this is the point Jesus makes in the gospel of Luke.

Luke 18:9-14 ⁹ And He also told this parable to some people who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt: ¹⁰ "Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. ¹¹ "The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: 'God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. ¹² 'I fast twice a week; I pay tithes of all that I get.' ¹³ "But the tax collector, standing some distance away, was even unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven, but was beating his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner!' ¹⁴ "I tell you, this man went to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Abraham had the kind of life which could boast before men because he was upright in the sense that his life was exemplary in many respects, but he knew he couldn't boast before God who requires simple trust and faith in what He says regarding our position before Him.

The good news is that even if our lives are not exemplary, according to a standard we may use before men, we can still come to God as sinners and rebels, and humble ourselves before God and say, 'God, be merciful to me, the sinner.'

And whether we're like the tax-gatherer or like the Pharisee who might try to boast before men, if we will turn from any self-boast and humbly trust in Christ's provision for us on the cross, we will hear these words from our Lord.... "I tell you that this man, rather

than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

<Abraham didn't exalt in himself, but chose to find his justification before God by believing God at His word and walking in that faith, by obeying God out of a trust and love for His faithfulness.

But as if Abraham were not enough of an O.T. example of faith before God, Paul moves to another man whom the nation of Israel loved and looked up to.

Rom 4:6-8 "David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: 7 "Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. 8 Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him." [Psalm 32:1,2]

These words are taken from Psalm 32 and they demonstrate David's understanding of how one is declared justified before God and how the penalty of our sin is covered.

Don't forget, both Abraham and David were admitted sinners. They both fell short when it came to upholding the requirements from God. For Abraham, he sinned when his trust in God's promises waned and he ended up trying to give God a hand by having a son through Hagar. That son's name was Ishmael. It was Ishmael who became the father of the Arab nation who to this day wars against Israel. Sin has its effects.

David was a man who sinned by committing adultery with Bathsheba, and then to cover his back he had Bathsheba's husband Uriah killed. He was a faithful soldier to David and yet David commanded his leaders to put Uriah in the front of the battlefield where he knew he would be killed. He did die. And even though David didn't draw back the bow he still murdered Uriah to allow himself to now legally marry Bathsheba.

What does Paul say in Rom.3:10-12 "As it is written: "There is no one righteous, not even one; 11 there is no one who understands, no one who seeks God. 12 All have turned away, they have together become worthless; there is no one who does good, not even one."

Though both David and Abraham may have been tempted to boast in their good works, they knew they couldn't boast before God. They both knew that there had to be another way to enter into a

relationship with God which had to do with accepting a gift from God by faith.

Both men were humbled before God because both men knew that their hearts sought to please self and turn to their own devices. But they knew they could trust God. And so they placed their faith in His faithfulness and His promises.

Rom 4:7-8 "Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. 8 Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him."

David knew his forgiveness was a gift. But like David, when we begin to realize how much we've been forgiven of, out of gratitude and love for so great a gift, we will desire to please our Lord in all things. Like the saying goes, 'those who are forgiven of much, love much.'

But now, after having established two men of faith, who found their righteousness in God, not in themselves, Paul goes on to set forth another proposition.

You see the Jew might have thought at this point, 'well you may be right Paul, that Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness, but the sign of that covenant blessing was circumcision and without receiving that sign one cannot be right with God.'

Their point was that only those within the nation of Israel could be saved because only those within that nation could receive the covenant sign and seal of God's grace, which was circumcision. This left the Gentiles completely outside of any possibility of having a personal relationship with God, according to the Jews.

Paul, perceiving this question in their hearts, responds by saying in Rom 4:9 "Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness."

Is it possible for a Gentile to have faith, even though he doesn't have the covenant sign and seal of circumcision? Is it possible for a Gentile to trust in God's promises and then to walk with God in that faith ALONE?

Interesting question Paul. What about that? Paul says, 'I'm glad you asked, because the one man you look to as the father of the

Jewish nation was a Gentile who had never even heard of circumcision as a means of being right with God.

Maybe a little history is in store here. Abraham was originally known as Abram. God later renamed him Abraham which means "father of a multitude of nations".

Abraham was part of a group of godless, idol worshipping people. We read in Jos 24:2 "Joshua said to all the people, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Long ago your forefathers, including Terah the father of Abraham and Nahor, lived beyond the River [That is, the Euphrates] and worshiped other gods."

This Gentile Abram and his family lived in Ur of the Chaldees. Today we would know this area of the world as the south eastern portion of Iraq. They then moved to Haran which is about 600 miles north and west from Ur. This area we would know today as northern Syria, right on the border of Turkey.

Terah was Abram's father who, according to Gen.11, was a descendent of Shem, one of the three sons of Noah. It was at the age of 75 when Abram, a Gentile and uncircumcised, was called by God to leave his family and go to the promised land, the land of Canaan.

By faith, Abram left his father and followed where God led. It was Abram's faith and trust in God which caused him to go. Nothing in his pagan practices attracted God to him.

