Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Abraham: The Old Testament Pattern of Saving Faith, Part 1
Scripture: Romans 4:1–8
Code: 80-346

Romans chapter 4 is the chapter. Open your Bible, we're going to look at Romans 4 for a little bit tonight.

There was a little girl who secretly and quietly had saved up enough money to buy her father a present for Father's Day. But when she had all her money collected, she was very concerned and so she went to her mother and said, “I can't be going down town every month to make payments. Mother, is there a store where they let you pay for the whole thing at once?”

That's the kind of question a child would ask. And it is also true that there are religions in the world, in fact all false religions believe that you buy your salvation on some kind of an installment plan. You pay a little bit as you go. Good works offered to God each month, each week, each day, but nothing could be further from the truth. Salvation doesn't come on the installment plan. The price was fully paid at once by Christ and the gift of salvation is given at once by Christ to the penitent and believing sinner.

This great reality is the message of the section we're in in the great epistle of Paul to the Romans. And in this fourth chapter, Paul explains that Abraham is the true example of salvation. Those of you who have been with us for our Sunday nights will remember back in chapter 3 we saw Paul lay out the sinfulness of man, the sinfulness of sin, the absolute and utter impossibility of a man to do anything about his own sin and its consequences. And then from verse 21 to 31 he laid out the gospel of salvation by grace alone through faith alone and Christ alone in which God grants righteousness to the penitent sinner.

In that section of Romans, Paul gave us teaching on how to be right with God, how to establish a right relationship with God. Another way to say that is how to have a relationship with God that will take you to heaven rather than send you to hell. How to come out from under the judgment of God into the grace of God. That has already gone before in chapter 3.

The key to it, of course, is verse 24, “Being justified,” that is made right with God, declared to be right with God, “as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus.” So Paul as presented his case for justification by faith. He has given the theology of it, the theology of it. In so doing he shattered religious myths and lies, including Jewish ones, showing that the way to be right with God is by repentance and faith in Christ, not by works.

Now to prove his case, he goes from a theology of justification to an illustration of justification. And the illustration comes in chapter 4. He's going to illustrate the truth of justification by faith not works with a life, a life of a man, no less than the man Abraham.

Let's look at the opening eight verses. “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.”

He does refer to David as an aside in order to borrow the quote out of Psalm 32, but the main character here used as an illustration is none other than Abraham. And this is very important because he is arguing against the traditional Jewish view of salvation by works. And Abraham is the perfect model for salvation by faith because of how the view...the Jews viewed Abraham. Why does he select Abraham? Because Abraham transcends, if you will, the dispensations because Abraham is a sort of permanent illustration of the righteousness of God that comes by faith. First of all, he was an Old Testament character. That is very important. Not only was he an Old Testament character, but he was saved before the Law was given. So he transcends, if you will, the age of grace and the age of Law. He is therefore a kind of universal illustration. He is the supreme example in the Old Testament of faith. And so he is the ideal example to use for salvation by faith as being the consistent norm, in fact the only way of salvation.

It is also important to note that the Jews looked to Abraham as their model of righteousness. So Paul picks him not only because he transcends the ages, and not only because he is the supreme example of faith in the Old Testament record, but because he was the favorite illustration the Jews used to prove salvation by works. So he really overturns their model of salvation. The majority of rabbis held that Abraham was the only righteous man of his generation, that he was the only truly righteous man of is generation which remember now is pre-Israel since he is the father of Israel, pre-the giving of the Law to Moses. So he stands alone as the emblem of righteousness. And the Jews taught that is why God chose him to be the father of his people. He was such a righteous man that God selected him to be the father of the nation that would become the dispenser of divine revelation.

