

Paul Proves the Gospel from the Old Testament (Part 1)

Romans 4:1-8

September 25, 2016

Tom Pennington, Pastor-Teacher

Countryside Bible Church

Well, it is my joy this morning to invite you to turn with me again to Paul's letter to the Romans. It's been four months since we studied the book of Romans together. I've enjoyed our summer series, but I'm so excited to get back to Paul's magnificent letter. Now, because it's been four months and because we all have good memories, they're just short, and because we have also added some folks, even in those four months, I think it's important to go back and just briefly review, so sort of get ourselves back up to speed with what's going on in this letter.

Paul wrote the book of Romans from Corinth at the end of his third missionary journey. Looking at the timeline of Paul's life, marrying it to secular history, it would have probably been in the late winter or early spring of the year 57 A.D. He's been a Christian since the early 30's, so you can do the math, and he has another decade left before his death, when he writes this letter.

Paul also wrote this letter in the middle of a huge transition in his ministry. He was finishing 25 years of missionary work in what we would call Eastern Europe. And he was about to begin a new ministry to reach Western Europe, starting in Spain. Paul writes these churches in Rome, and it's a surprise that he does because Paul didn't found these churches. In fact, he'd never visited Rome. And so, this makes his letter to the Romans unique.

Why would Paul write churches he didn't found and churches he had never visited? Well, in our early studies of Romans we discovered that Paul wrote this letter primarily for three reasons. There were a couple of immediate spiritual purposes. First of all, and this is always what drove the Apostle Paul, to glorify God and to exalt Jesus Christ through the proclamation of the gospel. He ends this letter in chapter 16 verse 27 saying, I preach this gospel to you, even in this letter, so that "the only wise God, through Jesus Christ, receive the glory forever." That was the heart of the apostle.

But there was also a reason he wrote this letter for the Christians in the Roman churches and that was to establish them in the gospel. In fact, notice Romans 1:11, he says, "I long to come visit you so that I may impart some spiritual gift to you, that you may be established," that you may be strengthened in your faith. That's why he wanted to come to them. That's also part of why he wrote this letter. He ends this letter, again, with the same sort of expression. In chapter 16 verse 25 he concludes, "Now to Him who is able to establish you according to my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ." He saw this proclamation of the gospel, even in his letter, as a way to establish those believers further in their faith, to understand the gospel more, to live more in light of its implications.

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But there was also a very practical reason that Paul wrote this letter and that was to encourage the Roman Christians to be his sending and supporting churches as he began his new ministry in Western Europe. Turn to chapter 15 and look at verse 23. Paul says, “but now, with no further place for me in these regions,” he’s talking about Eastern Europe, where he’s been for 25 years, he essentially is saying, look, I have now preached the gospel everywhere in this area, there’s no new uncharted territory for me (what an amazing testimony), “and since I have had for many years a longing to come to you whenever I go to Spain,” there’s his plan, “I hope to see you in passing, and to be helped on my way there by you,” that’s a way to say, I want you to help support this new ministry that I’m beginning in Western Europe, “after I’ve enjoyed your company for a while.” Now, this made perfect sense for the Roman Christians who were in Western Europe, to help sponsor the apostle in his ministry to Western Europe, and that’s what he wants them to do.

Now you understand a lot about why Romans is so different from Paul’s other letters. Romans is much longer than Paul’s other letters, they didn’t know him. In addition to that, it reads more like a theological treatise than his other letters. It’s because if the Romans were going to support Paul in his ministry in Western Europe, they deserved to know first-hand the gospel that he preached. And so that’s what motivated him to write this letter. Aren’t you glad for the circumstances? Because the result is, we have Romans.

The theme then, of this letter, that ties it together, is the gospel of God. Go back to chapter 1 verse 1. Paul initiates this in verse 1. He says, I’ve been “set apart for the gospel of God.” And then he introduces his theme down in chapter 1 verse 16,

For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, [*excuse me*] to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith to faith.

