

BIBLE STUDY: ROMANS #4

Scripture of Lesson: Romans 4: 1~25

1. Abraham was made righteous through faith: v. 1~5

In Chapter 3 Paul reasoned that we are saved by grace through our faith in Christ only. Now as a prime example he cites the case of Abraham, the father of all Jewish people, in that he was obedient to God's call to leave his own people and land because he believed in God. Abraham was considered righteous because of this faith he had in God's calling. Because of his faith his journey and life brought joy to God. Heb 11: 8~10 And Abraham was considered a friend of God [II Chron 20:7]. If the greatest ancestor of all Jewish people could be justified to God by faith only although he had done many great works and became a great person in this part of the world, how can any descendant of Abraham claim he/she is saved by his/her own works?

In verse 4 Paul points out the wrongful attitude of such a person that believes in works as the cause of salvation who would consider his/her works as God's debt to himself/herself in that because he/she has done the works. How can we believe that we are entitled to our salvation and God is obliged to grant the salvation to us owing to some great works we may have done. We dare not claim any right to our salvation when Christ our Lord, who had forsaken His glory of heaven, came as a lowly Nazarene lived to show us how to please God in full obedience and died on the cross to be our redemptive lamb so that we could be made righteous when we have not done anything at all to merit the justification before God and cleansing of all of our sins so that we can share eternity with Him and God.

Verse 5 makes clear that those who believe that God is a rewarder of blessings and salvation, without requiring any works at all, to those who believe such God, and such faith God considers as righteousness. God is totally pleased to pour out His salvation and blessings to people only through faith in Jesus Christ. And this is the nature of God's grace that is bestowed to us without any merits or works. Any claim of ours based on our works is a dishonor and shaming of God.

Discussion topic: In your opinion, what good qualities did God see in you that He chose you as one of His children? When the gospel message of calling came to you, what faith did you have in your heart and how did that help your choice to become a Christian?

2. David also was considered righteous because of his faith: v. 6~8

King David understood the nature of salvation by grace only that he sang in Psalm 32: 1~2;

*"Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered.
Blessed is the man to whom the Lord does not impute iniquity,
And in whose spirit there is no deceit."*

David knew that God was interested in the purity of our hearts—our heart service to the Most High God of heaven and earth. He knew that salvation comes from God through His generous Spirit, that is, His grace. That is why after his fall involving Bathsheba, he cried out,

*“Create in me a clean heart, O God,
And renew a steadfast spirit within me.
Do not cast me away from Your presence,
And do not take Your Holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of Your salvation,
And uphold me by Your generous Spirit.”* [Psalm 51: 10~12]

Discussion topic: Was the Spirit of God available to the people of Israel during the OT era as He is to the Christians today? How was it evident in King David’s life?

3. Abraham was considered righteous before circumcision: v. 9~12

Here Paul further clarifies that Abraham’s justification came because of his faith in God and the subsequent obedient based on his faith, not because of his works such as circumcision. So the Jews’ pride and glory in circumcision was only vain and had nothing to do with God’s salvation plan. Circumcision had been given as an outward sign that God’s people need to bear a mark on their bodies and live to show that they are different, and as a seal of the faith they had in God’s covenant. [v. 11]

Consequently, Paul is pointing out that salvation came by faith of Abraham, which was before the circumcision. Therefore, circumcision did not bring about salvation of Abraham. The outward signs as a Christian do not make us children of God. Rather, they come about as a result of our having been born as children of God through faith in Jesus Christ. As Paul emphasized this point clearly in the first century, we must not be confused on this truth even in the 21st century.

4. God’s promise to Abraham was given through his faith: v. 13~22

Paul states that Abraham became the forefather not only of the Jewish people but of all God’s people and that Christians as well as believing Jews are partakers of God’s covenant with Abraham through faith, not through Mosaic law or circumcision. [v. 16] Some Christians tend to believe that we Christians have nothing to do with the Jewish people and the time of the Jewish people had gone by long ago and that only spiritual lessons from Old Testament are helpful to our spiritual journey. That is not a correct understanding according to Paul’s doctrine.

In this chapter apostle Paul clarifies that Abraham became the forefather of all of God’s people through faith. As he was made righteous by God through his faith, we are made righteous through our faith in Jesus Christ [v. 13]. Thus we have entered God’s covenant with Abraham so that we are co-heirs of God’s promised inheritance. This point must have been deemed very revolutionary to the Jews of the first century and a doctrine that other apostles had not fully realized. And the gospel that Paul preached emphasized the connection between Judaism and Christianity through God’s covenant to Abraham based on the same faith and the covenant, which come to all believers by God’s grace only.

5. We are made righteous through our faith in Jesus: v. 23~25

Abraham believed God’s promise even when outward conditions made his faith look unreasonable and even foolish. However, nothing was impossible with God—Abraham’s promised son, Isaac, was given to him and Sarah when he was about 100 years old. In v. 23 and v. 24 Paul points out that God planned this blessing in

the late stage of Abraham and Sarah's life so that Abraham's example as a true believer could be tested and established as a true example to their posterity. Furthermore, that we, who are living several thousands of years after Abraham, could also believe as Abraham did so that we might also become partakers in the promise of eternal inheritance that God made to Abraham and his descendants. And this faith is in Christ Jesus who was delivered to the unrighteous judges for our offences although He was sinless and was raised from the dead so that we might be justified before God [v. 25].

You might wonder, 'Did Abraham know Christ? Was his faith in God somehow the same as the faith we have in Christ?' When Abraham obeyed God's command and went up to Mt. Moriah to offer up his promised son, Isaac, he was totally willing to offer up his son and yet was confident that God would somehow give him children as He had promised. Through the ram that was caught in the thicket on top of the mountain Abraham saw the Lamb of God who would be slain to achieve salvation for all God's people so that His promised inheritance could be made possible. Hebrews 11 tells us that Abraham foresaw the heavenly city whose builder and maker is God [Heb 11: 10].

In spite of his earlier failings Abraham learned to walk with God in full faith and this was counted as his righteousness. Through our faith in Christ Jesus we have become co-heirs of God's promise to Abraham together with the faithful people of God through the ages since the time of Abraham, even to now. Let us keep this precious faith clear and firm and live as God's children while we are here on earth.

Discussion topic: If Abraham was justified by faith but had failures in his life, does it give us license to fail in our journey as Christians? What do we learn from Abraham and Sarah's life story?