

ROMANS 4: 1 to 3

You have probably heard the saying, "It's always darkest before the dawn."

Well, that certainly was the case in our last lesson.

As you will remember, the whole problem revolved around righteousness.

God, who is completely righteous, cannot lower His standards, and man, who is completely sinful, cannot improve his. It was then that Jesus Christ stepped in to do the impossible.

Yes, "**--- once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.**" Hebrews 9:26

And because "**the wages of sin is death,**" the only way that it could be "**put away**"

once and for all was that its penalty
be paid in full.

And that's exactly what happened.

As the Son of God hung between heaven and
earth, His Heavenly Father "**made him to
be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we
might be made the righteousness of God
in him.**" 2 Corinthians 5:21

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The little word "**made**" which appears twice
in this verse is so important.

We talked about this concept in our last
lesson, only we used the word imputed.
As you will remember, the word imputed means
to credit to someone else's account.
And in Christ's case, and ours, it was the
switching of assets and liabilities.
On the cross of Calvary, Christ took our
place and was made "**sin for us**", even

though He Himself had never sinned, so that we could be **"made the righteousness of God in him,"** even though we had **"come short of the glory of God."**

And because of that transaction, which cost Jesus so dearly, the law was fully satisfied, and the books were completely balanced.

As Paul noted in Romans 3:21-22, **"--- now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets;**

²² **Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe."**

As you will notice, it is faith, not works, that procures the **"righteousness of God."**

Yes, Christ's perfect righteousness is counted to those **"that believe,"** not those who have measured up to God's standards.

And that's very good news indeed, for no one has measured up to God's standards.

However, righteousness by faith alone means righteousness that is available to all.

Paul made that point quite clear in Romans

3:29-30 **"Is he the God of the Jews only? is he not also of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also:**

³⁰ **Seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith."**

Probably that was something the Jewish Christians hadn't considered.

But it was something they needed to consider quite seriously, for the very ground of

faith that they now stood upon put the
Gentiles on an equal footing with them.

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And there is another aspect to the subject
of righteousness by faith alone which
we should consider.

By definition, faith alone is faith plus
nothing else.

When the church was born at Pentecost, it
was composed of Jewish converts.

However, as Gentiles were added to the body
of Christ, a question came up.

Acts 15:5 **"But there rose up certain of the
sect of the Pharisees which believed,
saying, That it was needful to
circumcise them** (that is the Gentile
Christians), **and to command them to
keep the law of Moses."**

In short, they wanted to impose additional requirements on faith as a condition of salvation.

The apostles and elders came together to consider this matter, and concluded that these requirements were not valid.

Today, this is not an issue, but for many Christians, faith plus works is.

Do we have to add works to the finished work of Christ in order to be saved or to maintain our salvation?

The answer is a decided no, and Ephesians 2:8-9 makes this very clear --- **"For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:**

9: Not of works, lest any man should boast."

Yes, faith plus works has always been a problem.

And it was a problem that Paul dealt with in Romans Chapter 4.

Not surprisingly, this false doctrine surfaced amongst the Jewish Christians, and for that reason, he drew his examples from their Jewish heritage.

Romans 4:1-3 **"What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found?**

² For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God.

³ For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness."

I can almost hear the Jewish Christians saying, *Surely you don't mean father Abraham.*

Yes, contrary to popular opinion, Abraham is a prime example of faith alone rather than works.

Oh, I know Abraham's faith faltered several times over the years, but he still emerges as God's grand example of implicit faith.

And for that reason, I would like to postpone our study of Romans Chapter 4 until next time, and spend the rest of this lesson getting to know this grand old man of faith a little better.

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At one time, Abraham, or Abram, as he was called then, lived in a culture of idol worshippers.

We are made aware of that fact in Joshua

24:2 **"And Joshua said unto all the people, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Your fathers dwelt on the other side of the flood in old time, even Terah, the father of Abraham, and the father of Nachor: and they served other gods."**

Can you imagine a more unlikely place and a more unlikely person to be chosen by God?

Nevertheless, when Abram was 75 years old, God told him to leave his home and his relatives and go to a land that He would show him.

Actually, when Abraham started out on this journey, he didn't have any idea where he was going.

No, it was only "a land that I will shew thee."

Genesis 12:1-7 "Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee:

² And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing:

³ And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed. (What a promise!)

⁴ So Abram departed, as the LORD had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran.

5 And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came.

6 And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land.

7 And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him."

As you will notice, in V 1, "the LORD had said unto Abram."

The fact is, Abram hadn't obeyed the Lord immediately, but stopped short in Haran until the death of his father Terah. Finally, he obeyed, but there was still a problem.

As you'll remember God had said **"Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred."**

Nevertheless, he took one of his kindred, namely, his nephew Lot, along with him. No, Abram was far from perfect, but in today's lesson, we will be concentrating on his obedience, and particularly on his faith.

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V 4 **"So Abram departed, as the LORD had spoken unto him."**

I don't know what kind of a dwelling he had lived in previously.

