

## ROMANS 4: 1 to 25

Well, we didn't get very far in our study of Romans Chapter 4, did we?

As you will remember, Paul was addressing believers, no doubt of Jewish heritage, on the subject of faith.

Surprisingly, the very first person he mentioned was the father of their nation.

Yes, Abraham was a man of implicit faith.

So much so that we spend the rest of our lesson following in his footsteps.

Today I would like make one more little detour, and once again, our subject is Abraham.

His life parallels that of the New Testament believer in at least two ways.

Both are possessors of a righteousness that  
is not their own.

And whether we realize it or not, both are  
**"strangers and pilgrims on the earth."**

Abraham looked **"for a city which hath  
foundations, whose builder and maker is  
God,"** and **"--- our conversation (or  
citizenship) is in heaven; from whence  
also we look for the Saviour, the Lord  
Jesus Christ"** Philippians 3:20.

*♪A tent or a cottage, why should I care?  
They're building a palace for me over there;  
Tho' exiled from home, yet still I may sing:  
All glory to God, I'm a child of the king.*

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Returning to Romans Chapter 4, we read these  
words in V 1-3 **"What shall we say then**

that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found?

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

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

No, Abraham's righteousness wasn't earned, it was "**counted unto him**" because of his faith.

And by that, I don't mean he was being rewarded for the quality of his faith, or any other personal attribute, for that matter.

No, it was the object of his faith that made all the difference, and we will be talking about that in a few minutes.

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Certainly, Abraham wasn't a perfect man, and his faith wasn't perfect either.

In fact, it faltered quite seriously on several occasions.

And, by the way, we are still living with the results of one of those lapses of faith today.

No, Abraham wasn't perfect, but he was teachable, and that made the difference.

Over the years, God had been able to bring him along, little by little, until he reached the high ground described in Genesis 15:6: **"And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness."**

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Reaching back in scripture, Paul points to this very verse as his example of faith without works.

Here was a man who had received righteousness as a free gift entirely on the basis of his faith.

And by the way, it was a righteousness that rendered him completely acceptable before God.

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So, what exactly did Abraham have faith in? Certainly, he believed God's promises concerning land and descendents, but that's not what this verse is talking about, is it?

No, somehow his implicit faith in God's promises went far beyond the temporal. Somehow he became the recipient of a righteousness that was not his own.

And, if we look closely, we will find that the object of his faith wasn't so much God's promises, as it was God Himself -- **"And he believed in the LORD."**

As a result, God **"counted it to him for righteousness."**

Now, by definition, *righteousness* is an attribute, an accomplishment attributed to a particular individual.

Whose accomplishment are we talking about here?

Certainly it wasn't Abraham's.

No, it was Someone else's accomplishment, and from our study of Romans Chapter 3, it is quite obvious that it could only be Christ's accomplishment.

Yes, Abraham must have been the recipient of Christ's personal righteousness, as

none other would have been acceptable with God.

So, how did Abraham become the possessor of such a wonderful gift?

Had he been personally acquainted with the Son of God?

I realize that such an acquaintance would not have been absolutely necessary, for many Old Testament saints received the gift of righteousness simply by seeing the Lord Jesus in the Old Testament sacrifices.

But to answer our question, the answer is yes, Abraham did have a personal acquaintance with Jesus Christ.

One of those occasions, of which there were several, is recorded in Genesis 18.

This was the time when the Lord Jesus, in company with two angels, actually

visited Abraham and Sarah in their home.

Genesis 18:1-2 **"And the LORD appeared unto him in the plains of Mamre: and he sat in the tent door in the heat of the day;  
2: And he lift up his eyes and looked, and, lo, three men stood by him."**

Many commentators agree that this was a pre-incarnate appearance of Jesus Christ. But more to the point, Jesus Christ Himself positively confirms these personal encounters.

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You might remember the incident, recorded in John 8, when Jesus was having a considerable dispute with the Pharisees.

Throughout His ministry, these men had steadfastly refused to recognize His deity, putting him down as nothing more than the son of a carpenter.