In other words, it’s faith from beginning to end. You can be right with God, not based on your own righteousness, but based on a gift of righteousness received by faith, “as it is written, ‘THE RIGHTEOUS MAN SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.’” So, that’s what this letter is about.

Now, let me just remind you of, sort of, where we’ve travelled so far then in this letter about the gospel. The letter opens in chapter 1 verses 1 to 17 with a, sort of, general introduction. It exposes us to who Paul is, to whom he’s writing, and why he’s writing. That’s the first 17 verses. Now, we are still in the middle, or toward the end, of the first major section of the letter. After that introduction, the first major section is the gospel explained. And, of course, Paul’s gospel at its heart was about justification by faith alone. This section runs all the way from chapter 1 verse 18, all the way through the end of chapter 4.

Now, Paul doesn’t begin with the good news. He begins with the bad news and specifically, why we need the gospel. It is our lack of personal righteousness. We need the gift of righteousness,

in the gospel, because we lack righteousness. And this is in chapter 1 verses 18 through chapter 3 verse 20. Paul begins this indictment with pagans, that is, those who don't claim to worship the true God of the Bible, those who worship something else. And chapter 1 is his indictment of them, they lack personal righteousness, they need the gospel.

Beginning in chapter 2 verse 1 through chapter 3 verse 8, Paul turned on the Jews and he says they need the gospel, they too lack personal righteousness. And not just the Jews, but all of those who claim to worship the true God but whose hope is in their own efforts, their own righteousness. And then he finishes his indictment with all humanity. In chapter 3 verses 9 through 20 he says, everybody, without exception, there is no human being who has personal righteousness, we all lack it, and that's why we need the gospel. That's why we need God to give us a gift of righteousness that comes through His Son.

And that brings us then to the second part of this first major section and that is God's gift of imputed righteousness. And here's where Paul lays out the gospel that he preached. Beginning in chapter 3 verse 21 and running down through chapter 3 verse 31. He begins this part by giving us an explanation of the gospel. I would say that the heart of Paul's letter to the Romans is Romans 3:21-26. It's where he explains justification by faith. If you weren't here when we walked through that passage, I urge you to go back, listen online, because that is foundational to everything else that Paul shares in this letter.

Having explained justification, he then lays out, at the end of chapter 3, the implications of justification. And we noted three of them that he includes there. First of all, when you really get the gospel he preached, it excludes all human boasting. When you really understand the gospel, you have nothing to boast about. And it also underscores the exclusivity of the gospel; there's only one message, only one way, and that's through this gospel about Jesus Christ. Jew or Gentile doesn't matter, doesn't matter what era you live in, it's the same message. And then, an understanding of the true gospel validates God's law. It doesn't undermine the Old Testament, it validates it, and we looked at the various ways that that's true. So, that's where we've been so far.

Today, as Paul continues to explain the gospel that he preached, we come to the final part of this first major section of his letter, and it is a biblical defense of justification, a biblical defense. He's explained it in chapter 3, he said, this is the gospel I preach, and now he's going to tell you why you should believe it too. Here's his biblical defense and, really, this is all of chapter 4, but let's read just the first eight verses of chapter 4 together, you follow along in your Bible. This is God's Word to us.

What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS." Now to the one who works,

his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:

“BLESSED ARE THOSE WHOSE LAWLESS DEEDS HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN,
AND WHOSE SINS HAVE BEEN COVERED.

“BLESSED IS THE MAN WHOSE SIN THE LORD WILL NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT.”

Now the point of this paragraph, and really of the entire fourth chapter, is to prove the gospel that Paul presented back in chapter 3, the truth of justification by faith alone, that we learned there. And he wants to prove that gospel from the Scriptures as they existed in the first century, the Old Testament, as we refer to it. And so, Paul cites then two Old Testament examples to prove that this has always been the only way to be right with God, and the two men that he cites are Abraham and David.

