

Romans 4:1-12

"Walk In The Footsteps Of Faith"

**Trusting God to perform His promise* brings you into the *blessing* promised. It's the footsteps of faith (of which we want to emulate/imitate) that Paul is going to demonstrate in our present passage. The specific promise in view is that of justification before God. The elimination or eradication of our sin that we might stand (remember our breakdown) justified "just-as-if-I'd *never* sinned" in the sight of God. *It's an incredible (in fact miraculous) transaction that takes place through faith in J.C. & His finished work (upon the cross) on our behalf. God is completely just in that the payment for the penalty incurred through sin has been paid in full. Now He is able to justify freely (by His grace) the one who has faith in Jesus.* *

& This is the tremendous truth that Paul has been establishing in our previous passage. That we can never fulfill some religious requirement, no list of do's & don'ts... We can't come to church enough, serve enough, give enough, pray enough, read our Bible's enough (or any other thing) that we might achieve an acceptable level of righteousness in the sight of God. *Because God demands perfect righteousness. & Even if we could accomplish perfect righteousness from this day forward (which we can't), we're still condemned due to the entirety of our lives lived in sin up until today! -- & This is why we need (Ch 3 Vs 21) righteousness from God apart from the law (legal regimen).*

But as we've learned (& we'll see more later on) the law was never meant to make anyone righteous; it was meant to reveal to us the desperate reality of our *unrighteousness*. It's true that in Christ we're under a new *covenant*, but we're not under a "new way" to be saved. Salvation (man's righteousness before God) has always been accomplished by the same means, by God's grace through faith... & In order to demonstrate that, Paul goes all the way back the primary patriarch of the entire nation... Abraham himself.

Vs 1-3

Paul is continuing to build on the thought from the last Vs of the 3rd Ch. He's looking at what would appear to be a discrepancy between what God is doing now (through faith) Vs what He did in ancient times under the law. & Basically, the question is, "Does this principle of justification through faith, apart from the works of the law, somehow void the law or make what God did in the O.T. irrelevant?" & Paul answered the question by saying, "No, it doesn't *erase* it, it *establishes/affirms* it!" & Now he reaches all the way back to the beginnings of their nation to show that God has *always* been about the business of justification through faith... (*Before* the covenant of law, *during* the covenant of law, *after* the covenant of law, nothing has changed).

He says, "Let's look at Abraham." -- Abraham would be the single most esteemed man in all Israeli history. It would be like us going back to George Washington (only to an infinitely higher degree). He was the "father" of their nation (physically/literally). He says, "What did Abraham find out about justification?"

He says, "If Abraham was justified by works, then he'd have something to brag about, to boast in... but not before God." (No one could ever boast before God, but before other men.) We touched on this last week, if we were saved by some set of do's & don'ts or benevolent works, heaven would be an endless tell of self-congratulatory tales of what we did, how we gave, all the time we spent in prayer... on & on the masses would go w/how great they truly are... But as we've already discovered, actual works based righteousness is *impossible* for man to achieve.

Now... Abraham had *a number* of works he could recite. When God called him to leave his country, to leave his family... he didn't argue, he uprooted his life & followed the call *obediently*. Later, when God told him to offer his son, he was prepared to do so *sacrificially*...

*Family, this is so important. We need to dial in & pay attention to what's being taught here! Because Paul is teaching on the simple, yet incredibly *sacred* matter of salvation. (Of how a man is declared righteous in the sight of God). & When it comes to the necessities of salvation, I don't know about you, but I want to pay attention! I don't want to miss what God requires of me! & What we learn is absolutely staggering! We're saved, not by doing something *spiritual* or even radically *sacrificial*, but through simply *believing the promise of God!* "For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham *believed* God, & it was accounted him for righteousness.'" *What* was accounted to him for righteousness? His belief. God said, "I'm going to do this for you..." Abraham believed God & rejoiced w/gratitude & God (essentially) said, "That's all I need, for you to trust in the sufficiency of My grace & the truth of My word."

Now, we read in scripture things like, "*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.*"¹ & Again Jesus said, "*I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?*"² I'll give you one more...

¹ *The New King James Version* (Jn 3:16). (1982). Thomas Nelson.

² *The New King James Version* (Jn 11:25-26). (1982). Thomas Nelson.

*“Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name.”*³ These are great & precious promises of God. Promises of forgiveness, of salvation, of everlasting life... of justification through faith. We’re not going to be declared righteous through something we did that was so *spiritual*, or so *sacrificial*, but through simple faith in Jesus... It’s not earning & deserving, it’s believing & receiving. What it comes down to is this. Are you going to *believe* God? *

“Abraham believed God, & it was accounted to him for righteousness.” Let’s look at it together. Turn to **Genesis 15**.

