

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
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Sermon Title: Credited Faith, Romans 4:1-16

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INTRODUCTION: We are continuing our study of Paul's letter to the Romans. We see how Paul has set up his letter by meeting the Romans right where they were. Paul's letter came to them at their level of understanding by answering the questions he knew was on their minds. By this point in the letter, in Romans Chapter 4, Paul has written about humanity's sinful state. He delivered God's guilty verdict for humanity's sinfulness. And, he has upheld God as a righteous God, and he even explained how we can receive the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ. Through Jesus, we learn in Romans, God calls us righteous.

Now, in Romans Chapter 4, Paul goes back to the Old Testament scriptures, which at one time, would have related to the Jews' faith history. How did the religion they grew up with relate to this new way of salvation? How did it match up with this good news Paul explained to them?

Paul's approach is interesting and similar to how many of us have grown in our faith over the years. He started with an explanation of salvation by faith in Jesus, and then he moved on to explain the Old Testament scriptures. Often, many of us come to an understanding of what Jesus did for us, see our need for salvation, and come into relationship with Jesus. But, that is only the starting point. It is not the finishing point. It is not a one-time deal that you look back on your diary and say on this day I was saved, and nothing has happened in my Christian life since.

Paul, in Romans 4, started teaching, getting deep into doctrine teaching—where he told people this knowledge is just the starting point. And, when we come to faith in Christ and we realize that's just the starting point, it is then we can further understand the depth of God's love and the spiritual principles he teaches us in scripture and that he shows us in our daily lives. I hope you are growing as a believer this morning. I hope you are not stagnant. I hope you are growing in your faith.

Paul uses the life of Abraham to show an example of being saved by faith, not by works. Last Sunday, you heard me say, the number of times the Bible has said we are not saved by works is astounding. The reason we need to be reminded we are not saved by works is because on the human level, we want to believe there is something we can do for ourselves on the spiritual realm. We want to believe in some small way, we have earned favor with God and that we have paid back some of our salvation.

Paul, as he approached the Romans, used this familiar figure—Abraham, our patriarch, our forefather. He used Abraham as an example because the Jews would have known who Abraham was. And, he knew the Jews in Rome would ask this question: “How does this new way of salvation by faith in Jesus Christ alone relate to the way we’ve always understood our relationship with God throughout all of history? How does this new concept, this new covenant of grace—relate to Abraham—a hero of our Jewish faith, who walked the earth years before Jesus came?”

So here, Paul answers these questions. And, in his letter to the Romans, he had an amazing opportunity to show them how Abraham actually pointed to Jesus.

There are two points to my message today:

1. God credited righteousness to Abraham through faith, not through his works.
2. God does not credit because of a person’s prior privilege.

First, GOD CREDITED RIGHTEOUSNESS TO ABRAHAM THROUGH FAITH, NOT THROUGH HIS WORKS.

Now, Abraham did a lot of good things. He was known for his works and for his legacy as the father of the Jewish nation and recipient of God’s covenant. Let’s take a moment to look at Abraham’s works. All of these bullet points are rich lessons in of themselves:

- Abraham left his home to go to a land God promised to show him. This was a major undertaking because Abraham had a lot of things. Abraham was a wealthy man. This was not a story of man who packed his knapsack and went on a journey. This is an incredible story of a man who left his home to go to a land God promised to show him.
- By faith, Abraham made sacrifices.

- He built altars.
- He called on God's name.
- He got circumcised at the command of God.
- He tithed.
- He made vows.
- He planted trees.
- He built monuments.
- He rescued his nephew Lot from an evil king, Chedorlaomer. This evil man conquered a land and captured Lot and his family. And, when Abraham found out about it, he put together an army of over 300 men to go and rescue his nephew, Lot.
- He interceded in prayer for Sodom and Gomorrah.
- He entertained angels.
- He made peace with the Philistine king.
- And, then we know in a work of the flesh and in a desperate feeling that he and his wife Sarah would never have the son God promised them, Abraham had a son with his wife's servant. And, from that we know Abraham learned more about having faith because God promised him and Sarah they would still have a son one day. Abraham was so caught up in his works and trying to help God, he messed up and sinned.
- And, then later, his wife Sarah bore Isaac—and from this lineage comes the Jewish nation, and ultimately Jesus.
- And, all of these works that were works of faith, but works that did not save him—they led him to a point of no return, when God told Abraham to take Isaac up to a mountain. And, we know the rest of the story there...where Abraham had Isaac bound. And, at the command of God, he was going to sacrifice his son. And, in his faith in God, he believed God would bring his son back to life. But, at the last moment, God provided a ram, so he did not have to sacrifice his son. But, God brought him to that critical point, a crisis of faith.