Now, why these two men? Why would they be at the crux of his argument? Well, there are a couple of different reasons we could cite. First of all, obviously, they're both leading figures in Old Testament history. Abraham was the father of the Jewish nation. David, although he wasn't the first king, in essence he was the father of the Jewish monarchy because he was the first king after God's own heart. And he was the one through whom the Messiah would come, through his family. Abraham was the greatest of the patriarchs, David the greatest of Israel's kings. These are twin pillars of the Old Testament. In fact, in Matthew 1, Matthew writing his Gospel to the Jews, when he wants to present the case for Jesus he begins, Matthew 1:1, “The record of the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham.” This is what mattered in Jewish thinking.

In addition to their leading roles in Old Testament history, both of these men, Abraham and David, are also examples of committed Old Testament believers. God Himself said of David, He is – what? – “a man after My own heart.” And Abraham enjoyed a unique relationship to God. In fact, in Isaiah 41:8, God says of Abraham, he is “‘Abraham My friend.’” God said that. Can you imagine? What if God said, “Tom My friend.”? “‘Abraham My friend.’” James 2:23 quotes Genesis 15 and says, “‘ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS,’” and then James adds this, “and he was called the friend of God.” Unique roles, unique opportunities, unique relationship to God, but, as we will see, they both also were fallen sinners who had to be saved by grace alone through faith alone.

You see, the key question is, how did these two guys, Abraham and David, come to be right with God? That's the key question. That's the key question you ought to be asking. How can I be right with God? Okay, well how did Abraham come to be right with God? How did David come to be right with God? Clearly, as we will see, as chapter 4 unfolds, neither of these men could ever have been justified by their works. Instead, both serve as perfect examples of the fact that

God must credit righteousness to the one who believes, absolutely apart from works. Paul is going to use both of these men to further explain and clarify the doctrine of justification by faith alone, and to bring out some additional implications. They were sinners who could never hope to be justified by their works.

But there's another reason, and I think it's the primary reason, that Paul chose these two men. It has to do with how they fit into Old Testament revelation. You remember, Paul has already argued that the gospel he preaches isn't new, it goes back to the Old Testament. Go back to chapter 1 of Romans, verse 1, Paul says, I've been "set apart for the gospel of God, which," that gospel, "God promised beforehand through His prophets in the holy Scriptures, concerning His Son." He says listen, you understand that this isn't a new message, God talked about this gospel in the Old Testament. Go to chapter 3 verse 21, as Paul begins to really lay out the gospel he preached here, he begins it this way, "But now apart from the Law," that is, apart from law-keeping, "the righteousness of God has been manifested," this gift of righteousness that he's going to talk about in the following verses. Verse 24, "being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus."

Go back to verse 21, he says, this gift of righteousness is "witnessed by the Law and the Prophets." Now, that is a shorthand way in the first century for the Jewish people to describe the Old Testament. What we call the Old Testament they called the Law and the Prophets. The Law was the first five books of the Old Testament, written by Moses, and the Prophets was everything else, the rest of our Old Testament. So, Paul says, in verse 21 of chapter 3, listen, the gospel I'm preaching is in the Old Testament. And then in chapter 4 he sets out to prove that.

Now, he uses Abraham and David for very specific reasons. Where is the story of Abraham found? In the Law, in the first five books of the Old Testament. Where is the story of David found? In the Prophets, the rest of the Old Testament. And so, by using an example from both, and these aren't the only examples, but by using an example from both and bringing them together, Paul is proving his point, the gospel is exactly what the entirety of the Old Testament taught, Law and Prophets, the message was the same. Paul wanted the Jewish believers to understand that the gospel he preached, justification by faith alone, is the only way that anyone has ever been redeemed, including all of those great figures of the Old Testament. No one has ever been saved, no Old Testament believer was ever saved, by his or her works or by animal sacrifices or by anything else.

You know, I grew up with the Scofield Reference Bible, Study Bible. That's what I had when I was growing up. In the version I had, I think they later made some changes, but in the early version I had, it specifically said that Old Testament believers were saved by their works. That is dead wrong. Paul says, absolutely not, they were never saved by their works or by their animal sacrifices, "the blood of bulls and goats can never take away sin." Both Jews and

Gentiles, both Old Testament believers and New Testament believers, were saved through the same basic gospel message; they were justified the same way.

