

Romans 4

[Rom. 4:1](#) ¶ What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found?

[Rom. 4:2](#) For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.

[Rom. 4:3](#) For what does the Scripture say? "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS."

- Paul's opening lines could be read this way
 - What did Abraham, our patriarch, discover on this topic?
 - If Abraham had been justified by works, then he would have been famous for that achievement
 - He would have no doubt boasted over such a great accomplishment
 - It would have been said that "Abraham was found righteous because of his perfect life and impeccable behavior"
 - But Abraham never boasted like that before God
 - In fact, the scriptures tell us specifically how Abraham received his declaration of righteousness from God
 - Abraham believed God and it (his faith) was credited to him as righteousness

[Gen. 15:1](#) ¶ After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision, saying,

"Do not fear, Abram,
I am a shield to you;
Your reward shall be very great."

[Gen. 15:2](#) Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will You give me, since I am childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?"

[Gen. 15:3](#) And Abram said, "Since You have given no offspring to me, one born in my house is my heir."

[Gen. 15:4](#) Then behold, the word of the LORD came to him, saying, "This man will not be your heir; but one who will come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir."

[Gen. 15:5](#) And He took him outside and said, "Now look toward the heavens, and count the stars, if you are able to count them." And He said to him, "So shall your descendants be."

[Gen. 15:6](#) Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness.

- Abraham is childless
 - He and his wife are in their seventies and are past child-bearing years
 - They have no earthly hope of ever having children
 - Then God appeared to Abraham and made a promise
 - He said you will have descendents so numerous they will be like the stars of the sky
 - And based solely on the promise of God's word, Abraham believed God
 - At that moment scripture says Abraham believed that he would in fact bear children despite his advanced age
 - And on the basis of that belief, God counted Abraham righteous
- So Abraham was declared righteous the same way that we are today – by faith in God's promise

[Rom. 4:4](#) Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due.

[Rom. 4:5](#) But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness,

- Paul tells the reader to take note that God reckoned faith as righteousness
 - He didn't credit righteousness on the basis of work
 - If He had pointed to Abraham's work, then righteousness is something men can earn, like wages for our work
 - But God specifically said that the righteousness was credited to Abraham
 - Credited is the word logizomai which means considered regarded, supposed
 - Not earned and given as a wage

- Regarded as righteous, said to be righteous for reasons other than his own making
 - This proves that righteousness is granted to the ungodly, Paul says, credited on the basis of faith and nothing more
- Notice that the content of the promise was different for Abraham than for you and I, but the object of faith is always the same
 - The content of the promise he received was a promise that he would have descendants
 - By comparison, the content of the promise that Noah received centuries earlier was a promise that God was preparing to destroy the world with a flood
 - God was prepared to spare Noah and his family if he obeyed his directions to build an ark
 - Noah believed God's promise and acted accordingly
 - He found favor (or grace) because of his faith in God's word

[Gen. 6:6](#) The LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart.

[Gen. 6:7](#) The LORD said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the land, from man to animals to creeping things and to birds of the sky; for I am sorry that I have made them."

[Gen. 6:8](#) But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD.

[Gen. 6:17](#) "Behold, I, even I am bringing the flood of water upon the earth, to destroy all flesh in which is the breath of life, from under heaven; everything that is on the earth shall perish.

[Gen. 6:18](#) "But I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall enter the ark — you and your sons and your wife, and your sons' wives with you.

[Gen. 6:22](#) Thus Noah did; according to all that God had commanded him, so he did.

- Today, the content of the promise for those who would be saved by faith was that the man Jesus was our Messiah who died for our salvation
 - But in all cases, the object of our faith is the same:
 - We have faith in God's promises

[Heb. 11:1](#) ¶ Now faith is the assurance of *things* hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