You can imagine their rage when He said in V 56, **"Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad."**

Yes, Abraham was acquainted with the Son of God.

And it appears he had identified Him as God's promised Redeemer.

But more to the point, it appears that somehow, through his faith in the Abrahamic covenant, he received the gift of Christ's righteousness.

So, is there any connection between the Abrahamic covenant and the Lord Jesus Christ?

Actually there is, and might I say, a very definite connection.

Paul brought that surprising truth to light, in Galatians 3:16 **"Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ."**

Let me try to explain what Paul is driving at here.

It all hinges on the little word **"seed."**

In the original, the word is 'zera,' and like its English counterpart, it is a collective noun.

That means it can be either singular or plural, depending on the context.

For instance, in Genesis 12:7, it could be interpreted either way, while in

Genesis 21:12 it is definitely singular because it refers to Isaac.

So, why would God use a collective noun?

If He wanted to positively identify

Abraham's numerous descendants, why didn't He use a word like *sons*, or *children*, or even *descendants*?

Such words would be immediately recognized as plural.

But He didn't do that, did He?

No, He used a collective noun which could be taken either way.

At least it could be taken either way until Paul explained that God was referring to Christ.

Galatians 3:16 **"Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ."**

So you see, the promises that Abraham believed in can only be realized in their entirety when Israel recognizes their Messiah.

True, they did become a great nation, and in Solomon's time, they occupied most, if not all, of the Promised Land.

However, until they accept their Messiah, they can never enter the kingdom of heaven that John the Baptist talked about.

So, in the end, Israel's promises are dependent upon the Lord Jesus Christ, and so is the righteousness that Abraham believed in.

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Returning to Romans Chapter 4:2, you will notice that Paul, in his effort to

highlight Abraham's faith, didn't  
downplay his good works.

In fact, he said, "**--- if Abraham were  
justified by works, he hath whereof to  
glory.**"

Yes, when it came to works, Abraham had an  
impressive record, earning him the  
respect of his neighbours.

For instance, when he wanted to buy land to  
bury his wife in, his neighbours were  
most co-operative: "**Hear us, my lord:  
thou art a mighty prince among us: in  
the choice of our sepulchres bury thy  
dead; none of us shall withhold from  
thee his sepulchre, but that thou  
mayest bury thy dead.**" Genesis 23:6

Yes, if anyone could have relied upon his  
good works to fit him for heaven, it  
would have been Abraham.

However, what does Romans 4:2 say in its entirety --- **"For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God."**

No, God's standards are higher and holier than anything man can obtain or even conceive.

But Abraham wasn't building upon a foundation of good works.

He had found the pearl of great price, and it was righteousness by faith, and by faith alone.

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At this point, Paul appeals to their reasoning, making a direct comparison between works and faith.

V 4 **"Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt."**

If you put in a good day's work, you can expect a day's pay.

Your employer owes it to you.

V 5 **"But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness."**

That's where Abraham stood.

His righteousness wasn't a reward for services rendered.

No, God didn't owe him anything.

Abraham had merely **"believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness."**

It was a gift, placed on his account by pure grace.

And yes, there is a great difference between works and grace.

Under works, everything depends upon the sinner.

Under grace, everything depends upon the Saviour.

Under works, God can only give us a fair trial.

But under grace, He "**that justifieth the ungodly**" can give us a free pardon.

Yes, He can be just "**and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.**"

And that's the ground Abraham stood on.

He "**believed God, and it was counted unto him (not owed to him) for righteousness.**"

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But Paul wasn't finished yet.

He now calls attention to another prominent individual from their Jewish heritage.

Romans 4:6-8 "**Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without**

**works,**

**7     Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.**

**8     Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin."**

In these verses, Paul is referring to David's words, written in Psalm 32, after the public exposure of his great sin.

You can read about that dark period in his life, in 2 Samuel Chapters 11 and 12. Basically, David had broken 3 of the 10 Commandments.

He had coveted another man's wife, committed adultery, and, finally, committed murder.

Two of these offenses are punishable by death.

And the Old Testament system of sacrifices makes no provision for willful sin.