Abraham did a lot of good things and was the patriarch for the Jewish faith. So, after discovering how we are saved by faith—what should we say about Abraham, our forefather, a man who had lots of works and works of faith? Surely he could have been saved by such great faith!

SCRIPTURE: Romans 4:1-3 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.” (NIV)*

EXPLANATION: Abraham’s resume of works was quite exhaustive. Paul goes back to Abraham—not to point out his great works—but to point out his faith, his faith in God.

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 12:1-2 is the first time we see the covenant—this unwavering promise from a personal God—and Abraham’s response.

¹*The Lord had said to Abram, “Go from your country, your people and your father’s household to the land I will show you.*

²*“I will make you into a great nation,
and I will bless you;*

*I will make your name great,
and you will be a blessing.*

³*I will bless those who bless you,
and whoever curses you I will curse;
and all peoples on earth
will be blessed through you.”*

EXPLANATION: This is a promise to make Abraham’s name great—so he will be a blessing and all peoples on the earth would be blessed through him. Why would his name be great? Not so he would be known as the richest man on earth or so he would be known as a famous person. But, his name would be great so he would be a blessing to all peoples on the earth and all nations would be blessed. We see Abraham saw great value in this promise and believed God enough to go to a land God was going to show him. He left his home without knowing where he was going. But, he left knowing who was showing him where he was going. This was true faith in God—going and not knowing. I have found my faith has been challenged the most in my life when I was going but not knowing.

This initial faith only grew stronger. All the great things he continued to do throughout his life were done by faith.

SCRIPTURE: And, Hebrews 11 says, ⁹ *By faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise.* ¹⁰ *For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God.*

EXPLANATION: Abraham got to the point in his life when he knew, as soon as he felt settled, God would move him on, either spiritually or physically. These works were not done apart from faith. Abraham had the assurance of what God said—although he couldn't see it—was true.

So, we see here—he had great works—but this did not justify him. Who justified him before God? God did. And, how? Through Jesus, even though Jesus had yet to be born. Verse 3 says, *Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteous.*

Keep reading here in verses 4 and 5—

The New Living Translation reads like this. It is so easy to understand—

SCRIPTURE: Romans 4:4-5 ⁴ *When people work, their wages are not a gift, but something they have earned.* ⁵ *But people are counted as righteous, not because of their work, but because of their faith in God who forgives sinners (NLT).*

ILLUSTRATION: When we work, we get paid. It would be crazy for someone to think every time he or she got a pay check, he was receiving some gift from his employer. Have you ever worked for someone that came across as if they were doing you a favor, and when you got paid, it was as if they were giving you a gift? That's not fun, is it? But, when you work, you expect payment. There's a contract. There's a deal. You have agreed to work a certain function for a particular wage, and on pay day, you expect to be paid.

EXPLANATION: But, Paul makes a distinction. We are counted righteous because of faith in God, not because of anything we did. This makes it all the more incredible. We didn't earn it. God does it for us because he loves us. And, we just can't understand it. On our spiritual accounts, we start out bankrupt. God is the auditor, sees we are serious trouble—we are completely spiritually bankrupt. We are in debt. We are not only, not righteous, but we are sinners. We are very unrighteous. And, God in Jesus Christ, gave us more than we could ever hope or

ask for—providing for all our needs—making our account completely right and completely full. And, he did this not because of anything we did to earn it but because we are his children, and he loves us.

Second, GOD DOES NOT CREDIT BECAUSE OF PRIOR PRIVILEGE.