However, if we remember Romans 3:10, we remember the Old Testament also says there is none righteous, not even one. Well they were content to ignore that statement in the Old Testament and grant Abraham a kind of righteous perfection as the reason God selected him to father their nation. If

you ask the question...by what standard was he deemed righteous? You couldn't make it the Law because the Law had not been given. So how did the rabbis determine the righteousness of Abraham? They said this, they said Abraham kept the Law by anticipation and intuition. He expected the Law to be of a certain nature. He anticipated what it would be and intuitively kept the Law and therefore God made an oath to him, the Abrahamic Covenant, Genesis 12, that his seed would be blessed. It was a reward for his anticipatory and intuitive observation of a Law not yet given. But he was so righteous that he was more righteous than any man and he was self-righteous, even though the Law had not been given. And because of the way in which the Jews revered Abraham, Paul chooses Abraham as his illustration not of salvation by self-righteousness and works but the very opposite. He endeavors here to wipe out the Jewish illusion of salvation by faith, by picking on their own best illustration. He will establish the truth that in fact Abraham is not an example of salvation by works, but he is an example of salvation by faith. Just the opposite of what they said. He is an illustration that God saves by grace. He is an illustration that God grants righteousness to those who have not earned it.

The basic belief of the Jews was that you earn favor with God. Abraham had earned more than anybody else in his generation. The message of the gospel is there's none righteous, no not one, that is also the message of the Old Testament, “No man can earn favor with God.” It is the supreme discovery of the Christian gospel that you don't need to try to earn favor with God. You don't need to try to be righteous enough on your own to be accepted by God. You don't need to torture yourself with a losing battle to try to earn God's love and salvation. Paul chose Abraham because he was their favorite illustration of works/righteousness and turn that view on its head.

It's also very good to have an illustration and Paul wanted to put flesh and blood to the previous theology. He wanted to take it out of the realm of abstraction and put it in the realm of life...flesh and blood. And so for these reasons, Paul chose to illustrate faith, righteousness by faith through the life of Abraham.

Abraham's life is a model, it is a pattern in three ways. And I don't know if we'll get to all three tonight, it doesn't really matter. First of all, he was justified by faith, not works. That's the passage I read. He was justified by faith not works. Secondly, in the subsequent passage, verses 9 to 17, he was justified by grace, not Law. Thirdly, from verse 18 to verse 25, he was justified by divine power, not human effort. Every way you can look at it, he was justified by faith, not works, by grace not law, by divine power, not human effort.

Each of those points has a negative and a positive side. So Paul is rather exhaustive in this presentation. And we'll look at them in a measure of detail, probably not as much detail as the series I did in Romans some years ago, that is more detailed, more prolonged, more elongated. What we're giving you is something of a summary of that more detailed study. I only say that because, of course, it's available to you through the ministry of Grace To You and you can downloaded it free, if you so

desire.

So Paul attacks the opponents of justification by faith at the very fortress at which they felt they were the strongest, at the point of Abraham. If Abraham was not justified by works, then no one could be because, as I said, they deemed Abraham to be the most righteous man of is generation. If Abraham was not justified by works, then no one could be. On the other hand, if Abraham didn't need to be justified by works because you could be justified by faith, then all men can be justified. You see the difference? If Abraham was not justified by his works, no man could be. If Abraham was justified by faith, all men can be and must be.

In the case of Abraham, is again the center stronghold of the whole Jewish position. And if you do a little research into what the rabbis taught, it's quite interesting. Comparing that with the Old Testament, this is kind of the formula they concocted for Abraham. God commanded Abraham in Genesis 26:5, because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes and My laws. God said Abraham was obedient. In fact, God spoke to Abraham, according to Isaiah 41:8, as My friend.

So based upon Abraham's obedience as noticed in Genesis 26 and he being called the friend of God, as indicated by the prophet Isaiah, they determined that Abraham had earned his way in. There is an ancient apocryphal book called Ecclesiasticus and in that apocryphal book it teaches that Abraham was given justification and along with the justification he was given the privilege of circumcision because he earned it by his law keeping. In fact, Abraham was considered by the rabbis as one of the seven men who through their own merit brought back the Shekinah glory, the presence of God, to abide in the tabernacle.

They got a little carried away with this extolling of the virtues of Abraham, and they said, “He began to serve God faithfully at three years of age.” You might want to note the following words from something called The Prayer of Menassah quoting, “Therefore, Thou, O Lord, God of the righteous hast not appointed repentance for the righteous, for Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who did not sin against Thee but Thou hast appointed repentance for me who am a sinner.” So they concluded Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, some of them anyway, didn't need to repent because they were not sinners. The book of Jubilee is probably dating from the second century B.C. minimizes the weaknesses of the patriarchs and contains this statement, quote: “Abraham was perfect in all his deeds with the Lord and well pleasing in righteousness all the days of his life.”

