

Romans 4A (2017)

- To those who survived my fire hydrant of Christian doctrine last week from the end of Chapter 3, welcome back
 - Last week we focused on Paul's summary of how we may obtain righteousness
 - God's solution solved all the problems to gaining heaven that Paul outlined in the earlier chapters
 - Which explained why Paul's summary was long and wordy
 - Paul put the whole solution out on the table knowing he's going to explain each part in detail in coming chapters
 - So let's run through the summary quickly looking at it as a roadmap for where we go next
 - First, in v.21 Paul says the solution is "apart from the Law"
 - So therefore we can expect Paul to explain more about the relationship between God's law and our salvation
 - Secondly, Paul says the righteousness we need for heaven is God's own righteousness, not some repaired version of our own
 - So we want a better explanation of how we get God's righteousness
 - At the end of v.21, Paul says this plan was promised in the Old Testament by the prophets
 - So Paul will need to show us where that is true
 - And He says the righteousness we receive from God is manifested through our faith in Christ
 - So we want more details on how this process of imputing righteousness actually happens through our faith
 - Paul adds this process is without distinction, so we would like to see how it's been true for both Jew and Gentile
 - Then, Paul wrapped up the summary saying this solution arrives at us being declared justified or innocent in God's court

- We need to understand just how innocent we are in God's eyes
- And God is able to remain just in declaring us innocent because He publicly displayed His Son as a sacrifice for our sake
- We certainly want to know more about how one man's death can save us from judgment and save God from accusations of injustice
- We have all of that to examine in the coming chapters
 - Knowing these things will be very helpful in defending your faith and maintaining your hope in the face of the enemy's schemes
 - The more we know about how we're saved in Christ, the less likely we are to doubt in that salvation
 - And the better we can explain why we will be in Heaven the more easily we can share this truth with others
 - So as we move ahead, we're going to dive into the details of that summary, block by block
 - The very first of those explanations actually comes at the end of Chapter 3 in vs.27-31 after Paul's summary
 - We studied these last week, as Paul elaborated on the meaning of "apart from the Law"
 - He said the fact that the Lord has designed the plan of redemption without works of Law, removes any possibility that mankind could claim to play a part
 - Paul talked of a law of works vs. a law of faith
 - You could replace the word "law" with the word "solution" or "means"
 - Paul was asking how does God exclude the possibility of us boasting?
 - He couldn't do that with a solution of works but He does do that with a solution dependent on faith
 - Especially when that faith is itself something that God produces in our heart

- And because the solution works through faith and not by works, it becomes equally available to Jew and Gentile
 - Only the Jews had the Law, so if the solution were on the basis of Law only the Jews could be saved
 - That's what many Jews thought, of course, because they misunderstood the role of the Law
 - But since the solution is based on faith, then salvation is equally available to both Jew and Gentile
- But does a solution of faith nullify the Law? No, Paul says
 - The fact that the solution requires faith is an acknowledgment that the Law is so demanding we can't meet its terms
 - So because the Law must be met perfectly, we needed a solution that didn't depend on us keeping the law in our own effort
 - We needed someone else do that hard work for us
- Which brings us to Chapter 4, and our fifth block in this study, the Old Testament proofs
 - Remember, Paul began by saying that the salvation we have was witnessed by the Law and Prophets
 - That phrase refers to the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament
 - So now Paul uses Chapter 4 to make those proofs
 - And in the process, we learn some interesting things about how this salvation plan relates to Old Testament concepts like circumcision and the covenants
 - Starting with THE classic example of salvation by faith; Abraham

Rom. 4:1 What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found?

Rom. 4:2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.

Rom. 4:3 For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."

Rom. 4:4 Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due.

