

To Those Who Believe – Romans 4

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Repetitive

1. What we're going to look at today is going to sound repetitive. There's good reason for that – *it IS!*
 2. As Paul writes this he knows the resistance of many of his readers because he'd faced it time & again as he taught around the Empire.
 3. His *goal* in these opening chapters is to *convince* people salvation isn't a reward for keeping the Law of Moses or being a good person.
 - a. *For generations* Jews had been taught that *righteousness* came from doing good works & obeying the Commandments.
 - b. Most *prided* themselves on how righteous they were.
 - c. The problem is, they weren't *truly* righteous. They were in fact – *sinner*!
 - d. They'd so *massaged the rules* they'd made convenient loopholes so they could keep the *technical form* of the law while ignoring its heart & meaning.
 4. So Paul piles up proof after proof to persuade them they've put their confidence in the wrong place.
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5. If you go shopping for sunglasses you'll find many with brown lenses.
 - a. They enhance reds & greens, but distort blue.
 - b. With some blues take on a greenish hue.
 6. Imagine for a moment someone who's worn brown sunglasses most of their life.
 - a. Now, they've seen the color blue, and it's been identified for them *as* blue.
 - b. But *you*, who don't wear brown lenses **KNOW** that person doesn't **REALLY** know what blue is because what he sees is in fact a shade of green.
 - c. He *calls* it blue, but it's not *true-blue* because those glasses distort his perception of reality.
 - d. If you say to him, "You don't *really* know what blue is," he's going to laugh at you.
 - e. If you persist, he'll likely get mad & start arguing.
 - f. But you know the truth; he *doesn't* know what blue is because what he *thinks* is blue, *isn't*.
 - g. You tell him, "Take off those glasses & you'll see for yourself."
 - h. He replies, "Why should I? I've worn these glasses all my life."
 - i. "Just take them off, you'll see," you say.
 - j. He comes back, "I see *now!* Besides, my family *has always* worn brown sunglasses; it's how we look at things."
 - k. You say, "**Exactly!** And you're **NOT seeing** things as they really are because the lenses distort your perception. Trust me – take them off."
 - l. This goes back & forth for a few more rounds, until eventually he takes the glasses off – & what does he realize?
 - m. His understanding of what blue is *was* distorted all along. Now he sees the truth about blue.

B. Today

1. In these chapters Paul urges his Jewish readers to take off their generations of seeing righteousness as something they could earn through self-effort & realize the righteousness God requires is a gift he bestows on those, *not* who earn it, but those who *believe* in Him.
2. Since the main group Paul is seeking to convince is Jewish, he turns to the *arch-Jew* – Abraham.

II. TEXT

A. Vs. 1-3

¹What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? ²For if Abraham was justified by works, he has *something* to boast about, but not before God.

³For what does the Scripture say? *“Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.”*

1. The Scriptures refer to Abraham as the *friend of God*. [James 2:23 / 2 Chr. 20:7 / Isa. 41:8]
 2. He is the Father of the Jewish people & esteemed by them as the *epitome* of what God is looking for in man. He is the *Prototype for Faith*.
 3. So Paul asks, “What do we learn from Abraham?”
 - a. “Was it his *works or faith* that commended him to God?”
 - b. If it was works, he’d be an example of how to boast.
 4. He’s an example alright but not of boasting; he’s an example of HOW God saves by FAITH!
 5. Paul quotes Gen. 15:6 where we *first* read the words - *“Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.”*
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6. Do you like being *right*? That’s a real ‘Duh!’ question isn’t it? Of course you do – *Everyone does*.
 - a. In fact, the desire to be right fuels a good part of life.
 - b. If we have a disagreement with someone, oh my! We want to be *proven* right!
 - c. And if we’re shown to be wrong, we’ll often try to salvage *something* out of it.
 - d. Many board games are based on being right about trivia questions.
 - e. Game shows like Jeopardy! are determined by who’s **MOST** right.
 - 1) Jeopardy! is my favorite.
 - 2) It gets pretty tense when it comes to Final Jeopardy & the scores are close.
 - 3) The contestants have to write down how much they’re going to wager *before* they see the question.
 - 4) They know the *category*, but not the exact question.
 - 5) How much different it would be if they knew the question before they wagered!
 7. *All of us* will find ourselves in *that place* – standing at a far more important Final Jeopardy.
 - a. The wager has already been made – *Our eternity*.
 - b. If there was ever a moment when you want to make sure you’re **RIGHT** – it’s that one.
 - c. Now here’s the thing: Unlike the TV show, we already **KNOW** the question –
 - d. God will ask, “Why should *you* be allowed into heaven?”
 - e. There’s only one right answer – because you believe in Jesus Christ;
 - 1) That He died for your sins
 - 2) And rose again from the dead for your justification & new life.
 8. That’s what the Bible means by the word *“righteousness”* = it means *being right*, as God the Perfect Judge declares it.
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9. Paul reminds us Abraham’s righteousness, *his being right before God*, was not the result of his works.
 - a. *Rather*, God accounted him righteous on the basis of his faith in God.
 - b. This word “accounted” means to *impute*, to *put to the credit of*.
 - c. It was an accounting term, as when a deposit is made by someone into someone else’s account & the balanced goes up.
 - d. When Abraham placed his trust in God, God deposited His own perfect goodness into Abraham’s spiritual account.