And so they had built this imaginary man that didn't need to repent, that was perfectly righteous. Our father, Abraham, became the heir of God and the coming world simply by the merit of the faith with which he believed in the Lord. As it is written, he believed in the Lord who counted it to him as righteousness. That is their spin on Genesis 15:6. Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness. They spun that verse to mean that is believing was another in the many acts of

merit by which he earned righteousness. We'll go back to that verse in a few minutes because Paul quotes it in chapter 4 as I read.

And so, by anticipation and intuition, he perfectly kept the Law to the degree, at least to some, that he didn't need to even repent of sin. They used Abraham to support their theory of earning salvation. They made him the ultimate model. He had actually inherited this world and the world to come, as I read, because of his faith which was a personal act of righteousness on his part by which in part he earned righteousness.

Now they had another scripture in the Old Testament they had to tamper with a little bit. Habakkuk 2:4 says, “The just shall live by faith.” They changed it. Some of the rabbis quoted it this way, “The just shall live by his faithfulness.” If you're faithful enough, which is another way to say obedient enough, you earn your righteous standing with God. All that simply to say that Abraham was at the very heart of their system of salvation by works and the two verses that might have undone their system, Genesis 15:6 and Habakkuk 2:4, they had managed to reinterpret or restate. On the other hand, Paul makes the point that Abraham's faith was not some merit by which he earned salvation, but simply a means by which he received the gift. And this will become clear to us as we look at the passage.

So let's look at point one in the chapter, Abraham was made right with God by faith, not by works. Next time we'll look at the fact that he was made right with God by grace, not by Law.

Now, first of all, as I said, in each of these three points in the chapter, Paul makes a negative and then a positive comment. Let's start with the negative, verse 1. “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.”

So we start out with how Abraham was not made righteous. How Abraham was not made right with God. The force of that opening statement is that Abraham if indeed he was on his own merit made righteous is then allowed to boast. If he earned it, he gets the credit for it. That's Paul's simple argument. He identifies Abraham as our father. He's talking to the Jews about the Jews, the supreme one of all God's called people, the man of the covenant. Therefore, whatever is true of him necessarily is true for all his children. So if Abraham is saved by works, then all his children follow along. On the other hand, if he is saved by faith, then all his children would follow along as well. So what do we say about Abraham our forefather according to the flesh?

By his natural unaided powers, is what that means. What was he able to accomplish on his own? What did he gain by the works of the flesh? What has he accomplished? What has he achieved? Was he justified by works? If he was, then he has something to boast about. But not before God. Translation...if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about but from God's

viewpoint, he has no reason to boast, no basis for pride. This is Paul's opening point and he will define and defend it as the text moves on. Men are never made right with God by human effort, we saw that back in verse 27. Where is boasting? It is excluded, chapter 3 verse 27, by what kind of Law or principle of works? No, but by a law or principle of faith. We maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from the works of the Law.

So Abraham has nothing to boast about. If you wanted a little bit of a syllogism, this is the way it would go. If you remember some of your logic courses. The major premise, if a man is justified by works, he has ground for boasting. Minor premise, Abraham was justified by works, conclusion, therefore Abraham has a right to boast. But Paul challenges that by stating that the minor premise is false. Major premise, if a man is justified by works, he has ground for boasting. You can say that. Minor premise, Abraham was justified by works, that's not true. He was justified by faith, therefore the conclusion cannot be he has a right to boast.

Starting then with the changing of that minor premise, he proves that Abraham was not justified by works and thus destroys the conclusion that Abraham had any right to boast...not before God means not in the presence of God, not with God standing there.

