

ROMANS 4:1-5 | God's Gracious Gift

Sunday, March 1, 2015 – The 2nd Sunday in Lent

¹ What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, 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 Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."

⁴ Now to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation. ⁵ However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness.

He certainly had much to boast about. Here he was, a wealthy man living in the city of Ur. He and his wife had everything they needed in life. A home, a profession, money, and a social status. It was a life that many at that time would have like to have had. But he left it. Why? Because his God told him to. What a fool he must have looked to his friends and peers! To leave everything he had, pack up what he could carry, and begin a journey to an unknown land with unknown people all because an unknown God had told him to do so. For those around him they would call him crazy; we call it faith.

He certainly had much to boast about. He had plead with God to allow an immoral and god-less city live. "For the sake of one!" he would cry out. And pleading and praying with God, he tried so nobly to save these people from an impending doom. For the people reading it, it sounds like he's crazy; we call it faith.

He certainly had much to boast about. He had been so patient. His God had told him he would have a son. And over and over again his God had promised him a fruitful lineage. "As many as the sand on the seashore...the stars in the sky." Yet 50 years, 70, then 80 passed—and still no son. Yet one dusty day in the desert, three men appeared seemingly out of nowhere. "She will have a son..." they told him as his wife prepared dinner in the tent. Absurd! He was 100 years old! It was so absurd that his wife couldn't help but burst out laughing at the thought of it. Yet they insisted, and he believed it. Most would have called him crazy; we call it faith.

He certainly had much to boast about. His God had delivered on his promise. He had given him that son, even at his old age. But now God wanted him to take this promised son—the line of the promised Savior—and sacrifice him on top of Mt. Moriah. And so he gathered the necessities: wood, flint, a knife, and the sacrificial lamb—his son. He trudged up the mountain, his young boy asking questions all the while: "Where's the lamb? Where are we going? What will we do?" And a simple, faithful reply was all he gave: "The Lord will provide..." Having reached the top, he bound his son, stacked the wood, placed his son on top, and held up the knife. "Stop!" cried the Lord. And he looked up and saw a ram caught in the thicket...the Lord truly had provided. Most would call him crazy; we call it faith.

He certainly had much to boast about. He fled to Egypt because of a dangerous situation in his homeland. Because of his wealth and well-deserved reputation, he wined and dined with the Pharaoh and his household. He was wealthy, well-to-do, and well-mannered. And he had a beautiful wife. Or was it sister? Because that's what he told the Pharaoh. He lied to him because he didn't want to appear off-putting or unkind. He wanted things to go well, so he sacrificed his marital vows and allowed his

own wife to sleep with the king of Egypt. When disease and trouble befell the Pharaoh's household, it was then that he realized what he had done. He had not only lied, forced his wife to commit adultery, and allowed harm to come to another man's home, but he had done so much more: he had lacked faith.

He other things to boast about. After being run out of Egypt, he ran to another country that was outside the reach of the thugs in his homeland. There he met the king, and once again his beautiful wife attracted the attention of this ruler. One would think that he would have learned; but he didn't. He again told this monarch that it was his sister. And again, she was forced to commit adultery. And again trouble came onto the house of the King. And again, this man lacked faith.

But certainly had other things to boast about. He had waited nearly 75 years for his God to come true on his promise. But it was long enough. He needed an heir. After all, he was getting so old! So, in his household there was a beautiful maidservant. She would do well as the mother of the Savior. And after discussing it with his wife, he slept with this servant girl, and they had a son. The promised heir! Except it was not so. He was illegitimate; he had been conceived in sin and shame. He had been born in unbelief and lack of faith.

Abraham was a man of faith. He had to be. The New Testament frequently points out the nature of Abraham's salvation: righteousness through faith. Paul does the same today. "If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. What does Scripture say?" And that's where Abraham's so-called righteousness ends. Scripture is very clear as to God's expectations of mankind. Be perfect as I am perfect. Anyone who breaks the law at one point is guilty of breaking all of it. The wages of sin—a singular word in Greek—is death! It's clear. On it's face, Abraham was a righteous, upright man. But he also sinned. Frequently. Horribly. Willingly. And for that, he died.

We might be tempted to believe the same thing about ourselves. We could, I'm sure, come up with, in a moment's notice, things we do or have done in our lives that are worthy to boast about. The size of the check I'm about to give in the offering plate...you would not believe the sacrifices I've made to give that to the Lord. You're welcome, Good Shepherd...My offering this morning makes up nearly half of the weekly contributions. Where would this church be without me? You're welcome, Lord...I didn't give any offering because I donate my time, my talents. Without them, this church would be lost! You're welcome, God...I didn't give any offering because I have bigger things to worry about. Plus, there's those other people here that can give—the "rich" people. God tells me not to let down my family and my obligations in my life. And I'm doing just that...you're welcome, family members.

I attend nearly every Bible Class and every service this church offers. Without me, some days there wouldn't be anyone at one of those events. Thank goodness I'm here. Without me, this church wouldn't be able to hold these things. You're welcome, Good Shepherd...I've been a member of this church for decades. In fact, I was part of the founding families. Without me, this church would be nothing. I've put blood, sweat, and tears into this congregation. We are so lucky to have me. You're welcome, Lord...I don't come often. I have so many other pressing things to do. But at least I come. At least I'm here today. Without my name on the books, we wouldn't have as many members. Plus, this congregation needs me because I can fill a spot in the pew so that it looks like we're full. You're welcome, God.

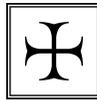
We sure do have a lot to boast about, don't we? We have pride, and hypocrisy, and greed, and slander, and malice, and coveting, and so many more. And we wear them like badges! We wear them with

pride. We excuse them away like an error on a math assignment in school. But these sins damn! These sins don't build us up...they tear us down. On the outside it may look like we are good, upright, contributing, kind, and generous people. But like Abraham, we sin. Frequently. Horribly. Willingly. And for that, we will die.

But, "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." The word in the Hebrew for "credit" isn't a financial term. It's not a judicial term or even a forensic term. It's emotional. We would never want a banker to operate on emotion, giving amounts of money away based on personal feelings or vendettas. We want a banker to operate on principles and justice. We want a banker to operate on an objective set of facts: mathematics, numbers, logic. But we don't want that from our Lord. We don't want him operating on a system based on logic and justice. For that we deserve immense punishment! But thanks be to God! He doesn't credit our account for what we deserve! He gives us a gracious gift. He gives us faith!

That faith is so important. That faith saves. That faith trusts. That faith looks to God for the impossible: the salvation of our souls. We put our faith in the payment for all of our sins. We look to him for his righteousness and for his peace. We believe that he has lived perfectly and died innocently for us and on our behalf. And we trust that he is faithful and just, and will not give us what our sins deserve.

So dear Christian, if you're going to boast, boast in the Lord. He has done marvelous and wonderful things! He has given you faith. He has shown you grace. He has promised you forgiveness. And he has given you a gracious gift. Amen.



Soli Deo Gloria!

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