

Romans: The Faith of Abraham Part 1, Romans 4:1-12, 2/8/20

Would you rather be the best player on a really bad team, or the worst player on a really great team? Well I have been both. I went down to my basement and dug up two trophies. This baseball trophy is from when my little league team won regionals. Now, I remember watching that game and most of the season games, from the end of the dugout bench...they would put me in when the game was out of reach in right field. This trophy was when I was Defensive MVP on my middle school football team, of course, we lost every game that season by at least 3 touchdowns.

Today, in Romans 4 we are going to talk about a true MVP, not an MVP of Football, but the MVP of Faith: Abraham. This is something Jews, Muslims and Christians can all agree on. He is considered the father of all three faiths. In fact, if you grew up in church you might remember the song, Father Abraham had many sons... I asked the worship team to do that song today, but Larisa shot it down.

Why does Paul take the entirety of chapter 4 to talk about Abraham? To answer that question we need to remember last week we looked at the three big words of God's Provision- Justification, Redemption, Propitiation. And Paul concluded that it is clear, that at the negotiation table of salvation, God brings everything, we bring nothing, not our good works, not our obedience, not adherence to the law...It is only by trusting in what God has provided for us. So there is nothing to boast in. Abraham is the ultimate test case for Paul's argument. He's the MVP. He's Father Abraham...if it's true for the father, it's true for the children. If Abraham became righteous, (was saved) by his obedience to God, then Paul's whole argument falls apart. But if Abraham was saved by faith apart from works, then Paul's argument also stands. So, like a good lawyer, Paul calls the life of Abraham to the witness stand.

Abraham's Example shows us **three reasons Righteousness is by faith apart from works.**

Righteousness is a Direct Deposit.

Righteousness is a Gift.

Righteousness Precedes the Law.

Righteousness is a Direct Deposit.

Romans 4:1-3

What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, discovered in this matter? ² If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. ³ What does Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."

Paul references Genesis 15, where Abraham encounters the voice of God while out with his flock one starry night. God says to Abraham, you see all these stars? I'm going to make your descendants like these stars. Now, Abraham was exceedingly old and had no children of his own. But Abraham trusted the promise of God. And included in this promise of descendants was a promise of the Descendant, the messiah, the savior who would be the blessing to the

world. Genesis 15:6 says that Abraham believed God, and “God credited it to him as righteousness.” Credited, or reckoned is the Greek Logizomai. This word shows up here 11x in just this one chapter. So we need to understand what this word means. Logizomai- **A banking term, that means to make a deposit into an account.** Paul borrows this word to describe a spiritual transaction. God deposited his righteousness to Abraham’s spiritual account at the moment Abraham believed, trusted in, the promises of God.

Faith (Not Works) deposited God’s Righteousness to Abraham’s Spiritual Account.

This is so significant to Paul’s argument. Because it was faith, not righteous living or being perfect, or obedience to the law. It means through faith, God treated Abraham as though he was living a righteous, perfect, obedient life even though he wasn’t. **Martin Luther- simul Justus et peccator- at the same time both righteous and sinful.** Friends, this is good news because that Latin phrase none of us can say describes you and me! God treats us as if we were righteous.

This leads us to the second reason Abraham is a great example of righteousness by faith apart from works. **Righteousness is a Gift.**

Romans 4:4-5

⁴ Now to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation. ⁵ However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness.

Paul continues the financial analogy to describe faith. Have you ever gotten a paycheck after a hard week’s work and said, “What? I can’t believe this. You are paying me to do this? Thank you, thank you so much.” Now maybe you had that experience with your first job. I remember my first job I went through a few days of training and I got a paycheck for about \$100 and I was astonished. I had no idea that I was getting paid during the training. And I thought I was rich. But astonishment isn’t the response of getting a paycheck, gratitude, but not astonishment. Why? It is an obligation, not a gift. You are owed the money legally for the work performed...business 101. Paul says, **Abraham received righteousness as a gift not an obligation.**

Paul is saying- if you approach God like your good works deserve righteousness, you haven’t exercised faith, and you don’t understand the Gospel. **Saving faith is when we stop working...** Not that we stop working out our salvation, we don’t stop striving to grow and obey God. But that we stop working to earn our spiritual wages, righteousness, and instead **trust that Jesus did all the work for us.** He earned the wages. And when we trust his finished work on the cross God transfers Jesus’ righteousness into our spiritual account.

Now here is why this is so important to make this distinction. We are so prone to a works based, self-salvation plan. We want to earn it and deserve it. Our entire lives are built around that principle. You work, you are rewarded. This is drilled into us in sports, in climbing the career ladder, and we carry it into our spiritual status with God. See we can believe God exists, we can believe Jesus lived and died on the cross, we can believe the Bible is God’s Word, yet all the while, you can be silently working to earn your righteousness paycheck from God, instead

of receiving it as a gift. If I do these things God will have to accept me. In essence you are trying to be your own savior and justified by trusting in your own performance in religion, in moral character, in financial giving, working to help social issues in our community, being a good parent.