SCRIPTURE: Previously in Romans, Paul talked about a righteousness now revealed apart from the Law. Romans 3:21 –*But now apart from the law the righteousness of God has been made known...*

EXPLANATION: The Romans would all agree Abraham was a righteous man. But, Paul reminded them the Law had not been revealed to man during the life of Abraham. The Law, which sought to make people righteous, but which ultimately proved people’s unrighteousness (because people could not really follow the Law) and hints the need for a Messiah—it came 430 years after Abraham died.

Abraham was righteous in God’s eyes because he believed him. He did not have the Law yet. But, God told him to leave his land, and he went. God told him to go, and he followed. We see, by understanding when God called Abraham, all the “privileges” Abraham gained after he obeyed God were not what made him righteous. When God called Abraham righteous, he didn’t have a special privilege.

Look starting in verse 9 of Chapter 4—

SCRIPTURE: Romans 4:9-15 ⁹ *Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham’s faith was credited to him as righteousness.* ¹⁰ *Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before!* ¹¹ *And he received circumcision as a sign, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them.* 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.* ¹³ *It was not through the 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.* ¹⁴ *For if those who depend on the law are heirs, faith means nothing and the promise is worthless,* ¹⁵ *because the law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression (NIV).*

EXPLANATION: That is a very dense and jammed-packed couple of paragraphs of scripture. In the scripture, Paul points out that Abraham was not circumcised when God called him righteous. And, in the eyes of the Jews, you had to be circumcised to be righteous. It was before that. The circumcision was an action that was a sign of his faith. His faith made empowered him to obey God even more. And, Paul wants to make it clear: Abraham is not only the father of the Jews—who have this physical sign of circumcision—but he is the father of all those who don't have this visible display of religion. So, the Jews of this day tended to think, *We grew up learning the Law and have followed the Law, so we started the game on second base. Now all we need is a home run.* But, Paul reminded them, they were not counted as specially privileged and that God had not credited any prior privilege to their account—but merely faith.

Today, you will hear people say, “He was a person of faith.” So, you see, we have kind of white-washed the term “faith.” You should know, I am saying this person was a man of faith in Jesus—not just a man of faith. The things that happen after you believe in God through faith in Jesus do not save you or save you more. They just help you move into a deeper understanding of his love for us and grace.

APPLICATION: Listen to this: Baptism doesn't save you. The Lord's Supper doesn't save you. Going to church doesn't save you. Having perfect attendance does not save you. So, quit trying to trick yourself into believing you are saved by things you have done, are doing, or plan to do. We are only saved by the blood of Jesus Christ, repenting of sin, and trusting him as Savior.

ILLUSTRATION: I got into this baptism discussion. We were talking about a plane crash, and I said, “So, you're telling me, the 230 people were going down, could not be saved because there was no baptistery on that plane.” I'm sorry, but the first prayer God hears is, “Forgive me, a sinner.”

EXPLANATION: Forgiving your friend does not save you. Forgiving your ex does not save you. It might improve your quality of life, but it's not going to save you. Going on a mission trip does not save you. Giving away everything you have until you're down to a t-shirt and pair of shorts does not save you. These things do not save you just as all these things Abraham did didn't save him. He was counted as righteous before God before he did all these things because he believed. Do you understand? And, then think about this: When did Jesus die for us and make us friends with God?

While we were yet sinners (Romans 5:8).

CONCLUSION: If you're listening to this, and you thinking, "There's some things I really need to clean up before I become a Christian. Before I follow Jesus, I need to fix this and this. Well, listen, you'll never fix it all. Jesus died on that cross while we were yet sinners.

So, coming to salvation in Christ has as much to do with surrendering pride as anything else. It's the point and place in your life when you realize I can never do it on my own. *No, I will never be good enough to come to God without any help from Jesus, no matter how hard I try.* It's surrender, and it's a letting go. And, it is *God, forgive me a sinner. I believe.*

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I use the NIV translation of scripture because of its conversational nature. Feel free to go to Bible Gateway and copy and paste whichever translation you want to use. This transcript has been edited to an outline format that improves readability and therefore may not exactly follow the video edition.

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Sincerely, Paul Gunn
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