I suppose it could have been a tent, but more than likely it was a permanent dwelling.

Nevertheless, at 75 years of age, he sort of pulled up stakes, as it were, and went *camping* for what turned out to be the rest of his life!

Oh, there were promises all right, big promises.

He was to have a complete country to call his own.

He was to have a multitude of descendents, even though at 75 years of age he was still childless.

Yes, Abraham stepped out by faith, completely depending on future promises.

How far into the future, he really didn't know.

One day, as he journeyed, God said to him,
*This is it Abraham! This is the land
that I will give you.*

However, it really didn't look like his
land, and that's because it really
wasn't his land.

The fact of the matter was, **"the Canaanite"**
still lived in the land, and they would
continue do so for many years to come.
And that's OK because God hadn't really said
it was his land.

He said **"Unto thy seed will I give this
land."**

In the meantime, Abram had to wait, and
Abram had to believe.

Was he disappointed? Not at all.

As a matter of fact, **"he builded an altar
unto the LORD."**

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Finally, God removed the obstacle, or should I say, the individual who was holding Abram back.

Genesis 13:14-18 **"And the LORD said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward:**

¹⁵ For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever.

¹⁶ And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered.

¹⁷ Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee.

18 **Then Abram removed his tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the LORD."**

It was a wonderful promise, wasn't it?

He was to have descendents **"as the dust of the earth,"** and **"all the land"** that he could see.

But, in the meantime, he was childless, and he didn't even have enough land to set his foot on.

However, God expected him to rejoice in His promises, just as if they had already happened --- **"Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee."**

And I'm sure Abram did.

If you had met him that day and asked him
where he was going, he would have said,
*I'm walking through the land that God
is going to give me.*

And he built another altar unto the Lord.

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Now there was a war in the land, and the
kings of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abram's
neighbours, got properly beaten.

And, as was customary, the enemy took their
possessions and some of their people
for slaves.

Unfortunately, Abram's nephew was one of
those people.

Well, he had to do something, and he surly
did!

To make a long story short, he and his men
rescued all of the people, and brought
back the goods.

As we look in on Genesis 14:21, the king is most grateful --- **"And the king of Sodom said unto Abram, Give me the persons, and take the goods to thyself."**

Certainly that would be reasonable, as it was the legitimate spoils of war.

But Abram refused.

You see, Sodom was a very wicked city, and Abram wasn't willing to be looked upon as the king's benefactor.

Now, a lot of men would have rationalized the situation this way --- *Certainly God has made some great promises, but in the mean time, I'm getting nothing. Isn't this my opportunity to get rich quick?* But not Abram.

Genesis 14:22-23 **"And Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have lift up mine hand unto**

the LORD, the most high God, the
possessor of heaven and earth,

²³ That I will not take from a thread
even to a shoelatchet, and that I will
not take any thing that is thine, lest
thou shouldest say, I have made Abram
rich:"

Yes, Abram wanted to keep the record
straight.

What he had, and what he was going to have,
would be the result of God's blessings,
not Sodom's generosity.

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However, after awhile, Abram seemed to have
second thoughts.

Have you ever noticed? Sometimes, after a
spiritual victory, our faith begins to
falter.

Maybe that's what happened to Abram.

Whatever the case, God felt it necessary to reassure him.

Genesis 15:1 **"After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward."**

Was Abram encouraged?

Not this time, I'm afraid.

V 2 **"And Abram said, Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?**

3: And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir."

Actually, Abram was right.

If a rich man remained childless, his chief servant would inherit everything.

So, that takes care of his present
possessions, doesn't it?

But what about those future blessings that
God had promised?

Well, they were also contingent upon him
having a son.

Remember God's promise --- **"For all the land
which thou seest, to thee will I give
it, and to thy seed for ever."**

So, you can see Abram's point, can't you? --
-- **"what wilt thou give me, seeing I go
childless."**

Genesis 15:4-5 **"And, behold, the word of the
LORD came unto him, saying, This shall
not be thine heir; but he that shall
come forth out of thine own bowels
shall be thine heir.**

⁵ **And he brought him forth abroad,
and said, Look now toward heaven, and**

**tell the stars, if thou be able to
number them: and he said unto him, So
shall thy seed be."**

Was Abram listening?

Was he willing to rest upon God's promises
without one scrap of evidence?

Well, yes, he was.

In so many words, he said --- *If you say so
Lord, then that's good enough for me.*

Yes, V 6 says --- **"And he believed in the
LORD; and he counted it to him for
righteousness."**

And by the way, that's the very verse that
Paul is referring to in Romans 4:3 **"For
what saith the scripture? Abraham
believed God, and it was counted unto
him for righteousness."**

We'll see the significance of that statement
in our next lesson.

But in the mean time, let's continue to look at Abram's walk of faith.

Genesis 17:1-8 **"And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect.**

² **And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly.**

³ **And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying,**

⁴ **As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations.**

⁵ **Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee.**

⁶ And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee.

⁷ And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.

⁸ And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God."

Abram is now 99 years old, and God is still using that little word "**will**."