And this is what the average person believes. When you ask the question- "Assuming for a moment that there really is a heaven, what do you think are the **general requirements for admission**? Who gets in, and who doesn't?"

- a) Because I have tried my hardest to be a good person.
- b) Because I believe in God and try to do his will.
- c) Because I believe in God with all my heart.

Each of these answers reveal common misconceptions about what it means to believe, to have faith. Answer A is a salvation by works answer. Answer B is salvation by faith plus works. Answer C is salvation by faith AS a work.

Slide- Someone asked Billy Graham right before he died, "Why do you think God will let you into heaven?" It was his last interview. Surely Billy Graham could rely on his godliness and good works, maybe only Mother Theresa seems more righteous than him in the last century. He said, "I won't be in heaven because I've preached to large crowds or because I've tried to live a good life. I'll be in heaven for one reason: many years ago I put my faith and trust in Jesus Christ, who died on the cross to make our forgiveness possible and rose again from the dead to give us eternal life." Are you working to earn your spiritual righteousness? Or have you stopped working for it and received salvation as a gift.

Reason #3 of why Abraham is a great example of Righteousness through faith apart from works **Righteousness Precedes the Law.**

Romans 4:9-12

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. ¹⁰ Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before!

¹¹ And he received circumcision as a sign, 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.

¹² And he is then also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also follow in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

The Jewish law of Circumcision was viewed by the Jews as required in order to be accepted as God's people. It would have been completely shocking to the 1st century Jewish mind to fathom anyone being righteous before God who wasn't circumcised. This is precisely why Paul's question in verse 10 was the final nail in the coffin. **"When was Abraham declared righteous,**

before or after circumcision?" Because the answer is clear- **BEFORE**, declared righteous in Genesis 15:6, circumcised in Genesis 17, 13 years later when he is 99. Before any these laws like circumcision were even given, Abraham had been declared righteous. Therefore, you can't say that obeying the law is necessary for salvation, because **Abraham was declared righteous before God even gave the law!** So Paul says, if it's true for the father, it's true for the children. Abraham is the father of both the religious and the rebels.

This must shape how we think about evangelism and conversion. **Is our focus on moral conformity or the Gospel?** Are we telling people who don't have a relationship with Jesus, "You need to stop sleeping with your girlfriend, you need to conform your sexuality to God's Word, you need to stop getting drunk and partying, stop using profanity, you need to change your ethical opinions." When we do this, we are subtly communicating that what it means to be a Christian is to morally conform to certain standards, to obey the law. Instead, our concentration should be on sharing our great need for forgiveness, healing, for acceptance, for grace, for mercy, for absolute truth, for assurance, for peace, for redemption- that the only one who can provide this is Jesus Christ.

Three reasons Righteousness is by faith apart from works.

Reason #1 Righteousness is a Direct Deposit.

Reason #2 Righteousness is a Gift.

Reason #3 Righteousness Precedes the Law.

You may have noticed that I skipped verses 6-8. I wanted to save it for the end because in it is a great anthem for a bunch of *simul justus et peccators* like you and me. Paul calls one more OT MVP to the witness stand: King David.

Romans 4:6-8

⁶ David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the one to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: ⁷ "Blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. ⁸ Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord will never count against them."

Who committed worse sins, you or David? Who is the bigger sinner? Let me go through his list...David was a neglectful father who didn't discipline his sons, one of his sons committed rape and incest, another one murdered his brother, one of them led a rebellion against David and tried to overthrow him. David ignored God's counsel and took a census that resulted in a deadly plague, in his fury David killed people and was a man of constant bloodshed. David abused his power and took advantage of a married woman. He began an affair with her and when she got pregnant, he devised a plan to have her husband killed off to cover the whole thing up. And these are only the sins we know about from Scripture! We could give David the MVP of sinners award. And yet David had assurance that God was not keeping score. He believed he had the righteousness of God.

True freedom and blessing comes only to those who have the assurance that their sin is forgiven and will never be counted against them. Without this assurance, we will either ignore

the truth of God's righteous requirements, or we will be crushed by that truth. We will ignore, excuse or despair in light of our sins. But if we have saving faith, if we have assurance, God can pick us up when we do fail, because we know the blessings of being sinners whose sins are not counted against us, sinners who have the transferred righteousness of Christ in our spiritual accounts. We can be real with ourselves about our flaws, our past, our sin tendencies.

I can be honest about myself- that my track record isn't pretty. I was controlled by lust and pornography, I abused alcohol, I frequently lied to get what I wanted. I was a total hypocrite. By grace God has rescued me from my former self...but I'm still a work in progress...My sin tendencies aren't pretty- I can be really self-centered and egotistical, I can control, argue my way out of things to make myself look good. I can get angry when my kids are doing what I want them to do. I'll stop there. Flawed...Blessed is the one whose sin isn't counted against them. Do you have that Assurance that David had? Do you know the gift that Abraham received by faith?

Ephesians 2:8-9

⁸ For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—⁹ not by works, so that no one can boast.