Rom. 4:5 But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness,

- Paul opens asking what would we say about Abraham's relationship with the father?
 - Paul says Abraham was the forefather of the Jewish people, by the flesh
 - All Jews descended from this man
 - And as such, he is the most revered man in Judaism
 - Only Moses is close
 - Because this man is such a powerful icon for every Jew, Paul uses Abraham's example to prove his point about salvation apart from works
 - The Bible calls Abraham a friend of God, which tells us that the Lord found a just way to overlook Abraham's sin and restore relationship
 - But Abraham lived long before God gave Israel the Law at Sinai with the Old Covenant
 - Which raises some obvious and important implications
 - Abraham could not have known of the requirements of the Old Covenant
 - He didn't possess the tablets with the Law nor the tabernacle for sacrifice nor was the priesthood in existence
 - So Abraham's good standing with the Lord couldn't have been on the basis of doing works under that Law
 - It was literally impossible
 - So God must have had some other way for Abraham
- Paul says if Abraham had been restored on the basis of good works, then the Bible would have acknowledged Abraham's excellent service to God
 - We would forever be talking about Abraham as the example of good works, perfect obedience and piety
 - And Abraham could have boasted for his own sake

- We could find examples in scripture of Abraham bragging to Isaac about his accomplishments
- And when he blessed his children as patriarchs did, he would have pointed to that example for the family
- But the Bible never speaks of Abraham in those ways and neither does Abraham boast of himself in that way
 - Instead, the Bible calls Abraham the father of faith
 - Paul quotes Genesis 15:6 when the Lord testified that Abraham believed God
 - The Lord promised Abraham that his wife would bear him a son though she was long past child bearing years and had never given birth yet
 - Based solely on the revealed word of God, Abraham believed this promise would come true
- Then, because of Abraham's faith in God's word, the Lord credited Abraham's faith as righteousness
 - This is an example of the imputation of righteousness, which we discussed briefly last time
 - God assigned something (righteousness) to Abraham that Abraham did not possess
 - And that assignment was not based on Abraham's act or decision but God's
 - Like a child chosen for adoption by new parents
- Paul elaborates on this key point in v.4 saying Abraham didn't earn something in this exchange
 - If Abraham was being declared righteous because of something he did, then the scriptures wouldn't have described it as a "credit" of righteousness
 - Instead, the Bible would say Abraham earned his righteousness, which was a wage paid to him by God for his hard work
 - But the Bible says Abraham's righteousness wasn't paid to him, but credited or reckoned to him

- God, in His role as the bookkeeper of men's souls, lined out Abraham's debt of sin in His heavenly ledger and credited Abraham's account as paid in full
- In v.5 Paul adds this credit came to Abraham solely because of his faith in God, Who is the justifier of the ungodly
 - This statement raises another important aspect of our doctrine of salvation by grace and not works
 - Notice what Abraham was believing in
 - He believed in Him who justifies the ungodly
- Three details emerge from that statement, and these statements give us the framework of the saving Gospel
 - First, Abraham's faith was in a person
 - Notice it says Abraham believed in Him, referring to God and perhaps more specifically the Messiah
 - In the Gospels, Jesus said this:

John 8:56 "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad."

- Abraham's faith was not in an event or a blessing
 - Yes, Abraham believed in the promise God gave Him concerning a son, but his faith wasn't in the blessing itself
 - If someone makes you a promise, what causes you to trust in their promise?
 - Isn't your faith based in the trustworthiness and capacity of the person to keep that promise?
 - If a used car salesman promises to give you a million dollars and Warren Buffet promises to give you a million dollars, which promise do you believe?
 - The promises are exactly the same, but the promiser is very different
- Abraham believed the promise God gave concerning Isaac because Abraham trusted in the Lord to be faithful concerning His word

- And so it was Abraham's faith in the trustworthiness of God that lead him to believe
- And by that faith, God was pleased to credit Abraham with righteousness
- This is the same process for anyone who is saved by the grace of God
 - The person receives a promise from God, and the person places faith (belief) in God to fulfill that promise
 - They expect what has been promised to come to pass, and they put aside all doubt
 - The future promise of God is as certain as history because we know the One Who promised is faithful to keep His word
 - As the writer of Hebrews says

Heb. 11:1 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.

Heb. 11:2 For by it the men of old gained approval.

- This leads us to the second important theological point raised by this verse
 - Throughout history the object of a saving faith has never changed
 - The object of our faith is always the Person of God and His faithfulness to keep His promises
 - Once again, Hebrews says it best:

Heb. 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him.