Aside from Ishmael, who was not part of God's plan, Abram was childless.

At this point in his life, I'm sure his only
desire would have been for a son, but
God gave him something else.

He gave him a new name.

And do you know what that name means?

Abraham means the father of a multitude!

It's hard to imagine this rich, highly
respectable old man without a
legitimate son to his name, going
around calling himself *the father of a
multitude*.

That's faith, isn't it?

Granted, his neighbours might have called it
something else, but really, that is
faith!

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Finally, at 100 years of age, his miracle
son arrived.

After 25 years of waiting, he held the key
to God's promises in his arms.

This little son must have been so dear to
him.

Yes, Abraham had arrived.

From this point on, he could rest on his
oars.

Or maybe not.

Genesis 22:1-2 **"And it came to pass after
these things, that God did tempt (or
test) Abraham, and said unto him,
Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I
am.**

**2: And he said, Take now thy son, thine
only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and
get thee into the land of Moriah; and
offer him there for a burnt offering
upon one of the mountains which I will
tell thee of."**

Over the years, Abraham had matured in his faith.

It was now time for his final examination before graduating from the school of faith.

You might say this was the acid test.

After 25 years of waiting, he was being told to destroy the only channel of God's blessings.

Remember God's words in Genesis 17:19,

"Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed; and thou shalt call his name Isaac: and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant, and with his seed after him."

Yes, Isaac was the only person in the world through whom God would work, and up until this time, he didn't have any children.

In fact, he wasn't even married.

And not only did God's commandment go
against the grain logically, it went
against the grain emotionally.

As God pointed out, He was asking Abraham
for the son **"whom thou lovest."**

Did Abraham have another lapse of faith?

No, not this time!

In those 25 years of wanderings, he had
gained more than a son. He had learned
to trust God implicitly.

Genesis 22:3 **"And Abraham rose up early in
the morning, and saddled his ass, and
took two of his young men with him, and
Isaac his son, and clave the wood for
the burnt offering, and rose up, and
went unto the place of which God had
told him."**

We don't have to guess what was going on in Abraham's mind as he **"clave the wood for the burnt offering."**

It's revealed in Hebrews 11:17-19 **"By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son,**

18: Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called:

19: Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure."

Now, that only made sense, didn't it?

If Abraham believed God would keep His promises, no matter what, and if he knew that these promises could only be fulfilled through Isaac, then he could

confidently plunged his knife into his son's heart, knowing that God would raise him up again.

Yes, it only made sense.

But what if God didn't raise him up? What would he tell Sarah when he got home? I don't think that possibility ever entered his head.

No, he didn't have a single, *What if?* moment.

God would keep His promises, and that's all there was to it!

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Well, time went by, and Sarah, Abraham's beloved wife died.

And you know what?

He still didn't have enough land to bury her in.

After a lifetime of believing in God's promises, he didn't have a square foot of the Promised Land to call his own. And up until now, he hadn't made any attempt to purchase any.

But now the time had come, so he purchased a field and a cave in a land he still didn't own.

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Finally, Abraham died, a rich man, blessed of God in so many ways, but **"a stranger and a sojourner"** in the Land of Promise, the owner of a field and a cave.

Genesis 25:7-10 **"And these are the days of the years of Abraham's life which he lived, an hundred threescore and fifteen years.**

⁸ **Then Abraham gave up the ghost, and**

died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years; and was gathered to his people.

⁹ And his sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, which is before Mamre;

¹⁰ The field which Abraham purchased of the sons of Heth: there was Abraham buried, and Sarah his wife."

I can almost hear the neighbours talking quietly together during the funeral:
He was such a nice man, and very successful too.

*I wonder why he never bought any land?
Certainly, he was rich enough.
Lived in tents all his life!
With his money he could have built a city
and named it after himself.*

That's what a lot of rich folk do.

Poor old fellow. In 50 years, he will be forgotten.

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Do you think Abraham died a disappointed man?

Not for a moment!

Granted, he hadn't received the Promised Land personally, but he knew it was coming.

He believed it with all his heart, and he had instilled his belief in the hearts of his family.

Hebrews 11:8-13 **"By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.**

9: By faith he sojourned in the land of

promise, as in a strange country,
dwelling in tabernacles (or tents) with
Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of
the same promise:

10: For he looked for a city which hath
foundations, whose builder and maker is
God. (No, Abraham wasn't interested in
an earthly city as a memorial.)

11: Through faith also Sara herself
received strength to conceive seed, and
was delivered of a child when she was
past age, because she judged him
faithful who had promised.

12: Therefore sprang there even of one,
and him as good as dead, so many as the
stars of the sky in multitude, and as
the sand which is by the sea shore
innumerable.

13: These all died in faith, not having

received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth."

No, Abraham never lived long enough to personally experience many of God's promises.

But his faith wasn't in vain.

Not only did God's promises come to pass in His good time, but Abraham's faith made him the recipient of a wonderful possession.

Yes, God's Word says --- **"And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness."**

How could God do that?

We'll just have to wait until next time to find that out.