I think that's what David was referring to in Psalm 51:16 when he wrote, --- **"For thou desirest not sacrifice; else would I give it: thou delightest not in burnt offering."**

No, there was no remedy for his sin under law, but there was under grace.

That's why we find these words in V 17 of this same Psalm: **"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise."**

Yes, the only hope David had in this otherwise hopeless situation was the grace of God, and a righteousness that was not his own.

And he found it.

In fact, I am quite certain, that the man he wrote about in Psalm 32 was no other than David himself.

Psalm 32:1-5 **"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.**

**2: Blessed is the man unto whom the LORD imputeth not iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no guile.**

**3: When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long.**

**4: For day and night thy hand was heavy upon me: my moisture is turned into the drought of summer. Selah.**

**5: I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the**

**LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity  
of my sin. Selah."**

Yes, David was the man to whom God imputed  
**"righteousness without works"** Romans  
4:6.

**And he was the man to** whom God would **"not  
impute sin,"** (Romans 4:8) even though  
he was worthy of death.

That's why Nathan could say, in 2 Samuel  
12:13, **"The LORD also hath put away thy  
sin; thou shalt not die."**

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However, God's grace doesn't give us a  
license to sin.

God could save David's immortal soul because  
of His Son's substitutionary death, but  
he still had to reap what he sowed.

2 Samuel 12:14 **"Howbeit, because by this  
deed thou hast given great occasion to**

**the enemies of the LORD to blaspheme,  
the child also that is born unto thee  
shall surely die."**

And that wasn't the end of it.

2 Samuel 12:10 **"Now therefore the sword  
shall never depart from thine house;  
because thou hast despised me, and hast  
taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to  
be thy wife."**

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And then Paul addresses another error  
concerning the doctrine of salvation.  
This time it wasn't faith plus works, but  
rather, faith plus religious  
ordinances.

This problem had surfaced in the early  
church when the Gentiles began to be  
added to the body of Christ.

We can read about it in Acts 15:1 **"And certain men which came down from Judaea taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved."**

After due consideration, the church had come down on the side of faith alone, and that should have settled it.

However, it appears that this misconception was still around when Paul penned the book of Romans.

Building upon the established fact that **"Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness,"** Paul asks the question in V 9-11, **"Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for**

righteousness.

**10: How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision.**

**11: And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised."**

So, it all comes down to the sequence of events.

Abraham had been justified by faith some 14 years before he received the sign of circumcision (and you can check that out by comparing Genesis 15:6 with Genesis 17:10).

Consequently, circumcision had nothing to do with God's gift of imputed righteousness.

So, in reality, those Judaizers whom we read about in the book of Acts were trying to impose a requirement on the believing Gentiles that would have disqualified Abraham.

So, if circumcision had no saving merits of its own, what was its function?

Paul answers that question in Romans 4:11.

As far as Abraham was concerned, it was a sign or **"a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised."**

So, you see, its only purpose was to bear testimony to a work of faith that had been already accomplished in his life.

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And now, I need to draw your attention to a parallel situation that exists today.

In the Church of Jesus Christ, there are only two ordinances.

They are the Lord's Supper, which is a feast of remembrance, and baptism.

Baptism, like circumcision in the old Jewish economy, is merely a sign of an accomplished work.

It's a testimony to a work of grace which has already occurred in the life of the Christian.

True, it is an act of obedience, but it has no saving value of its own.

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And then Paul directs their attention to another false teaching that had appeared along with the issue of circumcision.

In Acts 15:5 we read **"But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees**

**which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses."**

Here again, Abraham is exhibit A.

Romans 4:13 **"For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith."**

Again, like circumcision, it was a question of timing.

The law had been given about 400 years after Abraham's death, so there was no possibility that it could have been added to faith as a condition of Abraham's imputed righteousness.

But what about Abraham's descendants?

Certainly they were under the law.

Paul addresses that situation in the very next verse.

