

“Faith Alone: Made Right with God, Live Right for God”

Romans 4

We’ve been studying the 5 pillars that the Reformers held to when they were threatened and persecuted by the church of Rome for teaching the gospel by grace through faith alone. The first pillar was the authority of the word of God alone. Martin Luther, who became the figurehead for the Reformation (500 years ago this week) led the uprising that sought to reform the church back to its biblical roots. The church of Rome had swayed from the true gospel and began to teach that the church and the pope had authority over the Bible. That salvation was by adherence to the church rules and doing good deeds.

When Luther, a monk who was teaching Bible at the University of Wittenberg, Germany, studied Scripture, he realized that God says salvation comes by God’s grace through our expressing faith in Him and His Son Jesus who died for our sins. Last week we explored the biblical definition of grace, that being the sacrificial act of the one to give what he has and another needs. God in His grace, initiates reconciliation to Himself by sending His Son Jesus to die on the cross for our sins (sacrifice) to make available to us what we need (forgiveness). Grace is all of God. In spite of mankind’s disobedience, God has always reached out to us. He initiated the covenants with Noah, Abraham, Moses and David. Jesus died while we were yet sinners. None of us deserve saving and yet God reaches out to us by grace alone.

This week we look at Pillar # 3, faith alone. Grace is God’s reaching out to us and faith is our response back to God. The church in Luther’s day emphasized works and adherence to church rules. Luther wanted the church to reform and return to the Scriptures.

The problem with a works-based theology is it reflects how our world thinks; that rewards are based on hard work and accomplishment. We are rewarded for grades, promoted for good work, complimented on our looks, given positions of importance and influence because we worked hard at lower levels. Ask people today if they think they will go to heaven when they die and most will begin to tell you that they have performed well enough to ‘get in’. But Scripture says

Eph. 2:8 For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; ⁹not as a result of works, so that no one may boast.

In Rom. 1-3 Paul has already shown from Scripture that we all sin and fall short of the glory of God (3:23) and that the gospel *“is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes for in the gospel a righteousness from God is revealed by faith from first to last just as it is written, “the righteous will live by his faith.” [Rom. 1:16-17]*

Now in Ch. 4 he defines more clearly what faith is. Luther understood that God wants to impart His righteousness on us to save us. It’s not about our trying to become righteous on our own efforts. We are saved by grace through faith alone

Paul answers this question in two parts; how does one get right with God (vv.1-12) and how does one live right for God? The answer is the same for both – by faith – because saving faith results in a changed life that is demonstrated by continued faith. So first we see that we are saved by faith . . .

When We Believe God Makes us Right with Him (4:1-12)

Paul begins his defense of salvation by faith in 4:1,

What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather discovered in this matter?

Abraham discovered [eureka!] that if one wants to be right with God then he/she must believe what God says makes one right with God. Abraham discovered that

God justifies us according to His Word not our works (vv.1-5)

The Scriptures say in Gen. 15:6 that Abraham *'believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness.'* Paul uses Scripture to back up what he's saying. Back in 3:21 Paul said righteousness from God apart from the Law has been made known to which the Law and the prophets testify. Many Jewish people misunderstood the Laws of God; the sacrifices, circumcision, the Sabbath and the holy days. While God did want them to obey all these, it wasn't because they made them right with God. It was because they reminded them how God saved them out of Egypt by His grace. How He passed over them when the angel of death went through Egypt. How He graciously gave them their own land which they didn't initially stake out and claim. How He graciously gave them houses they did not build and vineyards they did not plant. God gave this all to Israel by grace and He expected their faith in Him as the response.

What was the context for Abraham's faith? Back in Gen. 15 we read,

After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward."² But Abram said, "Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus?"³ And Abram said, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir."⁴ Then the word of the LORD came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir."⁵ He took him outside and said, "Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."⁶ Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.

God spoke to Abraham and reassured Him that he and Sarah would have a son through whom all these promises would come true. Abraham believed the Word of God before seeing the promise from God. This is what faith is and always has been. We did not see Jesus die on the cross or rise from the dead, but by faith we believe what God said is true. We have not seen God's kingdom yet, but we believe by faith that God said those who trust Jesus as their Saviour will see and live in the rooms He is preparing to build for us now (John 14).

Salvation is not by works. Paul says you get paid for your work, that's something you earn (v.4) but to the one who does not work (spiritually speaking, the one who doesn't try to be right with God through his own good works) but *'trusts God who justifies the wicked, His faith is credited as righteousness.'*

Abraham's the first example Paul uses and David is the second. Why these two? One is the father of the Hebrew race and the other is the greatest king. Both were given promises. Both God made covenants with. And because both were great men who did great works? Wrong. Because both believed what God promised according to His Word.

David wrote Ps. 32 apparently after God dealt with him regarding his sins of committing adultery and having Uriah murdered. When David confessed his sins to God, God forgave him. So David sang a song about it in;

¹ Blessed is the one whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. ² Blessed is the one whose sin the LORD does not count against them and in whose spirit is no deceit. ³ When I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. ⁴ For day and night your hand was heavy on me; my strength was sapped as in the heat of summer. ⁵ Then I acknowledged my sin to you and did not cover up my iniquity. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD." And you forgave the guilt of my sin.

He tried to hide his sins. He kept silent about his sins but his guilty conscience ate away at him. When he confessed his sins God freely forgave by grace. The word blessed means 'happy beyond this world'! Which is true because joy from forgiveness of sins doesn't come from people but God.

