

The Book of Romans

Lesson 5: Abraham Justified by Faith -- Romans 4:1-25

Every family has its founding story, the ancestor whose portrait hangs at the top of the stairs, the one everyone is measured against. For the Jewish people, that figure was Abraham. He was the rock from which they were hewn, the friend of God, the man who left everything at a word and followed God into the unknown. If anyone could claim to have earned a standing with God, surely it was Abraham. So Paul, having just declared that we are justified by grace through faith and not by works of the law, does something brilliant. He calls Abraham himself to the witness stand. If the greatest of the patriarchs was justified by faith and not by works, then the case is closed for the rest of us.

And that is exactly what Paul finds in the Scriptures. He reaches back to a single sentence from Genesis, written long before the law of Moses, long before circumcision: Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness. Not earned, not achieved, not paid out like wages for a job completed. Counted. Credited. Given. Paul drives the point home with an everyday picture: when a man works, his wages are not a gift but his due. But Abraham did not come to God as a laborer demanding a paycheck. He came as a man with empty hands, trusting a promise, and God credited that faith to him as righteousness.

Then Paul shows us what kind of faith this was, and it is the opposite of a casual, comfortable belief. Abraham was nearly a hundred years old. Sarah's womb was as good as dead. Every fact on the ground screamed that the promise of a child was impossible. And yet, Paul says, no distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what He had promised. This is hope against hope, a trust that holds on to the word of God when everything visible says otherwise. Abraham's faith was not a vague optimism; it was a settled, God-honoring confidence that moved him to obey.

Paul ends by turning the spotlight onto us. The words it was counted to him were not written for Abraham's sake alone, but for ours also. The same God who credited righteousness to Abraham's faith will credit it to ours, we who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification. So read this chapter and find your own family story in it. You are a child of Abraham, not by blood, but by the same kind of faith, a faith that takes God at His word and follows where He leads.

Group Discussion: Paul says that when a person works, their wages are counted not as a gift but as their due, but to the one who trusts God, faith is counted as righteousness (vv. 4-5). Why do we so easily slip into treating our relationship with God like an employee earning a paycheck, and how does Abraham's example free us to come to God with empty hands instead?

Personal Reflection: Abraham was fully convinced that God was able to do what He had promised, even when everything visible said it was impossible (vv. 19–21). Where in your own life are you struggling to trust a promise of God because the circumstances in front of you seem to contradict it? What would it look like to grow strong in faith there, as Abraham did?

Read Romans 4:1–25

Study Questions

1. Paul cites Genesis: Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness (v. 3), and explains that to the one who works, wages are not counted as a gift but as a due, while to the one who does not work but trusts God, his faith is counted as righteousness (vv. 4–5). What does it mean that righteousness was counted or credited to Abraham, and why does Paul insist this was a gift received by faith rather than a wage earned by works?
2. Paul contrasts the worker who earns wages with the believer who receives a gift (vv. 4–5). In your relationship with God, do you more often feel like an employee anxiously earning your keep, or like a child receiving a gift? What in your life reveals which of these you actually believe, and how might you move toward resting in grace?
3. Paul quotes David to describe the same blessing: Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin (vv. 6–8). What does it mean that God will not count our sin against us, and how does this picture of forgiveness deepen our understanding of what it is to be justified?
4. Paul describes the deep blessing of being a person whose sins God does not count against them (vv. 7–8). Do you live day to day as someone whose sins are truly forgiven and not counted, or do you still carry the weight of guilt as though the debt were unpaid? What would change if you really believed your sins were covered?
5. Paul points out that Abraham was counted righteous by faith before he was circumcised, so that circumcision was a sign and seal of a righteousness he already had by faith, making him the father of all who believe (vv. 9–12). Why does the order of events matter here, and what does it teach us about the relationship between faith and the outward signs God appoints?
6. Abraham trusted God's promise of a son for decades, through long delay and apparent impossibility, without abandoning his confidence in God. When God's promises seem slow to arrive in your life, how do you tend to respond? What helps you keep trusting through the waiting rather than giving up?
7. Paul argues that the promise to Abraham and his offspring came not through the law but through the righteousness of faith, so that the promise rests on grace and is therefore guaranteed to all who share Abraham's faith (vv. 13–17). Why does Paul say that if the inheritance came by law-keeping the promise would be void, and how does resting the promise on grace make it secure for everyone who believes?
8. Paul says Abraham hoped against hope and grew strong in faith as he gave glory to God (vv. 18–20). Faith and giving glory to God are tied together here. Where do you need to give

glory to God in the middle of an uncertain situation, trusting His character before you see the outcome? Name one specific area where you can choose trust this week.

9. Paul says Abraham was fully convinced that God was able to do what He had promised, and that is why his faith was counted to him as righteousness; and these words were written for us also, who believe in Him who raised Jesus from the dead, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification (vv. 21–25). What does this passage reveal about the nature of justifying faith, and how do we hold together the truth that Abraham was justified by grace through faith (not by works of merit) with the fact that his was a living, obedient faith that left home at God's word and was later shown genuine when he offered Isaac (as James 2:21–24 makes explicit), so that we never reduce it to a faith that stands alone?
10. Look back across this chapter. Paul has shown you Abraham justified by faith, the blessing of forgiven and uncounted sin, the promise secured by grace, and a faith that holds on to God against all odds. Name one specific way you sense Jesus forming you through these verses. What is the single truth from Romans 4:1–25 that you most need to carry into this coming week?

Now or Later

Reflect on these passages: Genesis 15:1–6, Abraham believing God under the stars; Genesis 22:1–18, Abraham's faith proven when he offered Isaac; James 2:21–24, faith and works working together and faith completed by works; Galatians 3:6–9, those of faith as the children of Abraham; Hebrews 11:8–19, the obedient, persevering faith of Abraham