

Romans: Unashamed; the righteous shall live by faith

Romans 4:1–12 prt 11

MPS: **Salvation doesn't come by works, but by faith alone.**

INTRO:

- Chapter 4 is the last chapter in the first part of Romans
 - Chapters 1-4: *Salvation by Faith Alone*
 - Chapters 5-8: *Our New Life in Christ* (In the Fall.)
- Paul illustrates the doctrine of justification by faith alone by reflecting on the story of Abraham in this chapter.
- He will argue that Abraham is a Christian prototype.

OPEN:

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

- Abraham was a huge deal to the Hebrews. In John 8, they said, “Abraham is our father... Are you greater than our father Abraham?”
- Paul is bringing in Abraham as an illustration of God saving us and making us righteous through faith alone and not our works.
- *“Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.”*
- We are introduced to Abraham in Gen 12 where God called Abram to leave the country of Ur (in modern Iraq), and promised Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky and that he would give those descendants land – Canaan land, the Promised land.
- In chapter 15 we see Abraham dealing with fear and doubt. Have you ever noticed those two seem to travel together? If you start to become fearful about something in life, about The Lord and how we will or won't deal with a situation – that doubt tends to creep in too? “God won't do anything – He didn't answer my last prayers, why now? How can I trust Him? Why pray or even believe?”
- OR When you start to doubt, then fear creeps in. “What if God doesn't come through; I will be in trouble, I will be alone... “ then fear takes over. They travel as a pair, fear and doubt.
- That's Abraham here in Gen 15; let's look at it.

Genesis 15:1 (ESV) 1 *After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: “Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.”*

- So, the Lord has to tell Abraham to fear not – why? Because he was afraid. Most likely because of what we read in the previous chapter where Abraham goes to war against several kings to rescue his nephew Lot – maybe he is fearful of retaliation.
- In the next two verses, Abraham says, you haven't given me a son – all I have is a servant named Eliezer.
- God doesn't get on to him, isn't disappointed in him, doesn't correct him... but,

Genesis 15:4–5 (ESV) *4 And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: "This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir." 5 And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."*

- Abraham received kindness from the LORD, and patience from the LORD. "Let me redirect your gaze, Abe – now, can you count all those stars, Abe? No, there are too many.... So will your offspring be.
- By believing this last promise, Abram was justified –

Genesis 15:6 (ESV) *6 And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.*

- The kindness and patience of God overwhelms our doubt of God and His promises to us. In His kindness, he opens our eyes, fixes our gaze in the right direction.
- Watch how Paul uses this well-known event to prove his point of justification by faith alone.

Salvation doesn't come by works, but by faith alone.

Vs 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 counted to him as righteousness."*

- A common Jewish misunderstanding was that Abraham was justified by *works* of righteousness.

'Counted' is *logizomai* in the GK language. It means to impute. (Reckoned, accounted, credited, and counted)

- Its used in both financial and legal settings

- It occurs 9 times in chap. 4 alone, means to take something that belongs to someone and credit to another's account. It is a one-sided transaction
- Abraham did nothing to accumulate it; God simply credited it to him.
- God took His own righteousness and credited it to Abraham as if it were actually his. ... because Abraham believed in Him

ILLUSTRATION:

Landy has asked me before if I would give her some extra money to buy a dress. I would say, 'yes' and since she has her own checking account and debit card, I would pull up my banking app and *transfer* it to her account. Because I told her I did that, she believed me and proved she believed me when she paid for her dress at the counter. By virtue of her being my daughter, I didn't make her pay me back or work for it. She can enjoy the dress as a gift because she trusted I made a transfer into her account.

In a greater way, God has also given us a promise that those who put their trust in Christ will also receive a transfer – not of money in our bank account – but of righteousness in our spiritual account. Similarly, as LK's faith led her to the checkout counter, our faith leads us to enjoying the gift of salvation God has paid for. We don't get a dress, we get a cloak of righteousness that Jesus earned then gave to us when we trust in Him.

Vs 4-5 Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. 5 And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness,

- If salvation were on the basis of one's own effort, God would owe salvation as a debt—but salvation is always a sovereignly given gift of God's grace (3:24; Eph. 2:8, 9) to those who believe,

Vs 6-8 just 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."

- Paul quotes David from Psalm 32:1-2, a penitential psalm written by David after his adultery with Bathsheba and his murder of her husband (2 Sam. 11). In spite of the enormity of his sin and the utter absence of personal merit, David knew the blessing of imputed righteousness.
- By adding David's story, Paul demonstrates that salvation by faith alone runs across redemptive history. Abraham serves as proof from one portion of Scripture (which many refer to as *the Law*); David's psalms serve as proof from another part of Scripture (*the Writings*).
- He is reiterating the same message – **Salvation doesn't come by works, but by faith alone.**

Vs 9-11a *Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? For we say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness. 10 How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. 11a He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised.*

- Just replace circumcised with “Jews” and uncircumcised with “Gentiles” for the passage to be more easily understood.
- Remember that circumcision was one of the pillars of Judaism (along with the Law and the covenant)
- The chronology of Genesis proves Paul’s case. Abraham was 86 when Ishmael was born (Gen. 16:16), and Abraham was 99 when he was circumcised. But God declared him righteous before Ishmael had even been conceived (Gen. 15:6; 16:2–4)—at least 14 years before Abraham’s circumcision.

