

THIS WEEK'S MESSAGE

MARCH 27TH - 28TH, 2021 // BOOK OF ROMANS

FAITH, NO WORKS (ROMANS 4:1-8)

Paul made the claim in vs. 21 of chapter 3 that the O.T. scriptures bear witness to the righteousness of God being manifested apart from the law.

- The Jewish believers in Rome would immediately have asked, "Where can this concept be found in the O.T. scriptures?"
- Paul accepts the challenge and shows us this theology at work in the life of Abraham.

Abraham is the "father" of the Jewish nation, and as such is the most esteemed man in Jewish history even to this day (vs. 1).

- To many Jews, the belief was that God chose Abraham because he was the most righteous man on the planet, and that's why God picked him.
- But now Paul will examine the life of Abraham to illustrate this idea of justification through faith.

NOT JUSTIFIED BY WORKS, BUT BY FAITH (VS.1-3)

If it was possible for any person (even Abraham) to be justified by their works, they would have something to boast about.

- But such boasting is nothing before God! (vs. 2b)
- Paul's point is that no-one's works are righteous (not even Abraham's), therefore it's impossible for anyone to have earned their right standing with God through works.

"What does the Scripture say?", Paul asks in vs 3.

- Does it tell us that Abraham was declared righteous because of his works?
- No, Genesis 15:16 says that Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness.
- Abram ("exalted father") had no children at age 86, but God gave him a promise that he'd make him a mighty nation in Gen. 15.

God made the promise, and Abram believed ("aman") God.

- Because Abram trusted God, God counted it to him ("credited it to his account") as righteousness.
- He didn't do any work to be declared righteous, he simply said "amen" to and trusted God, therefore God took His own righteousness and put it on Abram's account.

GRACE VS. WORKS (VS.4-5)

This all points to the beauty of God's amazing grace towards us the "ungodly".

- If Abraham (or any of us) could earn our right standing before God, it would cease to be grace.
- When you go to work and put in your hours, you get a paycheck at the end of the week - that's not a gift from your boss and you shouldn't feel bad about taking the credit.

God's forgiveness and His righteousness aren't given to those who can work hard enough to earn them, but to those who "believe in Him".

- It's not that God is praising laziness here, it's that there is nothing we can do to put God in debt to us.
- When we say "amen" to and trust in God's promises through Jesus, our faith is counted as righteousness (vs. 5).

DAVID ALSO SPEAKS (VS.6-8)

Paul then uses David as a witness, quoting from one of David's psalms of confession after his terrible sin with Bathsheba (Psalm 32).

- In this Psalm, David makes two amazing statements - 1) God forgives sins and credits righteousness to us apart from our works, 2) God "covers" our sins and doesn't count them against us.

How did David receive that kind of grace from God in this Psalm?

- "I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity...I will confess my transgressions to the Lord." (Ps. 32:5).
- David believed God - he agreed with God's estimation of his sin, therefore God counted him as righteous.
- Faith in God is what saves us, not our works.

GRACE, NOT LAW (ROMANS 3:9-17)

RIGHTEOUSNESS APART FROM CIRCUMCISION (VS.9-12)

If we can be counted righteous by God because of faith, and not because of circumcision or any other work, then this gift can be given to the uncircumcised Gentiles by faith (vs. 9).

- In fact, Abraham was counted as righteous in Genesis 15:6 some 14 years **before** he was circumcised in Genesis 17! (vs. 10)

So why was Abraham circumcised at 99 years of age, some 14 years after he was justified?

- His circumcision was a sign that he belonged to God and believed His promises (vs. 11).
- His circumcision was a seal to remind him that God had given the promise and God would keep it.
- Circumcision didn't add to Abraham's salvation, it simply attested to it.

LEGALISM VS. LIBERTINISM

Two opposite and equally incorrect ways of viewing grace within the Christian life are legalism and libertinism.

