

EXPOSITION OF ROMANS
"Believing Not Achieving"
Romans 4:1-25
Mililani Community Church
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There was a preacher who had long-departed from the truth of the gospel, who told a story to summarize the faith he taught. He said there was a frog that fell into a pail of milk one day, and though he tried every conceivable way to jump out, he always failed. The sides were too high, and because he was floating in the milk he could not get the leverage he needed for the leap. So he did the only thing he could do. He paddled and paddled and paddled some more. And lo and behold, all his paddling eventually churned a pad of butter! He was able to get on that pad of butter, and launch himself to freedom. The preacher's message was: "Just keep on paddling, keep on working, keep on doing your best, and you will make it."

Most people think this way. They think that if you just do your best you will somehow in the end make it to Heaven. This is just the opposite of what the Bible teaches. The Bible teaches that we are justified by faith alone through God's grace. Nothing you and I can ever do can atone for our sins. Our only hope is what Paul explains in Romans 3:21-24: "A righteousness from God that comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe."

In the first three chapters of Romans Paul has been establishing his case:

- The first thing he has shown us is that all have sinned. Romans 3:23.
- The second thing he has shown us is that the Law cannot save us. The law reveals our sin. It exposes our sin. But it cannot save us from our sin.
- The third thing he has shown us is that a righteousness from God is bestowed on those who believe on Jesus Christ.
- The fourth thing he has shown us is that justification is a free gift. Verse 24. Justification means "to declare and treat a person as righteous."
- Finally he has shown us that the cross of Christ demonstrates God's justice. It was at the cross where Jesus died that God justly dealt with our sins. And Therefore God can justify a sinful man when he places his faith in Jesus.

Now in chapter four, Paul uses Abraham as an example of those who are saved not by works but by faith alone.

Of all the righteous men in the OT, none could surpass Abraham. Abraham was called the friend of God. If it is a mans works that justify him in God's sight, then Abraham would have a better chance than most--and he would be entitled to take some credit for it. But Paul clearly shows here that Abraham's acceptance with God was not based on his works. Abraham's good works, his obedience to God's commandments, were the fruit of his faith in God.

There is a four-point outline in this chapter.

- God credited absolute righteousness to Abraham apart from works (1-8). He did not earn it, he received it as a gift by faith.
- God credited absolute righteousness to Abraham apart from circumcision (9-12) For a Jew, circumcision was very important. Circumcision was the outward and visible sign of God's covenant with Abraham. But Paul shows that Abraham was declared righteous by God 14 years before he was circumcised.
- God credited absolute righteousness to Abraham apart from keeping the law (13-17). The Law was given over 430 years after Abraham. He was not declared righteous by keeping the Law. Trying to keep God's Law only brings us under God's wrath, because we all fall short. Abraham was not saved by obeying God's law but by faith.
- God credited absolute righteousness to Abraham by faith (17-25). Faith is "taking God at his word." We are declared righteous in the same way, by faith apart from any human works.

Let's look now at the first point

GOD CREDITS RIGHTEOUSNESS TO US APART FROM WORKS (1-8)

READ Romans 4:1-3. We need to know what "the Scriptures say." Gen. 15:6.

"Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." The word "credited" is *logizomai* in Greek. It is an accounting term, and it means "to credit to a person's account." What did God do? God credited to Abraham's account absolute righteousness.

READ verse 4. wages are earned.

Did Abraham earn his righteousness? NO. His faith was credited as righteousness. Just believing God, not achieving righteousness by his works.

We are never justified by works of righteousness.

In verses 6-8 he calls another man to the witness stand: David. What were David's works? Adultery and murder. Quoting Psa. 32:1-2. A Psalm that deals with sin--confession--and forgiveness. It was written after David had committed adultery with Bathsheba and had Uriah her husband killed.

Point here is that God does not put sin to your account, not because of your own works, but because He put your sin to Jesus' account. He took your sins and put them on Jesus and gave you Jesus' righteousness apart from your own works. It comes by faith.

This makes Christianity contrary to all other religions. In all of mans religions you have to pay. In Christianity, God pays.