- So like Abraham, a Christian today has faith in God (Christ) to fulfill His promises to justify us and raise us from the dead
 - We place our trust in Him to keep that promise to us
 - And we base our trust in Him on the basis of the testimony of His power and authority to keep His word
 - His resurrection from the dead was intended as proof to us that we can take Him at His word when He promised to do the same for us

- But while the object of our faith never changes, the content of our faith does differ from age to age in God's plan, which is the third point from this verse
 - In early times, the Lord had revealed only parts of His plan to redeem mankind
 - Men knew God would make a way to justify them despite their sin
 - But they didn't necessarily understand all that God would do to bring it about
 - Noah, Abraham, David, and even the prophets knew only parts of this plan
 - So we say the content of their faith varied
 - Noah was told to build a boat to survive a flood
 - Abraham was told he would have son in his old age
 - David was told he would have an heir Who would rule on the throne of Israel forever
 - The prophets were told that God would give His people a new covenant and a new heart and a kingdom where a Messiah would rule
 - In each case, the content of God's promise differed, growing from generation to generation as God revealed more of His plan
 - But in all cases the object of faith remained in God to justify His people
 - Today, the full plan of God has been revealed in Christ, the promised Messiah
 - With the full plan now revealed, the content of our faith and the object of our faith have become one in the same: Jesus Christ
 - We place our faith in the God Man and the promise we believe is that He is our Messiah...the object and content are now complete
 - Hebrews again has the summary:

Heb. 1:1 God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways,

[Heb. 1:2](#) in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.

- Finally, the last point raised by v.5 is that saving faith is a trust in God to justify the ungodly
 - Our faith in God begins with a recognition that we are unworthy of entering His presence on our own merits because we are ungodly
 - Therefore we turn to God to solve that problem for us
 - We recognize He is a justifier of the ungodly
 - That he can overcome our sin problem for us, and therefore we place no confidence in our own ability to solve the problem
 - In the Gospels, this point is typically described as the repentance that leads to salvation

[Rom. 2:4](#) Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?

- Repentance is a personal awareness that we cannot find the solution to Heaven on our own, so we stop trying
- Instead, we trust in God to justify us, the ungodly
- So Abraham was declared righteous because of His faith in God's trustworthiness to keep His promises and to justify him, an undeserving and ungodly sinner
 - And because of that faith in God, He credited Abraham's faith as righteousness
 - Notice, God didn't make Abraham righteous
 - Rather God credited Abraham's account in Heaven
 - So that at the moment Abraham stood before God following His death, he would be acquitted of his sin at that point
 - Including the sin that Abraham committed after Genesis 15
 - The rest of the story of Abraham reminds us that this man was not sinless following his justification by faith

- Abraham commits several high profile sins yet his justification remained in effect
- The Judge's declaration of not guilty is never reversed
- Because justification is not a description of Abraham's condition (i.e., it doesn't declare Abraham was sinless)
- It's a declaration of God's judgment of Abraham (i.e., it says Abraham was guilt-less for his sin)
- So Abraham's example is proof to us that salvation was never by doing works of Law
 - It's proof because of when Abraham lived
 - He lived prior to the giving of the Law, so Law can't be a necessity for salvation
 - And if the Lord could find a way to offer righteousness to even one ungodly person apart from the Law, then the Law is clearly not necessary
- Secondly, Abraham's example is proof of salvation without works because of how the Lord declared he was saved
 - He was credited with righteousness, he didn't earn it
 - So works have zero bearing on our righteousness
 - And if this is true prior to being justified, then it remains equally true after we are justified
 - A Christian does not become more righteous because of good works after faith than he or she did before faith
 - Our righteousness comes by means other than works. Period.
- We might think Abraham's example shuts the door on these questions, but it doesn't, which is why Chapter 4 doesn't end after v.5
 - If the chapter had ended here, some could argue that God changed the rules after Abraham's day
 - A Jew particularly might say that once the Law came through Moses, the rules for salvation were updated to reflect the Law's demands

- So that following Moses, a person must keep the Law to be saved
- You may have heard some argue this point, even to Christians, and they argue that why else would God have provided His Law?
- So Paul continues his explanation of Old Testament proofs by introducing his second major Old Testament example: David

Rom. 4:6 just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:

Rom. 4:7 “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven,
And whose sins have been covered.

Rom. 4:8 “Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account.”