10. Now, if you read Gen. 15 where this took place, you'll find that God promised Abraham that though he & his wife Sarah were barren, he'd have many descendants, & through them would come blessing to the entire world.
- Though the fulfillment of that *seemed impossible*, Abraham believed God & put his trust in Him that it would come to pass.
 - It was *this dependence on God* that put Abe in the place where God could not only move to keep His promise but to make Abraham right with Him.

B. Vs. 4-8

⁴Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. ⁵But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, ⁶just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works: ⁷"Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, And whose sins are covered; ⁸Blessed is the man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin."

- When you talk to someone about religion & spiritual things, it's important to make sure you clarify your terms. Otherwise you can be misunderstood.
- So Paul is careful to define his terms.
 - Wages** are *paid* to someone for work done. They're *earned*.
 - Grace** is a gift *given* apart from merit or what's owed.

 - Wages *depend* on the effort or skill of the worker they're paid to.
 - Grace *depends completely on the giver* without regard to the worthiness of the recipient.
- Paul's point is that righteousness isn't a wage paid those who earn it; if so, they'd be able to boast.
- No, righteousness is a *gift* given by God & received by faith.
- Abraham isn't the only example of this truth. **Another** heavyweight example in Jewish history demonstrates it—David.
 - In Psalm 32:1-2 David revels in the greatness of God's forgiveness.
 - Months after his terrible fall with Bathsheba & all that came after, David repented, confessed, & threw himself in desperate dependence on God.
 - Forgiveness was immediate, & while there were still consequences to bear, David knew God had removed the guilt from his spiritual account.
 - You see, David understood if righteousness was a wage paid for being obedient, what could he **EVER** do to erase his guilt?
 - Nothing! He'd have been toast. So he delighted in the truth that righteousness is not self-made – it's a gift God gives those who trust in Him FOR IT!
- Paul puts it this way in Ephesians 2:8-9
For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.
- [Explain – not faith as the gift of God but “salvation by grace through faith.”]

C. Vs. 9-12

⁹Does this blessedness then come upon the circumcised *only*, or upon the uncircumcised also?

- Using 2 of Israel's greatest heroes, Paul's proven that righteousness is a gift God gives & we received by faith.
- Is this true just for Jews or is it for Gentiles too?

For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness. ¹⁰How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised?

3. Paul is really messing with those who are still resisiting him!
 - a. Remember what we saw a couple weeks ago; the Jews considered circumcision a super-spiritual ritual that *guaranteed* them eternal life.
 - b. In their minds, being Jewish & being circumcised were one & the same.
 - c. And Abraham was the one who kicked it off. He was the first Jew, the first one to be circumcised.
4. So Paul asks a simple question—when did God declare Abe right—before or after he was circumcised?

Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised.

- a. God declared Abe righteous in Gen 15.
 - b. Circumcision came 2 chs. & at least *14 years later*.
 - c. As those who still resisted read this, they'd now be saying, "Uh-oh."
 - d. Paul presses home his point . . .
- ¹¹**And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while still uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also, ¹²and the father of circumcision to those who not only *are* of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised.**
5. Which is to say, Abraham is not only the *physical father* of the Jewish people, he's the *spiritual father* of *all* who put their trust in God.
 6. Once again, as at the end of ch. 2, Paul says the *true Jew* is not one who can trace his/her lineage back to Abraham –
 7. *Faith* in God is what makes someone a *child* of God.

D. Vs. 13-15

¹³**For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. ¹⁴For if those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise made of no effect, ¹⁵because the law brings about wrath; for where there is no law there is no transgression.**

1. God promised Abraham thru him blessing would come to the entire world.
 2. He said Abe would be the father of many nations.
 3. So—*If* relationship with God is based on the Law, then *only the Jews* who possessed it had the potential of being in relationship with Him.
 4. But, *since* no one keeps the law, as Paul has made crystal, then *no one* is *in* relationship with God.
 5. Therefore, His promise is *unfulfilled*, His Word broken.
 6. **BUT** – If the promise God made to Abraham is based on faith, then all who believe as Abe did, can be in relationship with God—& the promise is fulfilled!
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7. Paul's logic & argument are so solid, his opponents would be squirming all over the place. There's just NO denying this!

