



The Father of Faith for All

Romans 4:9-12

1. The Question (verse 9)
2. The Answer (verse 10)
3. The Purpose (verse 11)

One of the things that I love about the Bible is that it tells a story. It tells us about his ways and his dealings with the sons of men. In particular, the Bible tells the story of how God redeems his people. Whether that's the Jews who were enslaved in Egypt. Or whether it's Israel who were exiled to Babylon. Or whether it is us today, who were in bondage to our sin.

The Bible tells the story of redemption. It tells the story of how we, who are in trouble, can be brought back to God.

Central to that story is a man called Abraham. God called him from Ur of the Chaldeans, which is modern day Iraq. And God called him to travel some 1,000 miles by land to the promised land of Israel. And when God called him, here's what he said:

Genesis 12:1-3

"Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you.
I will make of you a great nation,
And I will bless you and make your name great,
so that you will be a blessing.
I will bless those who bless you,
and him who dishonors you I will curse,
and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

And Abraham went. And he came into that land. And indeed, he became the father of a great nation. He became the father of the Jews, a people that has continued until this day. Long gone are the "the Hittites, the Girgashites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites" (Deuteronomy 7:1). But the Jewish people have endured until today, because God has stayed true to his promise to make of Abraham "a great nation" (Genesis 12:2).

And the Jews have never forgotten that it all started with Abraham. He is the father of their nation. He is the one to whom many of them look.

And the story of the Old Testament is the story of how God has been faithful to the nation of Israel, often redeeming them from their troubles. But what is often missed is the role that Abraham has in the life of other nations. When God called Abraham, he said, "... in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Genesis 12:3).

Right there is the seed of the gospel--that through Abraham, the blessing that God was going to give to this nation of the Jews would spread to all the nations of the earth. And of course, this came about through Jesus Christ who was a Jew from the seed of Abraham. Christ's sacrifice upon the cross was not just for the Jews, but for all who would believe on him.

In fact, the promise of the book of Revelation is that there will be representatives from every tribe and language and people and nation, around the throne giving praise and honor to Jesus Christ who ransomed them with his blood to be the people of God! And the role that Abraham would play in the redemption of those around the world was made clear to Abraham, himself. For, when he received the covenant of circumcision, God said to him, "Behold, my covenant is with you, and you shall be the father of a multitude of nations" (Genesis 17:4). Indeed, it was at that moment that God changed his name from Abram to Abraham. "Abram" means "exalted father." "Abraham" means "father of a multitude."

And as we come to our text today, we are going to see this very thing spelled out for us by the apostle Paul. That Abraham isn't merely the father of the Jews, but he is the father of all who have faith. My message this morning is entitled, "The Father of Faith for All." It comes from Romans 4 and verses 9 through 12. Let's read the text together.

Romans 4:9-12

Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? For we say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness. How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well, and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

Our text this morning begins with ...

1. A Question (verse 9)

Paul asks, ...

Romans 4:9

Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? For we say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness.

And this question takes us back to our message last week, when we looked at verses 1-8. Now, if you remember, I entitled my message, "Counted Righteous," because that's what those verses talk about. They speak of the reality of what God does with our faith.

When we believe in God, he looks down upon us, and credits our faith as righteousness. In other words, our faith goes up to God, and his righteousness comes down, credited to our account. And so, even though we aren't righteous in and of ourselves. God considers us to be righteous because of our faith in him! This seems too good to be true! But this is what God does.

The case in point is Abraham. Look at verse 3.

Romans 4:3

For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness."

That's a quote from Genesis 15:6 that proves Paul's point. God told Abraham to go outside at night and look up at the stars and try to number them. And God said, "So shall your offspring be" (Genesis 15:5). And Abraham believed God. And God counted it to him as righteousness.

And what is true of Abraham is true of the gospel. When we believe in Christ, and all that he has done for us on the cross. God looks at our faith and credits it to our account as righteousness. It is by grace through faith that we are saved!

Paul continued with an illustration of what it means to be counted righteous in verses 4 and 5. He picks the illustration of a worker.

Romans 4:4-5

Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness,

In other words, this is how the gospel comes. It comes by grace! It doesn't come by works! The worker doesn't receive his wages as a gift. He receives his wages as what is due to him.

But God's righteousness doesn't work like this. God grants us righteousness by faith as a gift. This is the gospel. As Paul said in Romans 3:24, "[We are] justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." And so, after bringing up Abraham, and after giving an illustration of grace, Paul mentions David and the blessing that he received when God didn't count his sins against him. This comes in verses 7 and 8 (which quote from Psalm 32:1-2).