V 14-15 **"For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect:**

<sup>15</sup> **Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression."**

No, you can't have two different systems, especially when the one only **"worketh wrath."**

If Abraham's descendants could have prevailed by the works of the law, then Abraham's faith would have been **"made void."**

And that brings us to another point that Paul covered, not in this chapter, but in Galatians 3:17-18 --- **"And this I say, that the covenant, that was**

**confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect."**

There is a basic principle presented here. Once a legal document is signed, sealed, and delivered, it cannot be overthrown by that which comes thereafter.

Consequently, the Law of Moses, which was introduced 430 years later, could not disannul **"the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ."**

Yes, grace, and the gift of grace, was in operation long before the requirements of the Law.

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Romans 4:16-17 **"Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end**

the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all,

<sup>17</sup> (As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations, ---)."

If salvation had been based upon trying rather than trusting, then it could have never been "**sure.**"

It would come and go, based upon the performance of the individual ---  
"Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed --."

Certainly, that is a wonderful truth, but what is this part about Abraham being "**the father of us all?**"

Now, the promise that he would be "**a father of many nations**" has been literally fulfilled.

Abraham was the father of Ishmael, and through him he became the father of the Arab nations.

Through Isaac, he became the father of the nation of Israel.

And then, after the death of Sarah, he took another wife by the name of Keturah.

She presented him with six sons.

I can't honestly say I have checked it out, but I would assume they became the heads of nations also.

However, Paul wasn't referring to Abraham's physical posterity when he said in V 16--- "**but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all.**"

No, he was referring to Abraham's spiritual seed, those from every tribe and nation who would come to Jesus Christ by faith, and, like Abraham, would be partakers of Christ's righteousness.

Yes, in addition to the children of Israel, who are God's Chosen People, Abraham has a spiritual seed.

And by the way, his spiritual seed has not replaced his earthly seed.

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And while I'm on the subject, I would like to draw your attention to an interesting sidelight.

Although I cannot dogmatically make a connection here, I think it is most instructive to consider God's words, in Genesis 22:17 --- **"I will multiply thy**

**seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore."**

Was God merely using these examples to impress Abraham with the unlimited nature of his descendants, or was there a deeper meaning?

Perhaps the stars of heaven and the sand which is upon the seashore were deliberately chosen to foreshadow the heavenly and earthly nature of his descendants.

And by that I mean the Church of Jesus Christ and God's Chosen People Israel. And might I add once again, we should never make the mistake of trying to substitute stars for sand.

God has future plans for the bride of Christ, but He also has future plans for His Chosen People.

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V 17-18 "(As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were.

18 Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be."

Yes, Abraham believed God's promises implicitly.

V 19-22 "And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb:

20 He staggered not at the promise of

God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God;

<sup>21</sup> And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.

<sup>22</sup> And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness."

Yes, Abraham believed the impossible --- "he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb."

And not only that, but he was willing to offer up Isaac to God because he was "fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform."

He could do that because he believed in a "God, who quickeneth the dead, and

**calleth those things which be not as  
though they were."**

And you know what? We serve the same God of  
the impossible that Abraham did.

If we limit Him to the realm of possibility,  
we will miss a great deal.

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Yes, the Lord needed to become the God of  
the impossible in Abraham's life.

That's why He withheld his son until a  
normal birth was way beyond the realm  
of possibility.

For years He held back on Abraham's most  
cherished desire.

But, in the mean time, He honed his faith to  
the point He could finally say ---

**"Abraham believed God, and it was  
counted unto him for righteousness."**

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V 23-25 "Now it was not written for his sake  
alone, that it was imputed to him;

<sup>24</sup> But for us also, to whom it shall  
be imputed, if we believe on him that  
raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead;

<sup>25</sup> Who was delivered for our  
offences, and was raised again for our  
justification."

Yes, God asks us to believe in the  
impossible, doesn't He?

He asks us to believe that He **"raised up  
Jesus our Lord from the dead."**

He asks us to believe that this same Jesus  
**"was delivered for our offences, and  
was raised again for our  
justification."**

And He asks us to believe that the  
**"righteousness of God"** can be obtained  
by faith, and by faith alone.

**"--- Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and  
thou shalt be saved, and thy house."**

Acts 16:31