He also wanted us as Gentile believers to see that we have entered into a relationship with the one true God that is in continuity with Old Testament believers. I mean, obviously, there are differences, right? As New Testament believers after Pentecost, Paul says, in 1 Corinthians 12, when we're saved, at the moment of regeneration, we are baptized into the church, into the body of Christ. That wasn't true in the Old Testament. But, we are saved, we are justified, exactly the same way as David was and as Abraham was, no difference.

So, with that understanding of why he chooses these two guys, let's begin to examine Romans 4. Verse 1, "What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found?" Now, using the dates and timelines that the Old Testament provides us, the length of lives and other things, we can do the math and we can land on a birth date for Abraham. If you want to know exactly how we arrive there, I can point you to a resource that will walk you through all the math, I'm not going to do that here this morning, but essentially, when you do the math, you end at 2166 B.C. Abraham was born on or about 2166 B.C., 2,100 years before Christ.

The God that calls himself Yahweh, the one living and true God, the God of the Old Testament, the God and Father of Our Lord Jesus Christ, He appeared to Abraham while he was still living in Ur of the Chaldees, that's down in the ancient Mesopotamian Valley, down in the Euphrates Valley, at the southern end, in a massive ancient city called Ur. It was a sophisticated, cultural city. It was really a magnificent city. He was a man of the city and God sends him to Canaan. But God appears to him and He saves him, He calls him effectually to Himself, and then He promises to raise out of him a great nation.

Now, have you ever asked yourself why? Why did God do that? What was the point of choosing? He'd dealt in the first 11 chapters of Genesis with mankind as a whole, and you get to chapter 12 of Genesis and He says I'm not going to do that anymore, I'm going to choose one man and out of that man I'm going to raise up a nation and that's going to be the nation through whom I'm going to work in the world. What was God doing? What was the point? Well, that nation would become important for a couple of reasons. First of all, they would become the conduit for providing mankind the Scripture. The reason you have the Bible that sits on your lap this morning is because God chose to raise up Abraham and, through him and his descendants, to give us the Scripture.

Secondly, they become the conduit, that nation does, for the Messiah, the promised one to come, and they become God's witness nation. Have you ever wondered why God gave them that little piece of land there in the Middle East? If you've ever visited you know it's not because it's like, wow, this is where I've always wanted to live. No, it's because of where it's located. In the ancient world that little piece of land was the one land bridge between the three ancient

continents of the ancient world. You didn't want to go over the Mediterranean, sea travel was treacherous. You certainly didn't want to go over the Sahara. So, if you wanted to get between those three continents you travelled right through that little tiny land bridge we call Israel. God put them there as His witness to the nations.

Incidentally, Abraham is an important figure even in false religions like Islam, for example. He is second in importance to Mohammad and is mentioned 188 times in the Quran. He's crucial in human history. Now, notice what Paul says about him in verse 1, "Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh." He could simply mean that Abraham was the forefather of the Jewish people, of those who are his ethnic descendants, and of course that's true, or he could mean what he will later prove in this chapter, that Abraham is the forefather of all who believe in the gospel. Look at verse 16, "For this reason justification 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," watch this, "also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all." Listen, if you are a believer in Jesus Christ, if you have exercised the same faith unto justification that Abraham received, you are an heir of Abraham; spiritually, he is your father.

But regardless of which of those Paul means, I want you to see what he says about Abraham in verse 1, "What then shall we say that Abraham," "has found." Regarding the central question of how a man is made right before God, what did Abraham discover? Now, there are two ways to answer that question, two possible answers to the question of what did he discover about justification. You could say he discovered that justification is by works. That's the wrong answer. But Paul touches on it, look at verse 2, "if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God." And notice verse 4, "Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due." That's one answer, it's just the wrong answer, as Paul's going to show. Then there's the right answer, which is, by faith. Look at verse 3, "what does the Scripture say? 'ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS,'" verse 5, "But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness."