- Faith is defined in scripture not by the content of a promise but by our confidence in the One Who is faithful to keep His promises
 - Though the content of God's promises have varied from age to age
 - Men have always been justified by faith in God's word
- As we've learned already, God can be just to credit us with righteousness through faith because a ransom has been paid for our sin
 - Christ's death on the cross allows God to credit us with righteousness that is not our own
 - But remember faith is the conduit through which God delivers righteousness to men
 - And though earlier men didn't necessarily know all the details for how God intended to save them
 - They knew that by trusting in God's promises, they would receive His mercy
 - And God was pleased to reckon their faith as righteousness knowing that on a certain day, Jesus would pay the price for their sins
 - Today, God's revelation is complete regarding salvation
 - So in our age, men are called to trust specifically in the Messiah
 - So the content of God's promise and the object of our faith are one and the same
- Paul has opened chapter 4 by establishing that Abraham was made righteous in the same way we are today
 - He now backs it up with a reference from a second great man of Jewish stature – David

[Rom. 4:6](#) just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:

[Rom. 4:7](#) " BLESSED ARE THOSE WHOSE LAWLESS DEEDS HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN,

AND WHOSE SINS HAVE BEEN COVERED.

[Rom. 4:8](#) " BLESSED IS THE MAN WHOSE SIN THE LORD WILL NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT."

- Remember when Paul said that the law and prophets testified that the righteousness of God would be delivered apart from law?
 - Abraham was an example of the Law, in that his story is contained in the Torah
 - And now Paul uses David as an example of the Prophets, the part of the OT that follows the Torah
 - David lived in a time following the giving of the Mosaic Law
 - Yet Paul says it was just as with David – no different
 - “Blessed” are those who God forgives – indeed
 - Probably the ultimate definition of the word blessed
 - Then in verse 8, David suggests that there is a way that God will not take into account our sin
 - He’ll just forget all about it, not take it into account
 - The Greek word for “taken into account” in v. 8 (logizomai) – same as credited (not credited)
 - Again, the Law and prophets both taught the same way to salvation - grace
- Now Paul spends the rest of chapter 4 exhausting all the implications from Abraham’s life

[Rom. 4:9](#) ¶ Is this blessing then on the circumcised, or on the uncircumcised also? For we say, “FAITH WAS CREDITED TO ABRAHAM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.”

[Rom. 4:10](#) How then was it credited? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised;

[Rom. 4:11](#) and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, so that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be credited to them, [Rom. 4:12](#) and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised.

[Rom. 4:13](#) ¶ For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith.

- Paul asks is God’s blessing for Jew or Gentile also?

- What's going on here is that some Jews might think that God had two systems for salvation
 - Maybe for the Gentile, God intended a system of faith, but for the Jew the system was to be works through the Law
 - Or perhaps Abraham and David were granted
- Well, Paul says, let's consider when Abraham received his declaration of righteousness
 - Before or after circumcision?
- Abraham was not the first Jew born
 - That distinction is reserved for Isaac
 - Abraham was a gentile when God called him and granted him the promise of a nation to follow
 - And the promise led to his circumcision
 - And that circumcision marked Abraham's entry into the new designation of Hebrews
- So when was Abraham declared to be righteous?
 - Before circumcision
 - So clearly, God's plan for salvation by grace can't be limited to Jews through the law
 - Abraham received this designation while still a Gentile and before the Law
 - He then was made a Jew by God's covenant
 - So he becomes a symbol for both the uncircumcised to come to faith (Gentile) and the circumcised (Jew) who imitate his faith
 - And his circumcision itself becomes a seal to signify that faith leads to a permanent relationship in God's family
 - Abraham was the father of faith for the Gentile and the Jew, for both gain access to God's family by imitating his example

- Looking at Abraham's faith even deeper...

[Rom. 4:14](#) For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified;

[Rom. 4:15](#) for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, there also is no violation.

[Rom. 4:16](#) ¶ For this reason *it is* by faith, in order that *it may be* in accordance with grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the descendants, 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,

[Rom. 4:17](#) (as it is written, "A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS HAVE I MADE YOU") in the presence of Him whom he believed, *even* God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist.

