

Reckoned Justified By Faith

Romans 4

INTRODUCTION: Turmelebnis - (TOORM-er-layb-niss) A Latin phrase meaning - ***the Tower Experience***, was the word ***Martin Luther*** used to describe that marvelous change that took place in the deepest part of his soul.

This most fervent of the Augustinian Monks, there at the monastery of Wittenberg, was haunted by the reality that one day he must appear before a Holy God and answer for his sin. He could not sleep, he fasted, he prayed, he wiped sweat from his brow as he counted bead after bead, hoping to somehow make *penance* for his sin.

It was not some dark, hideous thing he had done, mind you, in fact, his confessor often grew frustrated at his frequent visits to seek absolution for the most minor infractions. No, it was the presence of sin itself, that stain that would not be washed away in spite of his persistent washing in religious rituals.

Years later, ***Shakespeare*** would capture this incessant haunting of conscience not healed by religious works in the character of ***Lady Macbeth***, who, despite her washing, could not remove the stain of her sin.

It was the very book open before us today that caused Luther to tremble violently. Paul's letter to the church in Rome, where three chapters have been spent shining the light of truth on the soul of every individual, pointing out the sin that must be accounted for. Reminding Luther and reminding us that there is no remedy to be found in religious acts performed, neither is ignorance of the Law an excuse, for both natural revelation and conscience bear witness to our undeniable guilt.

Then he set his eyes on the words of Paul in **Romans 1:17 (ESV)**

¹⁷ For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith, as it is written, "**The righteous shall live by faith.**"

By faith, not works, not ritual, not religion, faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ - that was the answer. How had he missed it all these years? Then, once seeing it, it seemed to shine from every page of Holy Scripture.

The soul of Luther that had been tossed too and fro, violently shaken in the tremors of fear and doubt, suddenly became as still and quiet as a dove... by faith, he rested.

What comes next would change history, for you see, ***that very truth which brought peace to the soul of Luther would soon bring an Earthquake to a religion in desperate need of Reformation.***

CONTEXT: Chapter 3 ended with a question - Romans 3:31 (ESV)

³¹ Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.

IN other words, Paul, is this idea that a man might be made right with God by simple faith not an **extraordinarily new concept?** Something entirely distinct and different from those Patriarchs of which we read in **Genesis - Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.**

Paul, a Rabbi by training who sat under the tutelage of the most prominent Torah scholar of his day, Raban Gamliel, declares, "This is not the case. In fact, the way of Salvation that he was preaching, by faith alone, was the exact same thing that had justified those Patriarchs of Old."

In fact, Romans 4 is essentially Paul's exposition of Moses's words in Genesis 15.

Remember, as we have said many times, **Observe the law of Repetition.** Ancient languages lacked the textual markup we use in modern English, so they compensated by using repetition.

(11) Eleven times in (25)Twenty Five Verses, Paul will use the Greek Word **Logizomai.**

It is the Greek Word from which we mentioned last week, the Old English word was taken - "gerecenian" - **yeh-RETCH-eh-nee-ahn.** Or our modern English Reconing. 11 times he uses it, in 25 verses - perhaps he is trying to tell us something. Logizomain in the Greek, Reconing in the English - meaning the same in both - to set the accounts in order. Paul uses this word again and again, like the stubborn thump of a drumbeat.

If you are to be righteous before a Holy God, **you MUST be RECONED** Righteous.

It is not because you have behaved better than the guy next to you - it is because you have been **RECONED righteous by grace through faith alone.**

Notice how he proves his point -

1. Justification by Faith EVIDENCED (vv. 1-8) Now, as any good Rabbi would, Paul grounds his argument in the Patriarch Abraham, the supreme exemplar of obedience to God.

A. Evidenced from the Patriarch — Abraham (vv. 1-5)

TEXT: Romans 4:1–25 (ESV)

¹ What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh?

² For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, **but not before God.**

The **Talmud** (*the official Jewish position on the OT*) would say that Abraham kept the whole law before it was given. "How did Abraham please God?" the rabbi would ask.

“By observing the law.” “But the law had not yet been given!” “Ah,” the rabbi would answer, “but he must have had a private revelation.”

Yet, as a church that has just completed an entire sermon series on the book of Genesis, do we not object? The longest book I have ever written is a commentary on Genesis. I think I know something of the subject matter.

- When he departed UR of the Chaldeas, he was told to leave his father, but his kin, but did he not bring his father as far as Haran, and Lot all the way to Sodom? Partial obedience is nothing short of disobedience.
- While anticipating the promised child, he took Hagar into his arms and conceived Ishmael.
- Then sent them both away at the prodding of his wife.
- Twice, Abraham abandoned Sarah to the arms of another man, in fear, declaring her to be his sister.

Can Abraham boast of righteousness? I mean, I guess on some human level, relative to other men, he was not Jeffrey Epstein. So, before men? Perhaps. Before history? Maybe. But could boast of righteousness before God? NOT AT ALL.

