

Romans 4:1-5, 13-17 What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? ² If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. ³ What does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”⁴ Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. ⁵ However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness...¹³ It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. ¹⁴ For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless, ¹⁵ because law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression. ¹⁶ Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham’s offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. ¹⁷ As it is written: “I have made you a father of many nations.” He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.

Trace the Family Tree of God’s Grace

Once in a while a call comes into the office and the person on the other ends asks the question, “Would you look for my relative in your church record books?” They want to be able to find out as much as they can about their relatives as they trace their family tree. They want to learn how their family got to be where they are, how they spread out into different places, and from whence they came. It allows people to get back to their roots.

This morning we are going to trace our family tree to find the roots. We are going to go way back past any of the relative work you might have recorded for your family. Way back to the year 2000, before Christ that is. There we find one of the roots of our family, Abraham.

He did something most of us don’t like to do. He left his family behind and struck out on his own. He took to the road of adventure with his wife and a nephew and traveled a long way off and appeared to never have seen his father and brother again. Remember this was the time before skype, computers, and phones. It was even before letters were easy to send. Leaving them behind meant he was separated from them. But he set off sure that his family would be established and that his family would be great.

For years he waited for children. He waited so long that he began to think that it would never happen. Even in his extreme old age while the hope flickered to have children with his wife, Sarah, still he star gazed with thoughts of many children. Then, he had a son who was his pride

and joy. Everything was good with the family. All hope sprung back to life with this boy. His family tree would not die

This Abraham is a huge part of our family tree. In Romans, the Apostle Paul tells you that his actions show the way to be right with God. It goes against everything you're born with. It goes against all your natural instincts. And it goes against everything you see everyone else doing. It's God's way, and the only way, that will take away your emptiness and give you peace and comfort and hope.

This fullness wasn't based on Abraham's hard work to be good. **If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about – but not before God.** If it was all about Abraham, then Abraham had a lot to brag about. He did leave his comfortable life and go where God told him. But that friendship between God and Abraham wasn't based on that. Here's what it was all about: **What does the Scripture say? Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.** When Abraham believed those awesome promises of God, then God did something for Abraham. He credited righteousness to Abraham's account. Abraham didn't deserve that. But God, in his grace, took pleasure in seeing Abraham's faith, and gave righteousness to Abraham as a gift.

God does not expect faith to rest on thin air, nor does he want faith to rest on the thoughts or feelings of any individual person. Many great men and women have accomplished much by their own perception of things and their resolve to accomplish something. But true faith does not choose its own tenets, nor does it rest on the opinion or the will of any human to succeed. True faith is in and of God's Word.

Imagine receiving your monthly bank statement, and as you balance your checkbook you see that a \$50,000 deposit was made into your account by someone you love. "There must be some mistake," you say to yourself. So you call that person up that you love and you say, "What is going on? Why did you put \$50,000 into my account? I didn't do anything." And that person you love says, "Because I just wanted to. I know that you love me, and I wanted to give that to you as a gift." Wouldn't that be a nice gift? Such is the gift believers receive from God through faith.

I want to go back to that story from the beginning of the sermon that I shared about Abraham. After his son was born God tested Abraham's faith. God told Abraham to take his only son,

Isaac, and offer him as a sacrifice to the LORD. So Abraham did. After the three day journey was complete, Abraham built an altar, bound Isaac, and readied his knife to sacrifice his son. Then God stopped Abraham just short so that no harm came to Isaac. In addition, God provided a ram for an offering that was able to be sacrificed in Isaac's stead.

God knew and strengthened Abraham's faith so that he would withhold nothing from God. God could say to Abraham, "Abraham, I know that you love me, that you trust me and believe my promises. So I want to do something for you, Abraham. I'm going to credit righteousness to your account. In my eyes, Abraham, you are righteous, you are good. I'm going to give that to you, as a gift, just because I want to." So God did that for Abraham, and he saw that Abraham believed.

Abraham's new righteousness was backed by another time when the only Son was not spared. At that time, God didn't stop the hand that threatened the Son but let him fly to kill his Son for the sins of the whole world. God used his Son, Jesus, the offspring of Abraham, as the sacrifice that pleased God. Through the works of Jesus in his only payment for the sins of the world God gave to Abraham and to all his descendants the guarantee of his grace.

Because God gave his own Son for you your sins, God says, "I promise you that all the sins you've ever committed in your life – I promise you that they've been forgiven. I promise you that while you live on this earth, I will be there with you. I will bless you. I will take care of you. I promise you that there really is such a place in heaven, and that someday you will be there. I promise you that you don't have to live your life trying to earn my favor – you can't do it – my standards of perfection are too high for you to attain. But I promise you, God says, that I will give you heaven, because Jesus earned it for you."

Those are God's promises. How will you respond? There's a part of you that says, "Yes, that's nice. But really, it's all about me, trying to be good, isn't it?" Those are those false directions you're born with. Ignore them – that's not the way. When you see and hear all these promises of God, do you know what the right response is? Believe! Believe that these promises are true. And believe that these promises are true for you. Be like Abraham who could trust in God no matter how hard or bad things appeared to be. Trust that God really will come through for you. That Christ really did die for you. That you really are a child of God going to heaven, even if you don't feel that way right now, as you sit there in those seats.

God allows us to have faith in him. Putting belief in his promises in you is how God credits righteousness to your account. It's how God has grafted you into the family tree of Abraham. Jesus is the main root of that tree. He brings it life. He makes it green and thrive. Tracing the those branches we find our connection to Abraham and other believer but the line only stop when it comes to Jesus. Through him we are part of God's family tree brought together by God's Grace. Amen.