Let me tell you a story that illustrates this. In India a missionary developed a very close relationship with an Indian Buddhist. They were very close friends. But this Buddhist man had not become a Christian --because of one barrier. He said, "It is just too easy! I have to pay something. I can't believe that God would just give me salvation as a free gift."

The missionary was finally leaving to come home on furlough---and this man came to him with a very beautiful pearl---He said "I want to give you this pearl." As the missionary looked at it, he saw that it was a perfect pearl and very valuable--worth literally thousands of dollars. He gave it back and said, "No, I can't accept it." He said, "but I would be glad to pay you for it." The Indian man said, "No, I want to give it to you. You can't pay me." The missionary said, "No, it's too great a gift, too much money involved. I'll be glad to pay you something for it."

The Indian man said, "But you can't pay for it." The missionary asked, "Why?" He explained, "my son was a diver and found this pearl. He went the deepest he had ever gone to find the oyster that contained this pearl. It took so much time to get it that when he finally came up, he had stayed down too long--and he walked up on shore, gave this to me and then fell dead at my feet." He said, "You can't pay for my son's life. I want to give you this pearl which cost the death of my son."

Then the missionary turned around and said, "It's the same way with God. You can't pay for your salvation. It cost the death of Jesus on the cross." And the Indian man became a Christian!"

APPLICATION: So, salvation is not by works.

This next point is a powerful passage to share with a Jew. God credits absolute righteousness to me . . . APART FROM CIRCUMCISION (9-11)

READ 9-11. The Jews depended on the rite or ceremony of circumcision to make them acceptable to God.

But when was Abraham declared righteous? He was declared righteous in Genesis 15:6- before he was circumcised. Fourteen years later in Genesis 17:10 he was circumcised. He was justified by faith 14 years before he was circumcised.

Verse 11: He was circumcised as an outward sign or seal of the righteousness he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised.

Paul is showing that circumcision was just an outward sign of an inward transformation. The Jews were trusting in the seal. They thought it was this ceremony that made them acceptable to God. Paul is showing that righteousness is credited apart from circumcision to everyone who believes.

APPLICATION: Some today have done with baptism what the Jews did with circumcision. They think they are saved by being baptized. But baptism is just the sign of something that has already taken place. It pictures our death burial and resurrection with Christ, which takes place the moment we believe. You can't be saved by something a priest or minister does to you or some ritual you go through.

Next . . . RIGHTEOUSNESS IS CREDITED TO US APART FROM LAW (13-17)

READ vv. 13-17. Here Paul tells us that we don't become righteous in God's sight by trying to obey and fulfill some kind of law. We are not saved by doing our best to try to live up to some standard. If we think that God is going to accept and love us because we have tried hard to do what we think is right, we are on the wrong track. It will never work. And Paul tells us why.

First, Abraham received the gift of righteousness 430 years before the law was given. So righteousness did not come by law.

Second, no one has ever kept God's law. And God's wrath falls on anyone who has tried to keep it and failed. The law reveals our sinfulness, but it cannot save us. It can only condemn us. James 2:10: "Whoever keeps the whole law but stumbles in one point is guilty of all."

Verse 16: Salvation has always been by grace through faith.

Verse 16 tells us why the promise of righteousness comes by faith. That it might be guaranteed.

If we want God's righteousness, we must all receive it the same way. On the principle of grace through faith. GRACE = God's Riches At Christ's Expense. This promise cannot fail, because it all depends on God. God is the giver. The promise is sure because it all depends on God.

That is the reason Peter said: "Our inheritance is undefiled, reserved in heaven for us."

**Now we come to the fourth point in the outline:
GOD CREDITS ABSOLUTE RIGHTEOUS TO US BY FAITH (17-25)**

Five things about Abraham's faith:

- He believed God (17)
- He believed against all hope (18)
- He believed in spite of circumstances (19)
- He believed without wavering (20)
- He believed God could do what He promised (21)

This is why it was credited to him as righteousness. God has only one way of saving men in all ages--by faith (23-25) Have you come to God by faith and trusted in Christ's righteousness alone, not your own, to make you acceptable to God? Do that today!

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