Paul has already established this whole concept of boasting in anathema from the Gospel. Remember, he used this same word earlier in **Romans 3:27** when he asks, “Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded.” Meaning shut out, locked out, barred from entry.”

Boasting is not merely *discouraged* in the gospel; boasting is *locked out* of the gospel.

It is as if there is a sign on the door of heaven, friend, and it does not read, “No trespassing.” It reads, “No bragging.” **Salvation requires a complete liquidation of any personal accomplishment.**

ILLUSTRATION: Campus Crusade once taught us to evangelize by asking open ended questions. For example, **if God asked, “Why should I let you into Heaven?” what would your answer be?** If you answer with even the slightest accomplishment, you reveal your lack of understanding of the Gospel.

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

Now that is a direct quote from **Genesis 15:6 (ESV)**

⁶And he **believed the Lord**, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

It is not that Abraham believed IN the Lord, although certainly he did that as well. But

that is not what recokened him righteous... instead it says, "Abraham BELIEVED GOD"

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Believed God about what? Well, in one sense - everything... It's not qualified; he simply believes the word of the Lord.

But as we have said many times around here, context is King, and a good student of scripture must allow context to provide understanding of the meaning. What was the occasion of the verse Paul quotes, "Abraham believed God"? Well, it was when God invited Abraham to ***gaze into a clear night sky and attempt to number the stars.*** Then God tells Abraham - Just so shall your offspring be. This was the moment and the occasion when it is said he believed the Lord.

Abraham, around 85 years of age, and his blessed wife, Sarah, 75 years of age, would be responsible for offspring that would rival the stars of the sky in number.

There were a few problems with that promise. Two in particular, which would not be appropriate to speak of in depth, but a man of Abraham's age loses some ***virility***, and poor Sarah, her ***womb*** had never borne a child, and at this age, it was almost cruel to awaken any hope that it might still happen.

Ok, ok, but what does that have to do with faith that saves a man today - Pastor, you tell us week after week that we must believe in the person and work of Jesus Christ to be saved... the Lord said nothing of the coming Messiah, nor the cross, nor the empty tomb. So what exactly was Abraham believing that saved him???

Oh, don't you see, it's not the content of his faith, but rather the object of his faith - ⁶And he believed the Lord. He believed the Lord concerning the **WOMB**, we believe the Lord concerning the **TOMB**, but it is the LORD we believe.

And did it not take one to produce the other? The WOMB God would awaken in Sarah would bring forth Isaac, the child of promise, whose line would one day produce a true and better Isaac, the Lord Jesus Christ.

So Abraham, looking forward, believed God about an empty **WOMB**; we, looking backward, believe God about an empty **TOMB**. And Paul is arguing that it is the SAME FAITH that reckons us as Righteousness.

So there aren't two faiths - the one by works that saved Abraham, and then this new thing Paul is preaching. No - the same faith that saved Abraham saves you.

Paul continues...

⁴Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due.

ILLUSTRATION: My assistant is not here today, so I can illustrate with her. We have

arranged for a more-than-fair wage to be deposited directly into her account every two weeks for services rendered. But not once have I received a thank-you card saying, “*You know I checked my bank balance today and I see you’ve arranged a*

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deposit- that was so very thoughtful of you!” Not once! And I shouldn’t expect to, because that was not a GIFT; that was her WAGE, her due.

Paul is saying, Salvation is NOT like that - it is NOT a wage for services rendered unto the Lord, but rather it is a GIFT of which we would do well to offer thanks!

⁵And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.

So we have the evidence of the Patriarch, to which he will return later, but notice also... Justification through faith is...

B. Evidenced from the Psalmist — David (vv. 6-8)

⁶just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God **counts** righteousness apart from works: ⁷“Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; ⁸ blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not **count** his sin.”

There is our word again - *yeh-RETCH-eh-nee-ahn*. Whatever this business of salvation is about, it must be a reconing that God does. HE BALENCES THE LEGER on which our column is at a severe deficit.

NOW, here is what Paul is driving toward. Remember the great controversy in these New Testament Churches was how the Jew and the Gentile could be ONE IN CHRIST? Paul has been making the argument: “Well, you see, we all come to forgiveness the same way, by faith alone.”

Since Justification through faith has been EVIDENCED... now we see that... 2.

Justification by Faith EXTENDED (vv. 9-17) It is as if he anticipates the argument, “Well, Paul, all of that is well and good, but what about **circumcision**? Shouldn’t these Gentiles sort of become Jews BEFORE they can really become Christians? Those Gentile brothers in the crowd who understand the nature of circumcision must have held their breath a bit at how Paul might answer.... He could say, “You have a point there...” Thank God, he doesn’t.

A. Justification Extended past the Ritual — before circumcision (vv. 9-12)

⁹Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? For we say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness. ¹⁰How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was

circumcised.