- If God had ever intended to produce a set of laws – rules – that we were to keep so that we could please Him
 - Then any promise of salvation would have been void
 - If I promise my son \$100 for his birthday
 - Then I later come back and say he can have that \$100 if he cleans his room
 - The earlier promise is no longer in effect
 - Obeying my rules become the only way to receive the money
 - It's no longer a gift but a wage
 - And the boy originally was 100% confident he would receive the \$100, but now he's likely to have doubts about whether he can earn it
 - That's the difference between works and grace
- Paul says Law has only one effect: to bring about wrath
 - But when there is no Law – no rules to meet – then there is no longer a violation possible
 - When God decided to bring righteousness on the basis of faith and not works

- We no longer had to fear that we wouldn't perform sufficient to receive the blessing (the \$100)
- Instead, we live confidently that we are receiving what was promised because it is solely a gift and not dependent on keeping rules or Law
- And then Paul says God wanted it this way because He promised to grant His mercy to Abraham's many descendents – many nations
 - Not only to his Jewish descendents but also to his Gentile descendents
 - As it was written in Gen 17:5
 - God made Abraham a father of many nations not just one
- So, God instituted salvation through faith not by works so that it could be delivered to many people who never knew or followed the Jewish Law
 - And did you catch the significance of the end of that verse?
 - Paul describes God as one who gives life to the dead and calls into existence that which does not exist
 - In Abraham's case, this describes the arrival of Isaac from a dead womb
 - But it has double meaning
 - For us it refers to the bringing of new spiritual life to a spiritually dead person
 - Calling into existence a faith and trust in God that previously didn't exist
 - This is how Abraham serves as a model for all believers

[Rom. 4:18](#) In hope against hope he believed, so that he might become a father of many nations according to that which had been spoken, "SO SHALL YOUR DESCENDANTS BE."

[Rom. 4:19](#) Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb;

[Rom. 4:20](#) yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God,

[Rom. 4:21](#) and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform.

[Rom. 4:22](#) Therefore IT WAS ALSO CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.

[Rom. 4:23](#) Now not for his sake only was it written that it was credited to him,

[Rom. 4:24](#) but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead,

[Rom. 4:25](#) He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.

- Paul takes an extended look at what faith meant to Abraham
 - And this becomes the model for all believers – this is what faith means
 - In hope against hope, he believed, he contemplated his own body as dead
 - He had no reason for hope apart from God's promise
 - So saving faith has no plan B
 - It sees no hope in self
 - This is not a shared plan
 - Saving faith must begin with a recognition that there is no solution to be found in our ability
 - Secondly, he had a strong, unwavering confidence in God's power to deliver what He promised
 - Saving faith is based on a promise received from God
 - And a complete unwavering confidence that God is able to keep that promise
 - He accepted a future outcome as a certainty even as he waited for it to become reality

- How do we explain Abraham's decision to create a son through Hagar?
 - In light of Paul's statements and elsewhere in the NT, we can see that Abraham was trying to arrive at the promised outcome in his own way
 - Not a doubt in God's promise, but a mistaken understanding for how it would be brought to fruition
- Even his name – Abraham – means a father of a multitude, and he wore that name proudly for 25 years without the promised son
- Now Paul makes clear that Abraham's life experiences were recorded precisely for our benefit
 - God wanted His children to be clear on this point:
 - Our righteousness is credited on the same basis
 - On our belief
 - Specifically, on our belief in Him who raised the Lord from the dead
 - Jesus was delivered to death because of our sin
 - And He was raised because of our justification
 - Once God delivered His Son to death, our penalty had been paid
 - Christ's resurrection was not necessary to remove our sin
 - That was accomplished in His death already
 - But God has promised that we are even now justified
 - And therefore, we will be raised into a righteous glory after our death
 - How could we trust in that promise if God had never raised His own sinless Son?
 - But because of our justification, God raised His Son to demonstrate His faithfulness

- Therefore, the final component of saving faith is a trust in the claim that Jesus died for our sin and was raised from the dead

"Christ being raised up, God announces to me, 'Not only were your sins put away by Christ's blood, so that you are justified *from* all things; but I have also raised up Christ; and you shall have your standing *in Him*. I have given you this faith in a Risen Christ, and announce to you that in Him alone now is your place and standing. Judgment is forever past for you, both as concerns your sin, and as concerns My demand that you have a standing of holiness and righteousness of your own before Me. All this is past. *Christ* is now your standing! He is your life and your righteousness; and you need nothing of your own forever. I made Christ to become sin on your behalf, identified Him with all that you were, in order that you might become the righteousness of God in Him.'"

William Newell