- The legalist hears of grace and thinks, "surely my works must matter in saving me." (Gal. 2:21)
- The libertine hears of grace and thinks, "this must mean I can live however I want to!" (Rom. 6:1)
- Works do not save us, but true, saving faith ALWAYS results in fruit and obedience! (Jms 2:20, Matt. 7:16).

The Jews of Paul's day thought circumcision signified who the true descendants of Abraham were.

- But Paul insists that to have Abraham as your father, you must do as Abraham did - you must believe God! (vs. 11c-12).
- What makes us children of Abraham is our faith in God, not our Jewish ethnicity or a religious work.

FAITH VS. THE LAW (VS. 13-15)

Not only does faith take priority over circumcision, but faith takes priority over the law as well.

- The promises that God gave to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob happened some 430 years BEFORE the law was given to Israel.
- So how were people saved before there was the law? "...through the righteousness of faith" (vs. 13b).

If it's only people who have kept the law who are to be "heirs" of God's promises, then faith is null and the promise is void (vs. 14), therefore any patriarch that came before the law wasn't saved.

- It's not that the law is bad, it's that we're not able to keep it.
- The "law brings wrath" (vs. 15) - the law can never remove sin. It can only reveal sin.

THE FATHER OF US ALL (VS.16-17)

"That's why it depends on faith..." God's grace can't be earned by law-keeping, circumcision, or any other work we can do (vs. 16).

- We can only receive right standing with God in salvation by grace through faith.
- This grace is "guaranteed to all his offspring" - not just to those who adhere to the law, but to those who share the faith of Abraham and believe God.

Abraham is the father of all believers, both Jews and Gentiles!

- Instead of the Jews complaining because Abraham wasn't saved by the law, they are to rejoice that God's salvation is available to all people.
- Abraham has a spiritual family (all believers), and a physical family (Jews) - this is the fulfillment of Genesis 17:5: "I will make you a father of many nations."

GOD'S POWER, NOT HUMAN EFFORT (ROMANS 4:18-25)

FAITH IN THE UNSEEN (VS.18)

God gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist (17b).

- God was able to call the dead womb of Sarah to life, therefore He's able to call those who are dead in trespasses and sins to new life in Jesus.
- Abraham believed "against hope" - it was an impossible thing God was asking Abraham to believe in that could only be accomplished by God's power.

THE CHARACTER OF ABRAHAM'S FAITH (VS.19-22)

Even as he considered his own body or the barrenness of Sarah's womb, Abraham did not weaken in his faith (vs. 19).

- When he looked at the natural realities, it must have seemed hopeless, just as it is when we consider the reality of our sinfulness.
- Nevertheless, he grew strong in his faith and was fully convinced God was going to work (vs. 20-21).

Faith is always strong or weak depending on how we perceive the object of our faith.

- Is the God we look too strong in our eyes, or is He weak? Is He faithful, or is He flaky? Is He good, or is He untrustworthy?
- Because Abraham believed in the faithfulness, strength, and goodness of God, His faith was credited to him as righteousness (vs. 22).

"FOR OURS ALSO..." (VS.23-25)

It wasn't only for Abraham's benefit that God declared him righteous through faith; he's an example that we're invited to follow (vs. 23-24).

- We're "barren" and as "good as dead" spiritually on our own strength.
 - But we've been promised by God new life if we would simply believe and trust in Jesus (vs. 24).
- Verse 24 and 25 speak to what kind of belief in Jesus that we're called to.
- It's a belief in His work on the cross ("delivered up for our trespasses") and triumph over sin and death ("raised for our justification") that saves us.
 - It's not a belief in just the historical events of Jesus' life, or the beauty of His teachings, or even in His claims of Lordship.

Saving faith that is accounted as righteousness must be an allegiant trust in what God has promised to do through Jesus for you.

- Abraham said to God, "I believe you, Lord, and I believe that you are powerful enough to do what you said. Though I am powerless, you are powerful, and I will rest in that."
- This is how any person ever has been saved- faith.