Now, theologians disagree a bit on the length of time between Gen. 15 and 17. But there was well over 13 years, maybe as many as 30 years, between God declaring Abraham justified by faith in Genesis 15 and God commanding him to be circumcised in Genesis 17.

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The point is devastating to any of those in the crowd who might be tempted to think that circumcision contributes to one's salvation. You see, Abraham was a Gentile when God justified him. Abraham was uncircumcised when God justified him.

Rabbi Levi in the Midrash said, *“In the age to come, Abraham will sit at the gate of Gehenna and will not permit any circumcised Israelite to go down there.”* Paul opens the page of Genesis, looks the rabbi in the eye, and says: Read your own Bible. Abraham was a saved Gentile fourteen years before the knife of circumcision ever touched him.

ILLUSTRATION:

- **Circumcision** was the sign of the Old Covenant - it showed that you were in the covenant community.
- **Baptism** is the sign of the New Covenant - It shows you are in the covenant community.

This is one of many reasons we don't believe in what is called “**Baptismal Regeneration**”. Baptism can't save a Gentile any more than Circumcision could save a Jew. Neither can walking a church aisle, filling out a card, reciting a sinner's prayer, or taking communion - we are saved by FAITH apart from WORKS. Notice how Paul explains in verse 11 -

¹¹He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised.

Now, a seal was a stamp: hot wax was poured on a scroll, then a seal was pressed into it to indicate that the contents of this letter belonged to the person who held the seal. It was, in other words, an outward sign of ownership. That is what circumcision was, and that is what Baptism is.

11b. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well,¹² and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

Ah, there we have it - the two groups becoming one in Jesus Christ, the Savior of Abraham. Yes, Paul, we see that... but what of the LAW? Shouldn't they stop eating all of this pork and catfish? Shouldn't they become Kosher?

Ah, not only was Justification extended past the ritual...

B. Justification Extended past the Regulation — before the law (vv. 13-15)

¹³ For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith.

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The promise came to Abraham 430 years before Moses stood on Sinai to receive the law. Thus, the fulfillment of the promise was not dependent on the behavior of Abraham, but rather on the faith of Abraham.

ILLUSTRATION: We told each of our kids that when they turn 10 years of age, we would take them to New York City and show them all the sights. We made that promise many years before we knew how much it would cost to fly three people to NYC or the salary of a Baptist Pastor and a homeschooling mom. Now, when the time came, and each one turned 10, we couldn't say, "Well, we would keep our promise if only you had cleaned your room more. NO - there were no conditions on the promise. It was simply a promise by grace.

It's the same with the Gospel - you are called to believe that Jesus is enough, and may be justified based on said faith.

¹⁴ For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. ¹⁵ For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.

Justification by faith has been evidenced. Justification by faith has been extended...but now can...

3. Justification by Faith EMBRACED (vv. 18-25) A.

Embraced by All Races — to all the offspring (vv. 16-17) ¹⁶ That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, ¹⁷ as it is written, "I have made you the father of **many nations**"—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

Ah, so no matter your lineage, no matter your DNA sequencing, no matter the color of your skin, Abraham's faith may be your faith.

B. Embraced Against the Evidence — Abraham facing death (vv. 18-22)

¹⁸ In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, "So shall your offspring be." ¹⁹ He did not weaken in faith when he

considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb.

Abraham did not believe that, by means of a godless logic, logically, this could not happen. Abraham, rather, accounted for God in his logic, so made all things from nothing.

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²⁰ No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, ²¹ fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. ²² That is why his faith was "***counted to him as righteousness.***"

- ABRAHAM TRUSTS GOD REGARDING AN EMPTY **WOMB**.
- WILL YOU TRUST GOD REGARDING AN EMPTY **TOMB**?

CONCLUSION/INVITATION: You see, look at verse 23 -

²³ But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone. ²⁴ but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord. ²⁵ who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

Do you believe that?

I leave you with the great line of **John Calvin**, that prince of the Reformation, who said:

"Christ is, as it were, a fountain, open to us, from which we may draw what otherwise would lie unprofitably hidden in that deep and secret spring which rises up (to us) in the person (and I would add promise) of the Father."

- **Abraham** reached down into that fountain four thousand years ago and drew up righteousness.
- **David** reached down into that fountain three thousand years ago and drew up forgiveness.
- **Paul** reached down into that fountain on the Damascus Road.
- **Martin Luther** reached down into that fountain in the Tower of Wittenberg.
- **I** reached down into that fountain in Florence, AL.

And this morning, the same fountain stands open. **Will you not draw from it yourself and drink of the waters of life freely?**

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ANNOUNCE: At the conclusion of this service, we will officially send off our Pastor of Students, Gaba Zavallah, to a new mission field. He has served the Lord faithfully and properly partnered with the families of this church to give these young people every opportunity for discipleship. For that, we are eternally grateful. He goes with our blessing and favor.