Now how does he support this denial of salvation by works and therefore a denial that Abraham has a right to boast with Scripture? And I love this. He defends himself based upon Scripture. Go to verse 3, “For what does the Scripture say,” and this is the positive. The negative dealt with Abraham not being able to boast. The positive deals with how Abraham was made righteous. It was not by works, it was by faith. How do we know that? And he quotes Genesis 15:6, “What does the Scripture say? Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness.” Paul puts Abraham's faith in the foreground. He believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. We understand this. We have heard this. This is familiar because it's repeated by Paul. Listen to Galatians 3:6, “Even so, Abraham believed God,” the same quoting Genesis 15:6, “it was reckoned to him as righteousness.”

Later in that chapter, the same emphasis is made. We are all children of Abraham, verse 7, we are all sons of Abraham because we also come by faith and not by works. He ends the chapter in verse 29, “If you belong to Christ, you are Abraham's descendants”

So Abraham is not the father of all those made righteous by works, but rather he is, in a sense, the father of all those made righteous by faith. To Paul and the Holy Spirit, the essence of Abraham's testimony and witness and model and pattern is simply that he believed God. He believed God. He took God at His Word.

To see an illustration of that, turn to Hebrews chapter 11 for a moment. And this is the account that the writer of Hebrews gives us of the faith of Abraham. Of course, in Hebrews 11 you have all the heroes of faith and Abraham is among them, and so here we learn about his faith. What was it that

he believed?

Well here it tells us, “By faith Abraham when he was called obeyed...he obeyed.” While he was being called, present participle, he obeyed. And his obedience is remarkable because it says, “By going out to a place which he was to receive for an inheritance and he went out not knowing where he was going. Pretty remarkable, great faith, kind of a drop all and follow Me faith that we see with the disciples...the kind of self-denying faith, great faith...He forsook everything without anything in return. No knowledge of where he was going, he literally put his life in the hands of the God who called him and he believed him to be a secure place to plant his life. He left the land of his birth. He forsook his home, his estate, severed ties with those he loved, abandoned present securities for future uncertainty. He abandoned everything he knew for everything he didn't know.

Verse 9 indicates that his faith was not only instant but it was patient. By faith he lived as an alien in the land of promise as in a foreign land, dwelling intense with Isaac and Jacob, fellow heirs of the same promise. For he was looking for the city which has foundations, whose architect and builder is God. Mark it, to Abraham, God's promise was never fulfilled. He never owned land. He never owned land. He wandered everywhere as a tent dweller. He had never lost his faith in those early years. He really never saw the fulfillment of his dreams. He never saw a great nation, never inherited the promised land, never had a fulfillment of his dreams but he never lost faith in God's promise. And ultimately he knew that the final promise was heavenly, the city which has foundations whose architect and builder is God.

He was following in faith the way to heaven. By faith even Sarah herself received ability to conceive even beyond the proper time of life since she considered Him faithful who had promised. Together, you remember, when they were long past childbearing age, God gave them that promised son Isaac who was the son of the Covenant and through Isaac came the nation and the promise. Therefore there were born even of one man and him as good as dead at that as many descendants as the stars of heaven in number and innumerable as the sand which is by the seashore and that was the promise given to him in Genesis. And out of his loins came that great nation. He didn't see it, he died holding on to the promise without ever seeing its fulfillment.

Look at verse 13, he was one of those who died in faith without receiving the promises. Having seen them and welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth...he knew that ultimately this was a heavenly promise, that he had been promised eternal life in heaven with God. He lived seeking a country of their own. Verse 15, “Indeed, if they had been thinking of that country from which they went out, they would have had opportunity to return, but as it is, they desire a better country, that is a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God for He has prepared a city for them. By faith, Abraham when he was tested offered up Isaac.”

Imagine. You want to know how strong his faith is, not only does he drop everything, instantly walk away from everything he knows for a life of uncertainty, but he's left in limbo for years wandering, as a bedouin in the land owning nothing. He has no heir until he reaches a hundred years of age. Finally the child of promise is given and he still hasn't seen the fulfillment of His promise. Where is the great nation? Where is the great Kingdom? Where is the great salvation?

And then that one son, God says to him, “Take him up to Mount Moriah and kill him and offer him as a sacrifice. And by faith, Abraham does it, verse 17, offered up Isaac. And he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son. It was he to whom it was said, “In Isaac your descendants shall be called,” Genesis 21:12. And here he was going to kill Isaac because God asked him to and in Isaac was the fulfillment of everything that he had left home for, everything he had languished as a bedouin through all those years waiting for, everything unrealized.