So saving faith is when we believe God can make us right with Him because

He forgives us according to the sacrifice of His Son

(vv.6-8; 3:19-26)

David is a powerful illustration of forgiveness because when you ask people if they think they will be in God's kingdom when they die they often say 'Well I'm been pretty good. I've never killed anyone or committed adultery' –things David was forgiven of! David knew even then God forgave sins based on blood sacrifice. How did that work since Jesus hadn't died yet? He already explained this in 3:21-26

²¹ But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. ²² This righteousness is given through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference between Jew and Gentile, ²³ for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, ²⁴ and all are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. ²⁵ God presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement, through the shedding of his blood—to be received by faith. He did this to demonstrate his righteousness, because in his forbearance he had left the sins committed beforehand unpunished— ²⁶ he did it to demonstrate his righteousness at the present time, so as to be just and the one who justifies those who have faith in Jesus.

Every blood sacrifice under the old covenant granted forgiveness of sins because they foreshadowed what Jesus would do – pay all our sins with His own blood. Nothing else saves us because nothing else can give us forgiveness of our sins. In Luther's day the church sold indulgences which claimed to offer forgiveness of sins but this was heresy and the reformers protested it so loudly the practice stopped.

Yet faith that leads to forgiveness involves repentance and repentance reveals true faith

Which we demonstrate through obedience (vv.9-12)

Paul returns to Abraham's example of faith. He explains that the rite of circumcision came after Abraham's declaration of faith. This was another reminder of God's promise that when Israelites have sons those sons are to be circumcised as a sign that the dads believed what God says. That's what it was supposed to mean. Later on Israel would twist this act of obedience demonstrating faith into a ritual that declared one was in good standing with God before the child has any opportunity to show faith. Which doesn't make sense.

Faith doesn't end at salvation. Abraham continued to live by faith in the promises of God even though it would be 25 years before he and Sarah would have Isaac from the time God first gave him that promise. Abraham never lived to see 'descendants'. Abraham saw the promised land and temporarily lived in the promised land and by faith even bought a cemetery for his family in the promised land, but he never saw the fulfilment of God's promises in his lifetime. Yet he never doubted God.

Paul moves from discussing saving faith to faith that grows from our salvation. Living by faith is when . . .

We Keep Trusting God's Promises Though We Don't See them Yet **(Rom. 4:13-25)**

What promises did Abraham keep trusting to be true that hadn't happened yet? That God . . .

Can do the impossible (vv.13-17).

Paul says of Abraham's faith;

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. ¹⁴ For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified; ¹⁵ for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, there also is no violation. 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, 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.

Continual faith in God's Word reveals that one has genuine faith in God. God promised Abraham right from the start that he would have many descendants, the land and that the world will be blessed through an heir of Abraham. Yet he had no descendants at the time! He believed God could do the impossible. It would be 25 years before he saw his first genuine descendant – Isaac. Then 13 years later God said sacrifice him for me and Abraham was willing because he had grown in his faith. Heb. 11:19 says of Abraham that

¹⁹ Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death.

Abraham's faith grew to believe God could do the impossible in giving him a son and then do the impossible of bringing his son (whom he didn't have to sacrifice) back to life.

What are you trusting God to do by faith that looks impossible? A need that you have in which you have no resources of your own to fulfil? A problem that seems to have no solution? This is what faith is all about; believing the all-powerful yet unseen God is always with us and knows our needs and has the solution to our problems and has an unseen purpose to our problems that will grow us and glorify Him. Like Abraham we need to remain . . .

Assured God delivers on His promises (vv.18-21)

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." 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;²⁰ yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God,

The sign we are trusting God's Word more and more (even if we can't see how His promises will come to us yet) is we doubt less and we give God credit more and more. When difficulties come we often forget God's promises for the moment but how quick are we to move from doubting God's presence or provision or power to remind ourselves 'What does the Scripture say?' about these difficulties? Then we reassure ourselves and say 'Okay God, I can hang in there. I know You won't leave me. I know You'll provide. I know You have the power to change this that I don't have and can't see – yet. We must always come back to the . . .

Reassuring ourselves that God delivers on His promises (vv.18-21)

²¹ and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform. ²² Therefore IT WAS ALSO CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.

I wonder how many times Abraham and Sarah discussed when they would have a son? Surely many discussions began; 'But we're too old, it's been too long, God has forgotten us!' What's your "too long"? What's your "too old"? What's your "too afraid"? Are you not fully persuaded that God has the power to do what He promised? To be with you always, to provide for you, to guard your heart and mind with peace, to be Your rock and salvation, to be Your shield and Your protection?

How can we keep growing in faith and stay fully persuaded that God will do what He promised?

Because of the resurrection (vv.23-25)

²³ Now not for his sake only was it written that it was credited to him, 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, ²⁵ He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.

God's promises all come true through Jesus. We have forgiveness of sins because Jesus was delivered for our transgressions. We are justified by faith because Jesus rose from the dead. God will deliver on His promises because He already has thousands and thousands of times and especially because of Jesus.

It always comes down to Jesus. Do you have faith in Jesus alone for your salvation? That He died for your sins and by confessing you are a sinner fallen short of God's glory you can be saved? Then God declares you right before Him. Your position with God is anchored in Jesus' righteousness not your own.

And if you already know Christ, are you growing in faith or do you continually doubt God's power and provision? If you are not growing my guess is you're not going to the Scriptures and assuring your selves 'What does the Scripture say?' about worry, doubt, fear, God's power, provision and protection? Will God ever leave you or forsake you? No. Are you and I more than conquerors through Jesus who loves us? Has God fulfilled His promise to Abraham about descendants, land and a seed? Yes. Has God raised Jesus from the dead? Yes.

³¹ What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? ³² He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

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If you have any comments or questions about this message please contact us at olivet@rideau.net