- Paul quotes from Psalm 32, a psalm written by David
 - In the first two verses of that psalm David declared that the blessed man (or woman) is one whose lawless deeds or sins have been forgiven by God
 - Specifically, he says whose sins have been covered
 - To cover a sin is euphemism for atonement, making payment for a debt of sin
 - In the same way that we might say we “cover” our debts
 - So being blessed is having your sin debt paid for
 - And he says a person is blessed when the Lord does not take sin into account
 - The Septuagint words it a little differently

Psa. 32:2 Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin, and whose mouth there is no guile.

- There’s that word again: impute
- Only it’s used here in the negative fashion as David says we’re blessed when the Lord does not count our sin as our own
- Rather we are blessed when the Lord would do the opposite, imputing us with His righteousness

- Notice how Paul introduced this quote in v.6 when he says David was testifying that God credits righteousness apart from works
 - David said that blessedness was having our debts covered, that is, paid for by someone other than us
 - And that God would not hold our debts against him, that is He would forgive them some other way
 - David said this is how we are blessed by God, therefore trying to work off our debt by ourselves is NOT being blessed
 - And anyone who has ever labored under the misconception that works get us into heaven can testify to the fact that this is not a blessed way to live
 - It's almost nonstop condemnation and doubt interrupted only by periods of self-righteous pride
- David's example serves as a "second witness" in support of Paul's point, but Paul chose to use Abraham and David for a very specific reason
 - These two men slam the door on any suggestion that the Law of Moses has some connection to the Lord's plan of redemption
 - Abraham was clearly saved before the Law was even known or available
 - His sin was covered, and a relationship with the Lord was established on the basis of his faith in God's promises
 - And then we have David who lived after the Law, and yet David continued to testify that blessedness from God was on the same basis
 - God pays our sin debt for us and will not count our sins against us
 - We do not work our way to righteousness
 - So if salvation was by trusting in God to justify the ungodly before the Law and it was still the same way after the Law came, then the Law did not change that plan
 - The Law is good and holy and necessary for reasons Paul will address later in this letter
 - But the Law has never been a means to salvation, whether in whole or part, whether before we're saved or after

- So Paul said in Chapter 3 that God's plan of salvation was witnessed in the Law and the Prophets, and now he's shown that to be true
 - Abraham's story is found in Genesis, which is one of the books of the "law" according to Jewish reckoning
 - And the same message is repeated in the Psalms, which is part of the "prophets" as Jews divide their scriptures
 - God has always described the means of salvation in the same terms in His word
 - The only thing that's changed over history is how much detail of the plan was known
- Next, Paul moves to exploring another point from his Chapter 3 summary: this salvation plan is for all mankind, there is no distinction between Jew and Gentile

Rom. 4:9 Is this blessing then on the circumcised, or on the uncircumcised also? For we say, "Faith was credited to Abraham as righteousness."

Rom. 4:10 How then was it credited? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised;

Rom. 4:11 and he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, so that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be credited to them,

Rom. 4:12 and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised.

- Paul answers simply, "What was Abraham's state when he was declared righteous? Was it before or after he was circumcised?"
 - Circumcision was like a Jewish birth certificate
 - It was the basis for Jewish identity and it was the sign of belonging to the Abrahamic covenant
 - Every boy born in the family of Israel was to be circumcised at the age of 8 days old
 - Women are not circumcised, of course, but they were included under this sign through association with the male authority of their family
 - A daughter was covered by the sign of her father

- And when the girl was married, she was covered by the sign of her husband
- Therefore, circumcision was a key distinction between Jew and Gentile
 - And since Paul used Abraham, the father of the Jewish people, as his example, the question arises was God's plan only for Jews?
 - But here again, the Lord orchestrated Abraham's life and the timing of these events to ensure we could not make such a mistake
 - Paul says in v.10 that Abraham's justification – the moment he was declared not guilty by God – happened while he was still uncircumcised
 - So clearly, circumcision is not part of the process of salvation
 - But more than that, it means that Jewish identity is not a part of the plan either
 - The Jewish people are important to God's plan
 - But Jewish identity is not a prerequisite for salvation, which Abraham proves
- So what is the significance to circumcision? Paul gives that answer in vs.11-12
 - Paul says Abraham received circumcision as a sign, a seal of the righteousness of the faith Abraham had beforehand
 - Paul means that the sign is a witness to the covenant that God made with Abraham
 - The mark in the person's body served as evidence the person was in covenant with God
 - And God ordered that Abraham take the mark of circumcision after he believed to make a point
 - A sign isn't the enacting of a covenant; it *follows* the enacting of a covenant
 - A sign signifies that a covenant *has been* formed
 - Like a highway sign that announces you are approaching a city