How could he do that? His faith was so strong, according to verse 19, he considered that God is able to raise people, even from the dead. Why would he have killed Isaac? Because he trusted the promise of God so much that he knew that God would raise Isaac from the dead to fulfill that promise if He had to. That is great faith. Abraham is a model of faith.

Now you can go back to Romans for there in that wonderful portion of the book of Hebrews we have the condensed summary looking at the faith of Abraham. Abraham, it says then back in verse 3, believed God and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Counted, logizomai, to put to one's account, to credit, to reckon, used eleven times from verse...well eleven times just in this one section in one form or another. Righteousness put to an account. It is to say that Abraham believed God and therefore credited to his account was the very righteousness of God. He received it by faith and that's how all men are made righteous before God, it is not because they can become righteous on their own, it is because the righteousness comes to them from God credited to their account by faith.

How can this be? How can this be? Because all sin was imputed to Christ's account and He suffered for it and bore it on the cross, including all of Abraham's sin. He bore the sin of all believers through all history. It was counted to him for righteousness.

What was? Simply the act of faith. The faith that Abraham had in God was a supernatural faith. It's not a normal faith. There's no normal human response that says I'll leave everything for nothing. It's not normal to say I'll kill my son because he'll be raised from the dead. That is not human fait h. There is such a thing as human faith. We talk about that. You exercise it every day when you turn your faucet on and drink what comes out. You exercise it every day when you get in your car and start a series of internal combustions that go on you don't ever think about being a part of a combustion that blows you into eternity. Same thing you do when you go to the hospital and they knock you out and slice you open and do whatever they're going to do. You have no idea what's

going on.

That's faith, but that's human faith. And human faith is built on a history of seeing things happen that indicate this is something you can trust. You drink the water because you've been drinking the water. You drive the car because you've been driving the car and lots of people do that. You have surgery because you've had surgery and all kinds of people have surgery and people come out of it. You have a track record that this is a valid thing to put your trust in.

There's no track record with this kind of faith. This is a promise that no one has ever seen. Abraham didn't see the future at all. He didn't know what he was headed for. He gave up certainty for uncertainty. There was no precedent for this. No one has ever seen heaven and come back to tell us about it. So we live in hope. We put all of our trust and all of our faith in something we cannot see. This is a kind of faith that isn't natural faith, this is a supernatural faith. It really is a gift...by grace you are saved through faith, that not of yourselves, it's a gift of God. The faith that Abraham had in God was empowered in him by God but not apart from his own willingness and his own obedience. And by faith he gave up his life, by faith he denied himself. By faith he followed and he knew there would be nothing in this life that would bring about the promise but that he was headed for a city whose builder and maker was God. He was headed for a country that wasn't in this world, it was a heavenly one. And whatever the cost, he trusted God. Trusted God to take him to that place. Trusted God to fulfill His promises. It is that kind of faith that marks the man who is declared righteous. This was Abraham's salvation. He believed God when there was no precedence, no evidence, no sight, it was all promise unfulfilled.

This is justification by faith. You believe God for a forgiveness you can't see. You believe God for a heaven you've never been to. You believe God for an eternal reward you've never received. You believe God for eternal bliss and joy you've never experienced. That's not normal.

I understand why people are skeptical about that in the natural. I understand that. That's a natural kind of skepticism. But you have, by the way, the testimony of the faithful in the past and that's given to you in Hebrews chapter 11. That's why the hall of faith is there. And you have unending evidences of the veracity and inerrancy and authority of the Scripture as divine revelation. And you have the testimony of all the transformed and regenerate of all the ages who give testimony to living the life of faith and living in anticipation of that promise which awaits us.

Furthermore, although we haven't entered in the full and final promise, we receive tokens of that promise all the time...the comfort, the assurance, the joy, the peace, the blessedness, the answered prayer, the usefulness, the demonstration of God's power through our lives and the lives of others as we witness to the gospel and see God work through us. All of these are evidences, these are tastes of that heavenly reality. And so, we all live like Abraham lived. We live by faith, having been saved by faith.