I’d encourage you to read Ch’s 13-14 leading up to this point on your own time. The short story is that Abraham had just rescued his nephew Lot, who’d been taken captive when the cities of Sodom & Gomorrah had been captured by some plundering & pillaging kings from the east... & The king of Sodom offered to make Abraham a wealthy man for rescuing his city... But Abraham said, “No way, I’m not about to allow you to lay claim to any success I might apprehend.” The idea is that he wasn’t enticed by the “riches of this world” he was looking for the blessing that came from God.

Vs 1-6

He accounted *what* to him for righteousness? His belief. He trusted God would do what He said He would do. That He would give him a son, give him land & make of him a great nation.

Now there are a couple of details here that we do well not to miss. They revolve around this word, “accounted”. We don’t read that Abraham was “made” righteous, but that God “accounted” him as righteous. *Listen, justification isn’t God *making* us perfectly righteous, it’s God *counting* us as perfectly righteous (& there’s a difference). – When we believe on Jesus (not historically or academically, but we trust in Him *personally*, go all in on Him for life & eternity) God “counts” us as perfectly righteous. After we’re counted righteous, then God begins *making* us righteous. The process of being *counted* righteous is known as “salvation”. The process of being *made* righteous is known as “sanctification”. Salvation is *positional* (we’re counted perfectly righteous in Jesus, there’s no improving on that). Sanctification is *practical*, we’re growing in godliness day by day, being transformed from glory to greater glory as by the Spirit of the Lord, culminating (ultimately) in the resurrection.*

³ *The New King James Version* (Jn 20:30–31). (1982). Thomas Nelson.

The 2nd thing we should note about this word “accounted” is what it means. It’s an accounting word which means, “to reckon”, “to impute”, to “count over” or “put down to one’s account”. It’s a word that deals w/reality. You’ve heard the phrase, “Numbers don’t lie”. If you reckon (or put down) \$20 in your bank account. You have \$20 in your bank account. It’s just the facts... *Even so, when Abraham believed God, God put to Abraham’s account, placed on deposit for him, credited to him, righteousness... It’s more than a subtraction of guilt (though that would be more than we deserve in itself), it’s an addition of righteousness (specifically the righteousness of Christ).*

Vs 4-5

Building on the idea of earning/deserving Vs believing & receiving, demonstrating how they’re diametrically opposed to one another.

“Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace (getting what we don’t deserve w/out any expectation of a return) but as debt (earning our just pay). If you go put in 40 hrs of your life for another man’s business & at the end of the week he gives you a paycheck, you don’t respond like, “Wow! I didn’t expect this! What a blessing!” You worked for him; he owes you! If he *didn’t* have a paycheck for you, you’d be having words w/him to say the least!

If God had pronounced Abraham righteous because he left his community or laid his son on the altar sacrificially, then his salvation would’ve been payment for his works. God would’ve been paying off a debt. But Paul is pointing out that it wasn’t a work that Abraham did that caused God to declare him as righteous, but simply a promise of God that he believed.

What does this mean for you & me? ■ It’s an attitude of heart that we need to guard against. Because if you find yourself entertaining the thought, “God, you saw that right? You saw me get out of bed before the sun came up. You saw me spend all that time in prayer, all that time in Your word... bring on the great day!” Or whatever the good deed, the sacrificial act. You’ve adopted the mindset of earning/deserving rather than believing & receiving. Now you’ve nullified grace... & God will be a debtor to no man. He’s never going to owe me a thing...

On the other side of that coin is this thought, “I haven’t read my Bible, I haven’t prayed, I argued w/my spouse, yelled at the kids... I know God won’t bless me.” Then God doesn’t bless me & I think, “I knew it... I just don’t deserve it.” But here’s what we need to understand. We never deserve it.

God didn't bless me, *not* because I didn't deserve it, but because I don't *believe* He will. I'm not walking (or leading a life) by faith. The reasons for God's blessings in my life don't lie in *me* & *my* goodness. They lie in *Him* & His goodness, His mercy & His grace toward me in Christ Jesus. *

Having said all *that*, I need to at least mention *this*. Paul is not saying that there will never be good works in our lives. That we just go through life believing & receiving, but never doing anything. – It's common that we'll quote or highlight Eph 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."⁴ But Vs 10 seems to get left out in the cold, what does it say? "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them."⁵ & The balance is found in *this* understanding, works aren't the *requirement* of salvation, they *will be* the *result* of salvation. Works aren't a responsibility, they're a response... They're not to *gain* God's favor, but because He's *given* me His favor in Christ. They're not legal, they're loving...

& Paul goes on record here demonstrating that believing God & being counted righteous wasn't some special arrangement that God made only w/Abraham. It's through faith that God justifies the *ungodly* (which is all of humanity)...