So, let's start with the wrong answer, verse 2. "For if Abraham was justified by works." For the sake of argument, Paul assumes for the moment that that is true. Let's say that that's the answer to the question, what Abraham discovered. He discovered we are justified by our works. Now why does Paul start there? Because, folks, that is exactly what the Jews of the first century believed and taught about Abraham. They believed that Abraham was the only truly righteous man in his generation and that it was because of, listen to this, his inherent personal righteousness that God chose him to be the father of the nation. You say, they believed that? Yeah, they believed that.

Listen to a couple of quotes from leading rabbis around the time of Christ, okay, both before, during, and after. Listen, here's quote number one, "Abraham was perfect in all his deeds with

the Lord and well-pleasing in righteousness all the days of his life.” Now, when I read that my first response is, were they reading the same Old Testament I’m reading? I mean, we’re talking about Abraham, right? The guy who lied about Sarah his wife on several occasions? That’s who we’re talking about. Here’s another quote, “We find that Abraham our father had performed the whole law before it was given.” He kept the law before it was even given at Sinai. Here’s another one, “No one has been found like him in glory.” Here’s the prayer of Manassas, verse 8, “You therefore, O Lord, that are the God of the just have not appointed repentance to the just.” Now, if your little red flags are going off, they should be at this point. Well, wait a minute, who of humanity doesn’t need to repent? Who’s just? Well, “You have not appointed repentance to the just, to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, which have not sinned against You. But You have appointed repentance unto me, that am a sinner.” So, understand then, this was the view of Abraham. This is what Paul was dealing with.

According to William Hendrickson, the Presbyterian commentator, the Jews believed that Abraham was the first of seven men who, by their own personal righteousness, would bring the shekinah glory of God back to the Tabernacle. Paul says, I don’t think so. He says, that could never ever be true. Abraham could never be justified by his works or by his own righteousness. Why? Well, Paul gives a couple reasons. He could have given more, but he gives two. First, it allows fallen sinful man to boast before God. Look at verse 2, “For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about.” Now, that just makes sense. If Abraham had been perfect in all his deeds and if he’d never sinned, like the rabbis taught, then he would have been able, some day, to stand before God and legitimately to boast in – what? – himself, his own righteousness, his own effort, his own work. To Paul this is unthinkable. Notice how he responds in the second half of verse 2, “but not before God.” It’s like this is repulsive. No! It can never happen! That’s unthinkable!

Paul has already addressed this issue. Go back to chapter 3 verse 27. He says, when it comes to the true gospel I’ve been preaching, “Where is boasting? It is excluded.” He uses a strong Greek word that means to slam the door. He says, listen, the gospel, the true gospel, slams the door completely on all human boasting. Can I just say, if you’re here this morning and if some day you intend to stand before Jesus Christ and He says, why should I let you into My heaven, and you intend to point to anything in you, anything about who you are or what you’ve done or some good deeds you supposedly have committed, if you intend to point to anything in you that could enable you even a little bit to boast, you have embraced a false gospel and you’re not a Christian, because the true Gospel slams the door entirely on all human boasting. If you’re a true Christian, when Jesus says, why should I let you into my heaven, you intend to say one thing – because of You and You alone. You’re my only hope. What You did in Your perfect life, lived in my place, and what You did by dying and suffering what my sins deserved, that’s the only way I’ll ever get into heaven.

But there's a second reason that Abraham could never have been justified by his works and that's because it's contrary to the Scripture. Paul says, that couldn't happen. Look at verse 3, "For what does the Scripture say?" Paul would never agree a man is justified by works because it contradicts what Scripture clearly teaches. Now, before we look at the rest of verse 3, just look at the question that begins verse 3, "For what does the Scripture say?" Let me just say, that little question deserves a sermon all of its own, but I'm not going to do that this morning. Let me just point out a couple of crucial implications of that really insightful question.

First of all, notice how Paul refers to the Bible, how he refers to it. He says, the Scripture, singular. He implies that even in the first century, when he wrote Romans, there was already a unified collection of Old Testament books that were considered to be divine revelation. In other words, as we've seen the last couple of Sunday nights, it wasn't some church council a couple of hundred years after Christ that voted what books should be in the Bible. What were they doing? They were merely affirming those books that had already been received by the people of God. The Old Testament canon was finished by the time Paul wrote this letter and as we discovered a couple of Sunday nights ago, the Old Testament canon was actually closed 400 years before Christ.