Vs 11b-12 *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.*

- He therefore serves as the prototype for all believers, both Jew and Gentile. For the Jew, he serves as prototype because his circumcision pointed back to his justification; for the Gentile, because he received justification apart from circumcision.
- Racially, Abraham is the father of all Jews (circumcised); spiritually, he is the father of both believing Jews (v. 12) and believing Gentiles (uncircumcised; v. 11).
- Adoption: By faith in the God of the gospel, we are adopted into a family. We are the Israel of God – a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation.
- Walking in faith makes us family. We are in a forever family.
- All true believers in Christ—whether Jew or Gentile—*belong* to Abraham’s family.
- Believing means belonging.

- If we are to walk in the footsteps of the faith that Abraham had before he was circumcised... Gen 15 faith, I think it's fitting for us to realize walking if faith will bring on constant fear and doubt.

CONCLUSION:

- Abraham is fearful (vs 1) and he is doubting God (vs 2-3) "how do I know I can trust you?" – God directs His gaze and reiterates a promise – Abraham believes it and God transfers righteousness to him.
- Now notice this **Genesis 15:8 (ESV) 8** *But he said, "O Lord GOD, how am I to know that I shall possess it?"*
- Abraham is settled on trusting God, but he is doubting himself.

How do I know I won't mess it up? I know you will come through, but what about me? How do I know I will come through? What if I fail? What if I mess it all up?

- I'm afraid I will let me down, let others down and most of all let you down.
- Lord, I'm afraid you will eventually become fed up with me and give up on me.
- God's response to Abraham and to you is this:

Genesis 15:9–10 (ESV) 9 *He said to him, "Bring me a heifer three years old, a female goat three years old, a ram three years old, a turtledove, and a young pigeon."* **10** *And he brought him all these, cut them in half, and laid each half over against the other. But he did not cut the birds in half.*

- When we read this, we are like... what in the world is all of this and what does it mean?
- Abraham didn't think that – he KNEW what this was. It was how people in ancient days made a covenant.
- The cutting of animals in two parts was to create a covenant
- We sign papers for contracts today, but it was different in an oral culture

Jeremiah 34:18 (ESV) 18 *And the men who transgressed my covenant and did not keep the terms of the covenant that they made before me, I will make them like the calf that they cut in two and passed between its parts—*

- One way to make a covenant in ancient days was to cut animals in half, walk between the pieces, and say, “If I break my vows, may I be as these animals. May I be cut to pieces.”
- In covenant language, ‘let me be cut off’
- You’re walking between the pieces and identifying with them, and saying, “Let this happen to me if I don’t obey.” You’re acting out the curse of the covenant. It’s pretty vivid.
- So, Abraham would most likely be getting ready to walk between the pieces to covenant with God – But God does something unexpected. Then, He puts Abraham to sleep and darkness came (are you in a dark place?)

Genesis 15:12 (ESV) 12 *As the sun was going down, a deep sleep fell on Abram. And behold, dreadful and great darkness fell upon him.*

- The phrase *dreadful darkness* literally means a darkness of terror. A terror fell on him. A dread fell on him

Genesis 15:17 (ESV) 17 *When the sun had gone down and it was dark, behold, a smoking fire pot and a flaming torch passed between these pieces.*

- Smoking fire pot and a flaming torch – same description of God on Mnt Saini and in the wilderness (get a little more info here) the word for *smoke* and the word for *blaze*.
- These are the same words used to describe the top of Mount Sinai when God came down on it years later and the same words that were also used to describe the pillar of God’s presence, the fiery cloud.
- What is happening? God Himself it is making an unconditional covenant with Abraham – Abraham doesn’t walk between the pieces – God does.
- “ABRAHAM, I WENT THROUGH FOR BOTH OF US.” Not, “now it’s your turn.” But “I WENT THROUGH FOR BOTH OF US.”
- “I will take upon myself the curse of the covenant for both of us.
- Abram, may I be cut off if I don’t do my part of the bargain,
- Fast forward, hundreds of years later, darkness came down again

Matthew 27:45 (ESV) 45 *Now from the sixth hour there was darkness over all the land until the ninth hour.*

Matthew 27:46 (ESV) 46 *And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, "Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?" that is, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"*

- God died. God was cut off. God was trampled into the dust. The darkness came down on him.
- Jesus was torn to pieces in darkness because we didn't keep the covenant.
- This is God saying "Not only will I not get in the way of me blessing you, but *your* failures are not going to get in the way of me blessing you."
- Jesus Christ, the Son of God, experienced all this so he could bless you even when you fail him, so your salvation could be an absolutely unconditional salvation.
- Abraham's eyes were closed when God justified him, BUT God's eyes were wide open. He sees our sin and ungodliness yet counts us righteous when we are awakened by Him and consequently put our faith in His gospel promises.

It's our hope:

Hebrews 6:13–19 (ESV) 13 *For when God made a promise to Abraham, since he had no one greater by whom to swear, he swore by himself, 14 saying, "Surely I will bless you and multiply you." 15 And thus Abraham, having patiently waited, obtained the promise. 16 For people swear by something greater than themselves, and in all their disputes an oath is final for confirmation. 17 So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, 18 so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. 19 We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain,*

QUESTIONS FOR GROUPS:

1. How glad are you that God transfers righteousness to your spiritual account through our faith and not our works?
2. Does doubt and fear creep into your lives? Why and when?
3. How does remembering that God the Son was 'cut off' to save you help Hope and Faith overcome our doubt and fear?