

Text: Romans 4:1-5 & 13-17

What then will we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered according to the flesh? ²If indeed Abraham had been justified by works, he would have had a reason to boast—but not before God. ³For what does Scripture say? “Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness.”

⁴Now to a person who works, his pay is not counted as a gift but as something owed. ⁵But to the person who does not work but believes in the God who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited to him as righteousness.

¹³Indeed, the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not given to Abraham or his descendants through the law, but through the righteousness that is by faith. ¹⁴To be sure, if people are heirs by the law, faith is empty and the promise is nullified. ¹⁵For law brings wrath. (Where there is no law, there is no transgression.) ¹⁶For this reason, the promise is by faith, so that it may be according to grace and may be guaranteed to all of Abraham's descendants—not only to the one who is a descendant by law, but also to the one who has the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. ¹⁷As 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. (EHV)

Prayer of the Day:

Almighty God, you see that we have no power to defend ourselves. Guard and keep us both outwardly and inwardly from all adversities that may happen to the body and from all evil thoughts that may assault and hurt the soul; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God now and forever. Amen!

Verse of the Day:

Jesus humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross. (Philippians 2:8b)

Sermon Text:

He was parched from the long walk in the hot sun. So he sat down at the local watering hole to quench His thirst. The woman was shocked to see Him there, “your kind and my kind don't mix.” Clearly He didn't belong, but He also didn't seem to care. Yet as He spoke it became obvious that this one knew a little something about her kind, His kind and more importantly the one who made them both, so she threw out her question. “Why can't we worship how we want to and where we want to?” That question always seemed to rile up His kind.

His answer was different. He told her that whether one was a Jew or Gentile ultimately didn't matter. What did matter, Jesus would tell the Samaritan woman, was Faith, Faith in the One who sat parched and waiting for earthly water while quenching the dehydration of sin, death and hell with His very presence. This faith changes everything.

Paul has just spent a considerable amount of time destroying our identity. No is righteous no one understands God was the crowning conclusion of the work of man under the law in Romans chapter three. Jew or Gentile doesn't matter nor does our sin stained works. The Law crushes every individual and announces that our personal identity counts for nothing before the righteous judge of all.

Why are you going to heaven? It becomes a massive question in the face of these accusations. A hefty percentage of our world today, if they even believe in such a place to begin with, will likely answer with a form of what they have done, who they are, or how someone else is more deserving of hell than they.

So Paul writes, *What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter?* The EHV was a little more literal when it asked *What then will we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered according to the flesh?* Abraham was a pretty amazing guy, right? He traveled from Ur to Canaan simply because God said so, fought off kings for the sake of wayward Lot, was even willing to sacrifice Isaac to prove his love for His Lord. Pretty impressive stuff!

So Paul writes, *If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God.* Abraham was a pretty impressive guy worldly speaking. But therein lies the problem. Heaven and our place in it has nothing to do with our world and its system of reckoning but with God and His. He doesn't ask for pretty impressive, but rather demands absolute perfection (Matthew 5:48).

So again Paul tells us, *Now to a person who works, his pay is not counted as a gift but as something owed.* If heaven comes by works (who we are, what we do, how we identify ourselves) we need not worry of promises. Our work will demand its pay, heaven, as an obligation. The problem is that we know who we really are. Abraham would probably have told us of himself – I pawned my wife of as my sister not once but twice and slept with a concubine because I didn't trust in God to provide when he said he would. You see, Abraham knew exactly what God could see, because that's exactly what ultimately happens when we peer into the law – we don't earn a thing. Instead, *Law brings wrath.* The way of the world doesn't work, but God's ways are different.

Why are you going to heaven? Listen again to Paul. ³ *What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."* 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.*

I will get to heaven not because of any working of my own but because of God! He is the one who credits us with righteousness. He is the one that justifies us wicked though we are with the sins that hang from our every limb. When my work is worthless, His work means everything.

Faith means everything to the Christian but still another question remains, Faith in what? That we are righteous in the sight of God through faith! But how? Through the saving work Christ, who makes us heirs of all things through Him. Faith's object is always Jesus and can never be anything else.

He is the only one who truly passes the test. He can stand before God himself and boast for he never sinned, never faltered, never doubted the will of His Father in Heaven. In the season of Lent we watch Him suffer and die on a cross as He faces our punishment, forgiving our every sin, granting us his righteousness. It is His work which makes it possible for God to *give life to the dead and call things that are not as though they were.* You are righteous through faith in Christ!

This then is the only answer that can be offered as we stand before God and His holy Throne in judgment. "Why should I let you sinner that you are, imperfect as you are into my perfect and sinless heaven?" can only be answer with because I am not a sinner and am perfect through the life and work of Christ which is my life and work through faith.

So “What is faith?” Most will answer simple trust that something is true. Not bad in so far as it goes but the answer is incomplete, at least of saving faith. The Lutheran theologians regularly called faith the “receiving organ”, it grasped the promises of God. Faith believes God when I am wicked and sinful. Faith boasts of Christ and His saving work when I would rather boast of myself.

The question then becomes, “Is faith a work of God or a work of man?” Paul provides the answer, *But to the person who does not work but believes in the God who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited to him as righteousness.*

Who does God justify? It is not the one who makes a decision in their heart for the Lord, nor is it the one that is a little less worse than the next person. Instead it is “*the ungodly*”. The one opposed to God and His will, who can do nothing at all because he stands against God this is the one whom God saves.

How does God do that? *The promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace*, our lesson trumpets. The means, the receiving organ, which God gives by grace and not by work is faith itself. This faith takes the dead, lifeless, ungodly body of the sinner, and connects it to the saving work of Christ Jesus. This is what saved Abraham and saves us all.

As this truth begins to develop everything becomes clear. While salvation was *from the Jews* (John 4:22) (through them and their race would come the Messiah) it would not just be for the Jews. Instead, Abraham is the Father of all who believe as Paul so aptly put it today, 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.”*

Again, it’s faith that makes Abraham the father of us all, every believer in Christ. Expanding Abraham’s empire from shore to shore and over oceans into continents he may not have even heard of. And as we separate it from the work of our sin filled flesh something else happens. We gain assurance. You see, if any part of our salvation from faith to forgiveness belongs to us, we will always have questions. Did I do enough, do I believe enough?

While I can never answer those questions with certainty, God can. Did He do enough? He fulfilled every law, every command not impressively but perfectly. Did He believe enough? He trusted in the face of Satan, in spite of the mockery of mobs and even in death suffering a hell He did not deserve. All of that, He has given to me through no work of my own but through the working of His mighty power. Like our Spiritual father Abraham, we are heirs of the promise, heirs of heaven itself.

As the woman plied our Savior with questions the only one she really wanted answered was what is necessary to be saved, to go to heaven. Jesus pointed out that she certainly couldn’t do it. She was a sinner, currently living in sin. Her actions couldn’t do it because ultimately mountains, worship spaces and flesh wrought actions wouldn’t save her. So what would? Faith became the answer spoken from the lips of our Savior and now she understood. ²⁵ *The woman said, “I know that Messiah” (called Christ) “is coming. When he comes, he will explain everything to us.”* ²⁶ *Then Jesus declared, “I who speak to you am he.”* What a reminder and a comfort God grants to his people buffeted by a world which doesn’t understand Him, God preaches the truth through His apostle. He grants us the righteousness of Christ through faith and the reward of heaven which He has earned for us becomes ours. **GOD CALLS YOU WHAT YOU AREN’T THROUGH FAITH! AMEN!**