Another implication of that little question "what does the Scripture say?" – notice Paul personifies the Scripture and says, "it says." That's really interesting because throughout the New Testament sometimes you find the writers of the New Testament saying, "God says" when they're referring to Scripture and other times they say, "it says." You know what the point of that is? It means that every time Scripture speaks, God speaks. They're one and the same. That book that you hold in your hand, when you read what Scripture says, you are reading what God says.

A third implication here is, literally translated from the Greek text, verse 3 begins, "For what is the Scripture saying?" – present tense – "what is the Scripture saying?" In other words, there is a timeliness to its message. Whenever Scripture is read God is speaking through His Word. This morning we sang, "Ancient words ever true, changing me and changing you." Yeah, that's exactly right, God is speaking. To whatever extent this morning I am accurately reading and teaching you the Word of God, God is speaking to you. Is that how you see it? God is speaking. John Stott writes, "Through the written text the living voice of God may be heard." You know, a lot of people want God to talk to them. He is, in and through His Word.

But I want you to see the most important implication of that little question and that is, for Paul Scripture was the ultimate authority, even on the important question of, how is a man made right with God? Think about it, Paul doesn't say, listen, I'm an apostle, let me tell you what you need to believe. He is an apostle, he does assert his apostolic authority, but what does he do? Just like all true messengers of God, he says, this is the message, go check it out against the Scripture; what I'm saying perfectly reflects previous revelation, because that's always true of true

prophets. Check it against the Word of God. What does the Scripture say? Listen, that ought to be the motto of your life. What does the Scripture say? What does the Bible say? That ought to be what you ask when you're trying to decide what decisions to make in life. That ought to be the question you ask when you're trying to decide what to believe. What does the Bible say? The apostle Paul says, what does the Bible say?

Now, notice what follows that question in verse 3, “ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.” Paul here quotes from Genesis 15:6. You know, as a Bible student I have to tell you that almost every time I study the Bible I'm surprised. There's something that just shocks me, that, it's like I didn't expect that, that wasn't, that doesn't make sense to me immediately. And here I had that same experience because it's very surprising that Paul decides to use this text, Genesis 15:6, to prove that Abraham was justified by grace alone through faith alone.

You say, why is that surprising? Because the rabbis used exactly the same text to teach that Abraham was justified by works. Listen again to one of the rabbis, “Our father Abraham became the heir of this world and of the coming world simply by the merit of the faith with which he believed in the Lord, as it is written,” Genesis 15:6, “he believed in the LORD; and He counted it to him for righteousness.” In context, that Jewish author is arguing that Abraham believed and that belief led to obedience and that package of obedient faith merited God's response. This is the very passage they used.

So what's Paul doing? Why would he choose that very passage? Just like our Lord does in the Sermon on the Mount, he chooses a passage and he's essentially saying, listen, you have completely misunderstood this passage and what it teaches; let me tell you what it really means. And then he walks through the passage and he exegetes it. The result here is that Romans 4 is really an expository sermon on Genesis 15:6. Now, this is not the outline that I will use as we walk through this chapter, I'll give you an outline next week, I just want you to see how (I really believe that when I get to heaven and ask the Apostle Paul, I think Romans 4 is a sermon that Paul pulled out of his sermon file, that he preached on a number of occasions in Jewish synagogues.), let me show you how it unfolds.

In every paragraph in this chapter, Paul will either quote a portion of Genesis 15:6 or he'll refer to it. So, here's how it could look. You have, first of all, his introduction in verses 1 and 2, where he says, so, what about Abraham, how was he made right with God? And then you have his text in verse 3, he quotes Genesis 15:6. And the rest of the chapter, chapter 4, is his sermon on that text. Let me show you how it relates. He goes back to that text and he essentially answers three questions. First of all, he answers the question, on what grounds was Abraham declared righteous, verses 4 through 8, and he uses that little word credit. We'll talk about that next week. On what grounds? And his answer? It was grace, not human merit.