Ok. In this courtroom where Paul is creating his case for righteousness by grace through faith, Abraham has been presented as Exhibit A. (The Primary Patriarch of Israel himself.) Exhibit B? The premier *king* of Israel, the one whom they all knew was God's choice to rule over the nation, to whom God promised to bring the Messiah through his line.

Abraham was justified through faith (apart from the law) *before* the law was ever given (at least 400 yrs). *David* was justified apart from the law through faith *after* the law was given (around 400 yrs). So, this isn't some strange new doctrine that voids the law. Abraham, David, you & me, we're all in the same lifeboat of justification by grace through faith apart from works.

Vs 6-8

The specific spot where David describes this is in Ps 32. He had taken one of his closest war hero's wife, slept w/her while her husband was out fighting for him, got her pregnant & then had her husband murdered on the battlefield to cover it up.

⁴ *The New King James Version* (Eph 2:8-9), (1982). Thomas Nelson.

⁵ *The New King James Version* (Eph 2:10), (1982). Thomas Nelson.

Of course, w/God there's no cover up, He knows what's really going on! But had David been judged based on keeping the law, on the basis of works, the righteousness of God would have to *condemn* him. But when confronted w/his sin, he confessed it (& though there were ramifications, we sow to the wind, we reap the whirlwind) God forgave him. As we read in 1st John, *"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."*⁶ & David came to know by experience the blessing of having your lawless (sinful) deeds forgiven.

He knew what it meant to be cleansed by grace through faith, rather than trying to "work it out". In the 51st Ps he said, "You don't desire sacrifice or else I would give it! You don't delight in burnt offering." The acceptable sacrifice in the sight of God is a broken spirit, a broken & contrite (repentant) heart... & So again in Ps 32, *"I acknowledged my sin to You, And my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, 'I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,' And You forgave the iniquity of my sin."*⁷ David agrees w/Abraham. Righteousness, true forgiveness is humbly received by faith, not earned through works.

Vs 9-12

The idea is this, since Abraham & David are both Jewish, both of the circumcision, does that mean that Judaism, or circumcision is necessary before you can receive justification by grace through faith? Is it a Jewish thing or is it open to Gentiles as well? (& This is where the brilliance that God gave to Paul shines through yet again.) He says, "Let's take a little trip back in time to when Abraham was declared righteous before God. Did God wait till he was circumcised to impute righteousness to him? Or did God declare this *before he was circumcised?*"

Ladies and Gentlemen: I trust that by the way Paul phrased the question, even if you're not familiar w/the history here, you know the answer! If you were to take a return trip back to Genesis later (which I'd highly recommend) what you'll discover (as we read earlier) is that Abraham was accounted as righteous in the sight of God in Ch 15. **God didn't give him the sign & the seal of circumcision until Ch 17. What takes place in between those Ch's is approximately 14 yrs! God counted him righteous well over a decade before he was circumcised! So what do we conclude? – His righteousness wasn't predicated upon the outward ritual of circumcision, but the inward reality of faith.**

⁶ *The New King James Version* (1 Jn 1:8-9). (1982). Thomas Nelson.

⁷ *The New King James Version* (Ps 32:5). (1982). Thomas Nelson.

1st came the inward *transformation*, 14yrs later came the outward *demonstration*. God transformed his life from the inside out. Yrs later God told gave him the sign of circumcision which spoke of the separation of a life lived after the flesh & leading a life of faith (after the Spirit).

& This is how Abraham becomes the father (spiritually speaking) *not* of all who are *circumcised* (which would be delegated/limited to the Jews) but of all who *believe* which extends to both Jew & Gentile alike...

It's not being circumcised that proves that Abraham is your father, it's walking in the same footsteps of faith that Abraham walked in. It's not about the *ritual* of Abraham *before* God, it's about the *relationship* of faith that Abraham had *with* God.

Faith: not works, not circumcision is the vital link to Abraham. It was by faith that he found favor, & righteousness in the sight of God. *"But without faith... it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him."*⁸

Prayer Points:

Father, the war between the flesh & the Spirit is real. We so easily vacillate between faith & a works mentality. Mature us in what it means to walk by faith (trusting in the promises of Your word) rather than giving such weight & merit to how we feel. Our hearts hunger for Your return, deliver us from this wicked/perverse generation. May we shine as lights in this dark world for the glory of Your name.

What a wonderful word of encouragement today. You don't have earn your way to heaven; you don't have to be "good enough" there are none good enough. You just need to *believe* God who gave His only begotten Son, who paid the penalty for your sin, so that whoever would believe in Him would never perish but have everlasting life. Don't delay, do it today.

⁸ *The New King James Version* (Heb 11:6). (1982). Thomas Nelson.