E. Vs. 16

¹⁶**Therefore *it* [the promise to Abraham] is of faith that *it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, 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***

1. There it is plain & simple: Abraham isn't just the *physical ancestor* of Israel.
 2. He is the *spiritual prototype* of all God's people in every age & place, regardless of their ethnic or racial origin.
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3. The sentence began in v. 16 runs through the end of 18. And I have to say it's a bit steep in English.

F. Vs. 17-22

¹⁷(as it is written, "*I have made you a father of many nations*") in the presence of Him whom he believed—God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did; ¹⁸who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, "*So shall your descendants be.*" ¹⁹And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. ²⁰He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, ²¹and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. ²²And therefore "*it was accounted to him for righteousness.*"

1. See what I mean?
 2. God promised Abraham he'd have a son; & not just 1 child. His *descendants* would be like the sand on the shore or the stars in the sky = Lots!
 3. When that promise was first made, Abraham & his wife Sarah were barren.
 - a. The years had passed without a child & they were now elderly.
 - b. Yet Abe believed the promise & God declared him righteous as we've already seen.
 4. **More years passed.** Abe turned 99, Sarah 90; yet God *renewed* the promise.
 - a. There was simply no *human possibility* for a child now & they knew it.
 - b. Yet Abraham's dependence on God was renewed.
 - c. A year later, just as God had foretold, Sarah was pregnant with Isaac.
 5. God always keeps His word!
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6. But here's what's amazing about *Paul's rehearsal of Abraham's story* –
 7. He *never mentions* the massive goof-up Abraham & Sarah made in the *middle* of the story.
 - a. Gen. 15 tells us of God's first promise of a son and Abraham's faith.
 - b. Ch. 17 is where God comes years later to renew it.
 - c. Sandwiched between them is ch. 16 which tells of Sarah & Abe's scheme to *help* God.
 - 1) The dependence Abe had placed in the Lord was withdrawn for a season as he connived how he might gain a son by *his own efforts*.
 - 2) Sarah suggested they use her Egyptian servant Hagar as a *surrogate*.
 - 3) Sure enough, she conceived & bore a son they named Ishmael.
 - d. When Abe suggested to God that *Ishmael could be* the fulfillment of His promise, God *flatly* rejected him – Ishmael was a work of the flesh, not the blessing of God.
 8. Paul *omits* Abe's feeble faltering from the story because that's the whole point of faith & the righteousness it brings!
 - a. Being right with God is a gift He gives & we receive by faith.
 - b. Being declared righteous, all guilt & condemnation are removed!
 - c. All sin, mistakes, goofs, errors, failures, spills, falls, stumbles, lapses, boo-boos –
 - d. Are forgiven & forgotten; forever erased by the blood of Christ.
 - e. Our record is *expunged*. We go free.
 9. Since Jesus paid for *all* our sin, the Father would be *unjust* to punish us for it further.
 10. This is why I believe when we arrive in heaven, our memories will be healed & cleared of all lingering regret & sorrow for past sins, so that our enjoyment of glory will not be hindered or diminished in any way.
 11. We'll come back to that in just a moment.

G. Vs. 23-25

²³Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, ²⁴but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, ²⁵who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.

1. The Holy Spirit moved Moses to record the story of Abraham's faith & righteousness *for our sake*,
2. So that we'd know **HOW** to be right with God.

III. CONCLUSION

A. Here's How

1. Here's how – **Believe!**
 2. But it isn't just *bare* belief – you can't just believe *whatever*.
 3. There's no power in *sheer* faith. Faith is only as good as what it's placed in.
 - a. You could have great confidence in your ability to fly, crawl up on the roof over here by the antenna, & jump off, but gravity will quickly prove the folly of your faith.
 - b. Conversely, you could have just a wee bit of faith in a Boeing 747, take uncertain steps down the jetway into the plane & to your seat, & it's still going to get you to your destination.
 - c. It's not the AMOUNT of faith that matters but what it's invested in.
 4. We cannot make it to heaven on our own merit. But Jesus can take us there on His.
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5. Abraham's faith counted for righteousness because he placed it in God's ability to do what he could not.
 6. His faith is the template for ours.
 6. God declares us righteous when we place our trust, not in our efforts to be good but in Jesus Christ,
 - a. Whose death on the cross paid the penalty of our sin,
 - b. And Whose resurrection from the dead secures us eternal life.

B. Sent Away & Sprinkled

1. Back up in v. 7 Paul quotes David -
"Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.
2. Forgiven & covered – more than just poetic words.
3. Forgiven is literally "*sent away*" & covered is "*sprinkled*."
4. David was speaking of something specific – Yom Kippur,
 - a. When the blood of a goat was *sprinkled* on the mercy seat, providing atonement for the people,
 - b. And another goat was let loose in the wilderness, after the high priest had laid his hands on its head, and symbolically transferred the sins of the nation onto it.
 - c. As it disappeared from view, the people broke out in rejoicing, trusting that God had both forgiven & forgotten their sins.
5. V. 7 begins with the word, "Blessed" = Happy! Delighted! Stoked!