So then, back to the original question...how can a man be right with God? How can sin be forgiven? And how can we have the promise of that city, that heavenly country? Do we earn it? Do we gain it by works? Paul's answer is absolutely not...absolutely not. It is by faith and faith alone. And let me hasten to add, it is not a faith that is a righteous act that merits it. It is a faith that simply channels the gift to us. One way to say it is, faith is never the basis of our justification, it is only the means of it. It is only the channel of it. It is just the hand that reaches out to take the gift. It isn't that because you believed on your own you earned it, for faith itself is a gift of God. It is a means by which we receive the justification given to us.

Listen to Galatians 2:16, “Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus so that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law since by the works of the Law no flesh will be justified.”

What Paul is saying is belief is not a work of the Law. He contrasts belief with the works of the Law. It is not a righteous deed done by a sinner on his own. It is not the basis of justification. You're not justified because you did this righteous thing of believing. Believing is only a means by which that justification comes to you and even that believing is a work of God in a regenerated heart.

Now let's go back to the text. In verses 4 and 5, “Now to the one who works,” Paul's argument moves from Scripture to reason here, “Now the one who works to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who doesn't work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness.”

This is a simple obvious fact. If you work, it's a wage, it's not a favor...it's not a gift. But if you didn't work, but simply believed, then it's a gift. That's all that he's saying. “The one who works gets a wage, that's what he's due. The one who doesn't work and receives this greatest of all gifts, then has to acknowledge that righteousness has been credited to him and he doesn't deserve it...and here's the key line...he believes in Him who justifies the ungodly.”

Now you ought to underline that in your bible because you ought to go back to that again and again and again and again. The Jews believed that God justified the godly. Religion believes that. That if you want to be right with God, you have to be good, you have to do good works, you have to merit salvation. But God is in the business of justifying the ungodly. That is an absolutely stunning statement. God is in the business of justifying the ungodly. In fact, He only justifies the ungodly because that's the only kind of people there are. There are no people who work the righteous law well enough to have earned their standing with God. There are only people who have failed. All have sinned and come short of the glory of God...as we found in the previous chapter.

And so, God justifies the ungodly. That literally overturns all works/righteousness systems. Salvation comes to those, verse 5, who do not work...who do not earn it, but believe in the God who justifies the ungodly and that believing is counted, credited as righteousness.

Job 9 verse 20 says, “If I justify myself, my own mouth will condemn me. If I say I'm perfect, it will prove me perverse.” He's right. Nobody honestly can stand before God and declare his righteousness. There are no godly to justify. There are only ungodly.

In Exodus 23:7 the Law says this, “I will not justify the wicked...Exodus 23:7...I will not justify the wicked.” On the other hand, grace says here, “God justifies the ungodly.” If you go by Law, can't get there. He will not justify the wicked. If you're going to come by Law, you're going to end up wicked, you have no hope. But by grace He will justify the wicked.

The high point, I think, of this in the Old Testament, turn to Isaiah 43 and it's good to look at this because Abraham is not the only illustration or model of Old Testament salvation by faith and grace. Maybe the high point of Old Testament grace is in Isaiah 43. Isaiah 43, well let's see, let's start at verse 23, or verse 22. “Yet you have not called on Me, O Jacob. You have become weary of Me, O Israel. You have not brought to Me the sheep of you burnt offerings, nor have you honored Me with your sacrifices. I have not burdened you with offerings or wearied you with incense. You have brought Me not sweet cane with money, nor have you filled Me with the fat of your sacrifices. Rather you have burdened Me with your sins. You have wearied Me with your iniquities.”

Then look at verse 25. “I, even I am the one who wipes out your transgressions for My own sake and I will not remember your sins.” That in my mind is the pinnacle of grace in the Old Testament. The promise of God to justify the ungodly didn't arrive with the New Testament. It has always been so.

All through the New Testament, of course, sinners are referred to as ungodly sinners and their ungodly ways are referred to. Second Peter, Jude especially. It is God who justifies as He always has the ungodly because there are only ungodly, there are none righteous, no not one.