The second question he answers and deals with about this text, Genesis 15:6 is, at what time was Abraham declared righteous? Verses 9 through 12. And Paul's answer is, it was before he was circumcised. Now, you're sitting here going, well, okay, so what? You know, how does that intersect with my life? Listen, Paul's going to argue it's huge because that's what makes the gospel available to you. Because by it being before his circumcision God was making it clear that the gospel is available to both Jews and Gentiles, and not to Jews only. And then the third question he answers as he exegetes this text is in verses 13 to 22, by what means was Abraham declared righteous? And Paul's answer is going to be, it was through faith, and not through law, and not through works. So, this entire chapter is really his exposition, his expository sermon, on Genesis 15:6. And then you come to verses 23 to 25, and you have Paul's conclusion and his application to all Christians, because he wraps it up by saying, listen, God didn't just say this to Abraham for Abraham, He said this to Abraham for you, and for you, and for you.

So, let's look at Paul's text then, back in verse 3, "For what does the Scripture say? 'ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.'" Now folks, we cannot exaggerate the importance of that passage. Let me just set it in its context for you. If you go back to the Old Testament, this is the first time in the Old Testament that the word believed occurs. Secondly, it is the first time that faith is linked to righteousness, or being right with God, and it is the first time in the Bible where the doctrine of justification by faith alone, that God declares guilty sinners to be right with Him based on their faith in what He has accomplished, it's the first place that ever occurs. Just think about that. In the first book of the Bible, with Abraham, 4,000 years ago, we are told that the only way to be right with God is by faith alone. This isn't a doctrine confined to Romans or to the New Testament only. This is the message of salvation from cover to cover.

In fact, notice what Paul is saying here. He is saying that this is the very gospel he preached. You say, how can that be? Well, let me set this verse, Genesis 15:6, in its historical context in the life of Abraham. I told you Abraham lived in Ur of the Chaldees, down in lower Mesopotamia, when he was called, when God effectually called him to Himself in salvation. What was Abraham like when God called him? Well, we can't be absolutely certain, but there are some pretty strong clues in Joshua 24:2. Listen to what Joshua writes, "Thus says the LORD, the God of Israel, 'From ancient times your fathers,'"' so, those who are your, the Jewish forefathers, "lived beyond the River," in, beyond the Euphrates, in Mesopotamia, "namely Terah, the father of Abraham, the father of Nahor, and they," who's they? In context, "the fathers who lived beyond the river," including Abraham, "they served other gods." It is highly likely that Abraham was not only a sinner when God found him and called him to Himself, but he was an idolater, he was worshiping some stone or the moon or something else that was worshiped in ancient Samarian culture. He was an idolater and God entered into a covenant with him, made unconditional promises to him, and called him His friend.

Now, the first record of the covenant that God made with Abraham is recorded in Genesis 12:1-3. I don't have time to take you back there. There are promises there about land. There's a promise about descendants, a nation that would come from him, but there's another part of the promise in Genesis 12 that's really intriguing, and instead of going back to Genesis 12, let's see what Paul says about it. Turn over to Galatians 3. Galatians 3, notice verse 6. He comes back to this same passage, "Even so Abraham BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS. Therefore," here's the implication, "be sure that it is those who are of faith who are truly sons of Abraham." Now watch verse 8, this is key, "The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying," here's a quote from Genesis 12, part of the promise to Abraham, "'ALL THE NATIONS WILL BE BLESSED IN YOU.'" Paul says, that was the gospel.

You say, wait a minute, I missed something, how is that the gospel? Well, think about this, He's saying that people from nations all over the world, Abraham, are going to be spiritually blessed through you. God can't bless unredeemed rebellious sinners and so it is a promise that God is going to make a way to redeem sinners, to bring them to Himself, so that He can pronounce a blessing on them. Here's the gospel in its most rudimentary, basic form. And notice verse 16, "Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. He does not say 'And to seeds,' as referring to many, but rather to one, 'And to your seed,' that is, Messiah." What's Paul saying? He's saying, okay, you've got this collective noun seed, it can be plural and mean descendants plural, right? His seed, his descendants. But he's saying, sometimes when that noun seed is used it's used in the singular, meaning one specific descendant, specifically Messiah.