- The sign doesn't make the city a reality...the city doesn't appear because we erected the sign
- We only erect the sign after a city has been established
- Circumcision gave outward evidence of Abraham's faith in the promise of God, which Abraham had beforehand, Paul says
 - God even designed the method of circumcision to reflect this truth

Gen. 17:10 "This is My covenant, which you shall keep, between Me and you and your descendants after you: every male among you shall be circumcised.

Gen. 17:11 "And you shall be circumcised in the flesh of your foreskin, and it shall be the sign of the covenant between Me and you.

Gen. 17:12 "And every male among you who is eight days old shall be circumcised throughout your generations, a servant who is born in the house or who is bought with money from any foreigner, who is not of your descendants.

Gen. 17:13 "A servant who is born in your house or who is bought with your money shall surely be circumcised; thus shall My covenant be in your flesh for an everlasting covenant.

Gen. 17:14 "But an uncircumcised male who is not circumcised in the flesh of his foreskin, that person shall be cut off from his people; he has broken My covenant."

- God commanded that the mark be taken at a very early age to reinforce the meaning of the sign
 - A mark in the flesh is given to male Jewish children at 8 days old, before the child is old enough to choose this mark for himself
 - This reminds us that the covenant is already in force for each Jewish child on the basis of God's promise to Abraham, without respect to the child's personal choice
 - Just as the covenant was in effect for Abraham before he was circumcised
 - Furthermore, if a child is not circumcised, the child breaks the covenant, and you can't break a covenant unless it's already in effect
 - This same relationship between covenant and sign holds true for the New Covenant
 - The Lord makes promises to us concerning His Son, our Savior

- And as we trust in those promises (i.e., believe in the Gospel), we're declared righteous on the basis of our faith in that promise
- Then later we take a sign of that covenant when we submit to water baptism
- Water baptism follows our entry into the covenant, it doesn't bring the covenant into effect (it doesn't save us)
- So God determined the timing of circumcision to teach the relationship between His covenant to Abraham, and its sign
 - Abraham's faith brought him to righteousness before the covenant was put in place
 - And the sign was taken after the covenant was formed to ensure we would know it didn't create Abraham's righteousness
 - So Abraham serves as a model for both the Jew (who has been circumcised) and for the Gentile who has not
 - For both groups, the answer to the question of how we become righteous is the same: by faith – irrespective of when or if we are circumcised
- This leads to an important distinction between the Abrahamic covenant and the New Covenant
 - The Abrahamic covenant promised the blessing of Jewish identity for those born into the line of Abraham
 - Jews entered into that covenant by birth into the physical line of Abraham
 - And the mark of circumcision is a sign of that relationship
 - But that covenant doesn't automatically convey the spiritual blessings Abraham received by faith in God's promises
 - That 8-day old Jewish boy is included in the Abrahamic covenant
 - But that child is not credited with the righteousness Abraham received
 - Only if that child repeats the faith of Abraham will he receive the credit of righteousness

- So the Abrahamic covenant was not a means of salvation, though it implies the coming of the New Covenant
 - It established a series of promises to be fulfilled in Abraham's family later to be called Israel
 - God is fulfilling those promises through his family line, and their accomplishments are not dependent on faith
 - Each child receives the mark of circumcision to reflect they have been born into that covenant
- But only the one who believes, as Abraham did, in the promises of God will be credited with righteousness as was Abraham
 - Paul says in v.12 that Abraham is the father (in the flesh) of those who have received physical circumcision
 - But more importantly, he is also the father (i.e., an example) for all who follow in him in faith
 - So he serves an example of how one obtains righteousness by faith, whether you are a Jew (circumcised) or Gentile (uncircumcised)