From start to finish then salvation is a gift that comes by faith. Righteousness is credited to the account of those who don't deserve it, but in faith believe to receive it. And Abraham's experience is not isolated. The next great illustration is David, let's look at it just briefly in verses 6 through 8. “Just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works.” And this comes right out of Psalm 32 verses 1 and 2, supporting Paul's point. David speaks of the divine blessing on the man to whom God credits, imputes righteousness apart from works when he says in Psalm 32, “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. Blessed is the one to whom the Lord forgives. Blessed is the one whose iniquities are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one to whom the Lord will not impute sin...is what it says...but rather to

whom the Lord imputes righteousness."

It's sort of like Psalm 130 verse 3 and 4. "If the Lord should mark iniquities, who shall stand? But...says the Psalmist...there is forgiveness with Thee that Thou mayest be feared, worshiped, honored and adored."

And why does God do this? Well Isaiah 43:25 says it, "For My own sake." Why does He forgive? "For His own glory." To put His grace on display, to put His love on display, to put His mercy on display, to put His salvation on display, His loving kindness, His compassion to prove to all that He is the God that the prophet Micah said He was, "Who is a God like You who pardons iniquity, passes over the rebellious act of the remnant of His possession, He doesn't retain His anger forever because He delights in unchanging love," that's grace. "He will again have compassion on us. He will tread our iniquities under foot. Yes you will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea."

He is a God who removes our sins, the Old Testament says, as far as the east is from the west and remembers them no more. And so, Abraham, David and all other souls made righteous were and always will be made righteous by faith alone.

So Paul begins his argument from the illustration of Abraham by saying, "Abraham's righteousness came not by works but by faith." Next time we'll look at the fact that is righteousness came not by Law but by grace.

Our Father, we know that this is true because it is continuously the wondrous message of Scripture. We see the imagery in our minds again of the prodigal running home to the father with no works to offer, a life of wretched sinfulness was all that he had accumulated, animosity and hatred toward the father, scorn toward all that was good and right and true. And he came back empty handed, starving as a beggar with nothing to commend himself. But he was willing to repent and he trusted in the goodness of his father. And we remember the scene where the father throws his arms around him and kisses him and embraces him and puts a ring on his finger, a robe on his back and sandals on his feet and receives him fully back as a son and gives him all rights and privileges and has a great celebration. And our Lord puts in the words of that father who represents the Lord Jesus Himself, we had to rejoice, we had to rejoice for your brother who was dead is alive again.

We know this is heaven's attitude. There's no reluctance, O God, on Your part to impute righteousness to a penitent sinner, but rather You find Your joy in forgiveness. You find Your joy in a wretched sinner in rags comes back with nothing to offer. You go out to meet that sinner with a full embrace. You set him at Your table, give him the finest clothes, the finest meal and hold a celebration as he sits in a robe of righteousness before You. We thank You that You bring the best robe and You put it on the ungodly when they come to You in repentant faith. This is the gospel, Lord, and we love this truth. It is the truth that has set us free from sin and death. And like Abraham,

we live in this promise of things unseen. We love an unseen Christ, we have received an unseen forgiveness. Our lives are controlled by an unseen power and we are headed to an unseen heaven. But like Abraham, we believe You and we believe You strongly enough that we will go to death knowing that You will raise the dead to fulfill Your promise. It's in that hope that we live and rejoice.

And we thank You along the way for all the tokens, all the evidences of the heaven to come, all the small deposits of heaven's realities that are given to us in this life, the taste of heaven, the taste of what is to come, the tokens of Your love and power and grace and mercy, the joys that You give us in the Spirit, the peace that passes understanding, all foretastes of what is to come that delivered to us strengthened our faith and our hope. We thank You for this gift. If we had to depend on anything we could do, we'd all perish in hell. But because of the gift of salvation by faith alone we have a righteousness not our own but as Paul called it, the righteousness of God granted to us and in that righteousness we stand before You as worthy of Your love and Your heaven. This is the glory of the gospel and we thank You for it. In our Savior's name. Amen....Amen.

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