**IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF ABRAHAM’S FAITH**

August 1, 2021

Romans 4:1-25

Key Verse 4:12 “And he is then also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also follow in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.”

In the last passage Paul explained the nature of the gospel. While all men were helpless under the power of sin and the condemnation of the law, God sent his one and only Son Jesus Christ into the world. Jesus became the Lamb of God who shed his blood on the cross and died for our sins. By faith in God’s promise, we sinful human beings can be declared not guilty; we are justified and made right with God. We gain a spiritual standing with God as his precious children with all its inherent rights and privileges. Still, God maintained his holy righteousness and absolute justice, for he poured out the full measure of his wrath on Jesus on the cross. When we simply accept Jesus’ blood shed for our sins, we are justified to be righteous before the Holy God. In today’s passage, Paul chooses Abraham as a model of this and breaks the chapter into three sections. First, he talks about the fact that Abraham was saved by faith, not by works. Second, Abraham was saved by grace, not by law. Third, Abraham was saved by divine power, not by human effort. In all three sections, looking at it from a different angle, Paul is basically saying the same thing. Namely, Abraham is the father of all those made righteous by faith. He is the father of all those who follow in his footsteps of faith.

**First,** Abraham was saved by faith, not by works (1-8). In explaining Abraham’s faith, Paul begins with the fact that Abraham was justified by faith in God alone; it was not by any good works he had done. Look at verse 3. “What does Scripture say? ‘Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.’” Paul takes this quote from Genesis 15:6. After Abraham had won a great victory to rescue his nephew Lot, fear and discouragement came into his heart. Abraham revealed to God his no son problem that was still in his heart. It had been 10 years since God called him and gave him the promise, “I will make you into a great nation.” Still, Abraham had no son. There was no sign that Sarah his wife was pregnant. God had given Abraham his promises, but still there was no evidence, no sign. It was like ordering pizza and waiting for it to come and hearing the pizza delivery man saying, “It’s coming” but nothing happens.

Abraham was thinking about adopting Eliezer of Damascus and making him his heir. God, however, wanted Abraham to believe, despite there being no physical evidence, even after 10 years. God decided to help Abraham with a visual display in order to encourage his faith. Genesis 15:5 says, “He took him outside and said, ‘Look up at the heavens and count the stars—if indeed you can count them. Then he said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be.’” When Abraham saw the stars in the sky and began to count them, he began to open his heart to God. Through counting the stars, Abraham believed what God said. God then credited his faith as righteousness. Abraham’s faith was simple. He trusted God and believed. He had no evidence, nor was he able to do anything. He simply trusted and believed. Then God made him righteous. This faith of Abraham became a major theme in the Bible. A man is credited righteousness by faith in God’s promises, not by any human works. As we have studied in Romans so far, this is its theme as well, “The righteous will live by faith.” It is very important that we are made right with God by faith, not by our works. Those who think that they need to do many works to be right with God eventually become burdened. Our spiritual lives become very burdensome if we think we must do works to be right with God. If we hear that we are made righteous by faith, some people may worry, “What if I don’t have enough faith? Is my faith strong enough to save me?” They have a big misunderstanding. It is Jesus Christ who saves us, not our feelings or actions. He is strong enough to save us no matter how weak our faith is. Jesus offers us salvation as a gift because he loves us, not because we earned it through our powerful faith. What then is the role of faith? Faith is believing and trusting in Jesus, reaching out to accept his wonderful gift of salvation.

Look at verse 5. “However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, their faith is credited as righteousness.” According to verse 5, wicked people must trust in God and not expect that work will make them right with God. Who are the wicked people? That is all of us. This is what we studied in chapter 3. There is no one righteous, not even one. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. Our throats, tongues and lips are dirty, revealing our dirty desires and dirty hearts before God. There is no way for us to be made right with God by our works. Our hearts are too dirty and too defiled to be made right with God by doing any kind of humanly good works, even religious works. Jesus gave an example of this in the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector. The Pharisee was confident of his own self-righteousness and looked down on others, so he proudly went to the temple one day and prayed about himself, “God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.” But when the tax collector went up to pray, he beat his breast and said, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner.” Jesus said that it was the tax collector, not the Pharisee who was justified by God. (Luke 18:9-14) We need to accept this fact that we are justified by faith in Jesus and made right with him, not by works.

My older brother got bankrupt at the time of IMF crisis in Korea in 1998. He went into hiding to avoid creditors and did not show himself since then because of shame. He did not even show up when my father died. We heard that he said to his friends that he would show up after paying off all his debt. My parents said, “Please just come back. We will pay off your debt.” If he comes back, taking my parents at their word, all his debt will be paid off. It is the same with God. We come to God just as we are, as ungodly sinners believing that God will accept us as his children no matter how many sins we committed. We do not come to God after paying up our debt of sin. We come just as we are as sinners. This is the gospel truth.