So, do you see what Paul is saying? He's saying that Abraham understood that God was going to spiritually bless people in nations around the world through his descendants, and not through all of his descendants, but through one of his descendants, that is, Christ the seed, and Abraham got it. You say, Tom are you sure he got it? Well, let's let Jesus weigh in. John 8:56, "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, he saw it and was glad." Do you see what Abraham believed? He didn't just believe God was going to give him a lot of kids. He believed that God was going to spiritually bless, i.e. redeem, bring the Redeemer. It was going to be one of his descendants, his seed, that is the Messiah, and he looked for that day, he looked for the Messiah to come and his confidence was in that God was going to make it all right, He was going to make a way of reconciliation through the seed. That's what Paul is saying. That's what Abraham believed. He was justified before God solely by his faith in God "who justifies the ungodly." How? Through his seed, singular, that is, the Messiah. That's what Abraham believed, he "BELIEVED GOD AND IT WAS COUNTED TO HIM FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS."

Do you see why this fits perfectly in defending the gospel Paul preached? Folks, do you understand that Abraham believed what you believed? He understood. He was a believer before he left Ur. The fact of, and the means of his justification, that isn't recorded until Genesis 15:6. But the point of Genesis 15:6 and Paul's New Testament commentary in Romans 4 and

Galatians 3, is that Abraham, listen carefully, Abraham heard and believed a simple rudimentary gospel message that God would spiritually bless, He would make it possible to spiritually bless sinners through one of his seed, his descendants, and he was justified before God solely by his faith in that coming seed, the God who justifies the ungodly through that seed, through the Messiah. “ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS.”

Let me ask you this morning, do you believe, do you think that you can gain a right standing before God based on your own merit, your own righteousness, your own good works? Paul wants you to see how ludicrous that is. He says listen, let’s talk about Abraham, the friend of God, the one God said was His friend, and Abraham couldn’t get there on his own works. Do you really think you’re going to? Abraham’s only hope is our only hope, it’s the seed, it’s Jesus Christ.

It doesn’t matter who you are, it doesn’t matter what you’ve become, it doesn’t matter what kind of sin label would describe you, if you are willing to turn from your sin and put your trust in the Promised One, in the seed that Abraham trusted would come and deal with sin, if you will turn from your sin and believe in Jesus of Nazareth the Messiah, the One promised, you can be right with God today, through His perfect life and His substitutionary death. But I promise you this, if you put your hope anywhere else, you will be damned. That’s what the Scriptures teach. There is no hope anywhere else. Your only hope is the hope of Abraham who lived 4,000 years ago. Abraham believed God would bring salvation blessing through his seed, the Messiah. ““ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM FOR RIGHTEOUSNESS.”” Let’s pray together.

Father, we are amazed at Your wisdom and at Your grace, Your mercy. Father, thank You, that You have shown us throughout human history the way to be right with You. Thank You that we can go back 4,000 years ago, 2,100 years before Christ, and see how Abraham was made right with You. And it wasn’t because he was a wonderfully righteous person, he was an idolater and a liar, but by his confidence in You, the One “who justifies the ungodly,” through the seed, he was made right with You. Father, thank You for the gospel. And I pray for those of us who’ve already embraced it, Lord, encourage us, strengthen our faith, help us to love it. Lord, may we never be bored with the gospel, may we live in joy and thankfulness and obedience because of the gospel.

And Father, I pray for those here this morning who are still on the fence, who haven’t yet been willing to bow their knee to Jesus Christ as Lord because they love being lord themselves. O God, I pray that You would do whatever it takes in their lives, as gently and graciously as possible, to bring them to the end of themselves where all they can do is cry out to You as a beggar, that You would save them. O Lord let it be today, we pray in Jesus’ name, amen.