God simply chose to love Abram and extend a promise to him. If he would trust that God would be faithful to His word then he would receive the promises. "Abraham believed God and it was reckoned to him as righteousness."

But his faith had action and therefore Abraham, by faith, left everything he had grown to love in Haran and chose to obey God and follow Him.

And so now we go back to Paul who understood that the Jews knew this aspect of Abraham's life and says in verses 9-10
"We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness. 10 Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before!"

Paul was reminding the Jews, who felt that to be properly righteous in the eyes of God one must be circumcised, that Abram himself

was declared righteous in every respect way before he was circumcised.

Let me quote F.F. Bruce: "What was Abraham's condition when he was justified by faith? Was he circumcised, or uncircumcised? To this there could be only one answer. He was uncircumcised. The covenant of circumcision was not introduced until a later stage in Abraham's life (Gen.17:10-14) - at least 14 years later according to the Genesis chronology."

In other words, Abraham had been declared righteous by God, by his faith in God's promises. He was declared righteous even in his "uncircumcision". In fact, he wasn't even instructed by God to be circumcised until some 14 years later.

And so, Paul's point to the Jew was, 'Hey, if you're gonna pattern your life after who you consider to be the most important person in the history of Israel, then get your facts straight and pattern your life on faith in God as Abraham did, not on keeping the law or circumcision as a means unto your salvation.'

By the way, God's promise to Abraham that he would be a father of many nations wasn't simply limited to a physical lineage. Even if it were, Israel could not claim exclusivity to Abraham. The Arab nations even today call Abraham their father as well.

But much more than being a father of physical descendants, Abraham is father to all who believe in Christ as their Lord and Savior. He is a type of what it is to walk with God by faith.

Rom 4:11 "And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them."

And so he is the spiritual father, in a sense, of all believers who have not been circumcised. In other words, the father of all Gentiles who have believed on the Lord Jesus Christ for their righteousness and the forgiveness of their sins.

Rom 4:7-8 "Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. 8 Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him." [Psalm 32:1,2]

The believing Hebrew, Abraham, was also the spiritual father of David, who was a Jew. In fact, Paul recognizes Abraham is not only the father of all Gentile believers but also all Jewish believers.

Rom 4:12 "And he is also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised."

So, whether circumcised or uncircumcised, all who trust in God's promise and provision for our sin will be considered righteous. Faith must be the only way we can approach God and embrace His righteousness, His Righteous Son, whether we be Jew or Gentile.

If you've placed your faith in Christ then you have done exactly what Abraham did over 4,000 years ago. "For by grace you are saved through faith and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God, not as a result of works, that no one should boast."

Let me read to you what the writer of Hebrews says of our father Abraham.

Heb 11:8-19 "By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going. 9 By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. 10 For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God. 11 By faith Abraham, even though he was past age--and Sarah herself was barren--was enabled to become a father because she considered him faithful who had made the promise. 12 And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore. 13 All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. 14 People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. 15 If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 Instead, they were longing for a better country--a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them. 17 By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, 18 even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac

that your offspring will be reckoned." [Gen. 21:12] 19 Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death."

Abraham didn't always understand all the rhyme or reason to his life. There were times when life was very hard and seemed to be very unfair for him. But, Abraham understood that this life was not the focus he was instructed to look at.

Abraham was always looking for the things above. That didn't mean that he was unconcerned with his life on this present earth, it just meant that he didn't measure his happiness or joy based on the things in this life which are at best fleeting.

He viewed his life, not based on what he didn't see with his physical eyes, but on what he could see by faith. He had to take God at His word. And then he had to act on that faith. Faith without works is dead.

For Abraham to have said to God, 'I believe your promise God but I'm not leaving Haran', would not have been faith. To have said to God, 'I believe Isaac will be my heir as You have promised God', (and the only way he could be heir is if he were alive), but then not to be willing to give Isaac up for a sacrifice would not have been faith.

That's not to say living by faith is always easy, humanly speaking, but we're not talking about human understanding are we? We're talking about trusting God who is Spirit and who says, 'I am He who gives you life; trust Me and live by faith every moment in this life that I may be glorified in you.'

And if we can trust Him for eternity, by placing our faith in Christ who came to die for the penalty of our sins, then we can trust Him for our today and tomorrow.

Isa 26:2-4 "Open the gates that the righteous nation may enter, the nation that keeps faith. 3 You will keep in perfect peace him whose mind is steadfast, because he trusts in you. 4 Trust in the LORD forever, for the LORD, the LORD, is the Rock eternal."

Today, this week, if you find yourself doubting or confused, simply look at the example Paul gives us. Abraham, a man who doubted and was confused at times, was still willing to trust the God who called him to follow by faith.

God is faithful. Let me end with this.

Heb 10:23-25 "Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. 25 Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another--and all the more as you see the Day approaching."

He's coming back. But whether we meet Him at His return or before, may we be found faithful and loving Him and serving Him to the very end by faith, to His honor and glory.