In verses 6-8, Paul gives King David as another case study of the example of being right with God by faith, apart from works. David was Israel’s greatest king. Not only was he a successful warrior and king, but he was also a poet, a musician. That’s not what made him right with God. Look at verses 6-8. “David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the one to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: ‘Blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord will never count against them.’” David said this after committing his great sins: He committed adultery with a young woman named Bathsheba, and in order to cover up, he had her husband Uriah, one of his most loyal and bravest fighting men, killed on the battlefield. King David thought he could cover up these acts. Perhaps David tried to do many works to be right with God and to remove the guilt from his heart, but he couldn’t. Perhaps he tried to offer many sacrifices. The guilt and agony kept growing. He became weaker and weaker and more and more burdened. He only had peace with God when he repented and accepted God’s forgiveness. When David trusted God by faith that his terrible and wicked act of adultery and murder were forgiven by God, not by works, he felt he was the most blessed man. This is why he could say to all believers, “Blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord will never count against them.’”

**Second,** Abraham was saved by grace, not by law (9-16).In verses 9-12, Paul explains that Abraham is the father of faith for both the Jews and the Gentiles. At that time, circumcision was a big issue. It divided Jews and Gentiles. But Paul points out that Abraham was justified by faith before he was circumcised. Clearly, circumcision is not necessary for justification. God justifies sinners by faith alone. In our time, some people claim that baptism is necessary for salvation and make a big dispute about how it should be done. But God justifies sinners by faith alone. Some people think that they must contribute something to their salvation through their good works. But these things add nothing to one’s salvation. God justifies sinners by faith alone. This is what Abraham teaches us. Look at verse 12. “And he is also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.” Here Paul stresses that to be justified by God, circumcised people must also walk in the footsteps of the faith of Abraham. In other words, they must be circumcised in their hearts by the Spirit (Ro 2:29). This is far more important than physical circumcision. It is cutting away of human desires and the sinful nature in one’s heart to equip them to live fully for the glory of God. Circumcision of the heart is invisible, but real. When Abraham received the covenant of circumcision, he had been involved in a family-centered life with his son Ishmael for thirteen years. Abraham was too busy having backyard barbecues with Ishmael than to spend time in prayer and Bible study. He lost God’s great purpose for him and became a kind of noble father, according to his human desire. But when God visited him, God declared that he was to be a father of many nations. God challenged him to live up to God’s greater purpose for him. God circumcised Abraham’s heart. Abraham’s outer life did not change much, but this circumcision of the heart changed him from a family-centered man, into a God-centered man. God changed his name from Abram, a noble father, to Abraham, a father of many nations.

The faith of Abraham is not just for personal salvation. It is faith that leads us to God’s greater purpose for our lives. It is faith that holds on to God’s great promise of world salvation and the kingdom of God. We must have this great promise in our hearts by faith. Look at verse 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.” Abraham’s faith was in God’s great promise. It was to believe that God would make him the father of many nations. Many Christians do not know this faith very well. Many are satisfied to live a comfortable life, just getting by. But to have the faith of Abraham, we must realize that God is Almighty God and that God wants to save not just us, but all people on earth from their sins and restore his kingdom. We must believe that God wants to use each one of us as a father of faith or a mother of prayer for the whole world. We must believe that God will establish a kingdom of priests and a holy nation through us.

**Third,** Abraham was saved by divine power, not by human effort (17-25).To have real faith that God will fulfill his great promises, we must know that the God of Abraham is God Almighty, God who can raise the dead. Look at verse 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.” The God of Abraham gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were. Abraham believed this God. Abraham had resurrection faith. Without resurrection faith, we remain under the power of sin and death. We cannot but give in to the social consensus to live a hedonistic and materialistic lifestyle. But with resurrection faith, we have victory over the power of death. There is no sorrow or fear or despair or failure for those who have resurrection faith. Abraham’s resurrection faith was not just a matter of theory. It was something that he experienced in his practical life.

Look at verses 18-21. “Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be.' Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead–since he was about a hundred years old–and that Sarah’s womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.” When Abraham was 100 years old, his body was as good as dead. His wife Sarah’s womb was also dead. Humanly there was no hope at all for them to have a son. But God had said to Abraham that his offspring would be as numerous as the stars in the sky. Abraham believed that God had the power to do what he had promised. Abraham had hope in God. This hope nurtured his faith in God’s promise. His faith does not mean that he was blindly optimistic. It means that he did not doubt that God could give him a son and that God could make his descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky. When we believe in God, we must have faith in God who raises the dead. We must have faith that God can call things that are not as though they were. With this faith, we can overcome the world and render glory to God in our personal lives. Look at verses 23-25. “The words ‘it was credited to him’ were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness–for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.” In other words, God wants us to have the same faith as the faith of Abraham.

Abraham was an ordinary man. He was a man with many weaknesses. He lied about his wife being his sister twice. Yet, he was made righteous when he simply believed in God’s promises. If we follow Abraham’s footstep in our triumphs and failures, in fear and doubt, holding on to God’s promises, we are righteous in God’s sight.

Big Idea: Follow in the footsteps of Abraham in faith