Romans 4:7-8

"Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven,
and whose sins are covered;
blessed is the man against whom the Lord
will not count his sin."

And last week we reflected upon these words. How freeing (Psalm 32:4) it is when your sins, which laid heavy upon your shoulders, are taken away. How life-giving (Psalm 32:3) it is when your sins, which stain your soul, are covered over to make clean! How blessed (Psalm 32:1-2) you are when your sins, which come with the penalty of death, are not counted against you!

And church family, I press upon you the importance of experiencing forgiveness of sins! It takes a burden from your back! It can restore your vitality! It will bring you everlasting joy! That is the blessings of believing in Christ! Never underestimate the blessing it is to believe in Jesus.

And then the question comes (in verse 9). What about this blessing?

Romans 4:9

Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? For we say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness.

The question comes up because David, if you remember, was a circumcised, covenant member of the people of God. So, is this blessing only for the Jews? Is this blessing only for those in the covenant community? Then, in verse 10 we have ...

2. The Answer (verse 10)

And in his answer, Paul focuses upon Abraham.

Romans 4:10

How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised?

In other words, when Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him as righteousness, was Abraham circumcised? Well, let's review a bit of Abrahamic history. God called him in Genesis 12, saying, "Go ... To the land I will show you. ... In you all the families of the earth will be blessed" (12:1-3)

In Genesis 15, we see Abraham's faith. "Abraham believed the LORD and he counted it to him as righteousness" (15:6).

In Genesis 17, we see the covenant of circumcision that God made with Abraham. "This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised" (17:10).

So, again, the question in verse 10, ...

Romans 4:10

How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised?

If you look on the overhead, you see that he was counted righteous in Genesis 15. You see that he was circumcised in Genesis 17. Paul answers the question with these words, ...

Romans 4:10

... It was not after, but before he was circumcised.

And when you chase down a few things, you see that circumcision came quite a bit later, like more than a decade later. For, in Genesis 16, we see Ishmael born. In Genesis 17:25, we see Ishmael circumcised at age 13 on the same day as his father.

So, the answer to the question is this: Faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness before he was circumcised. More than 13 years before he was circumcised!

Here's the thing: this timing was not an accident! Look at verse 11. My third point this morning:

3. The Purpose (verses 11-12)

Romans 4:11

He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well,

In other words, circumcision was a sign of the righteousness that he already possessed. By faith he obtained righteousness in Genesis 15. He was given the covenant of circumcision in chapter 17, more than a decade later. And here's the big lesson: righteousness doesn't come through circumcision!

And it's right here that people so often get it backwards. People often think that righteousness comes through religious acts.

You can see this is the pagan world. Where people bring sacrifices to offer up to their gods to bring some blessing in their life. Where people are giving money to their holy men for some problem they are facing in their life. Where high importance is placed upon the burial ritual to insure that their spirits would be released from their bodies.

You can see it in the church as well. Whether it's going to church or giving to church. Whether it's offering up some specific prayers or lighting some certain candles. Whether it's being dipped in water or eating some bread and drinking some juice.

We easily think that it's something that we do that brings us righteousness. But Paul would bring us back to Abraham. "Look," he says, "Abraham wasn't counted righteous through some religious ritual! Abraham was counted righteous through faith!" The religious ritual of circumcision came later! It came afterwards. It came with a purpose. But its purpose wasn't for obtaining righteousness.

And what was true in Abraham has a higher purpose for all of us. But, did you notice the purpose of why God did it this way? It comes right there in the middle of the verse:

Romans 4:11

... The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well,

Paul is talking about the Gentiles. He is talking about those who have grown up without the law. He is talking about those who don't have any religious heritage.

And he brings them back to Abraham. He says, "You can look to him. He was believed God before circumcision. He was counted righteous before circumcision. And you, who haven't been circumcised, who haven't lived under the law, you too can be counted righteous in the same way that Abraham was. He is your spiritual father."

For all intents and purposes, Abraham came to faith as a Gentile! The father of our faith was a Gentile!

To the Jews in Rome (and for the Jews all over Paul's world), this was shocking! The Jews prided themselves as being children of Abraham! And as children of Abraham, they were recipients of the blessings of Abraham. They despised the Gentiles! They considered them as outsiders! And Paul comes here and says that Abraham was a Gentile before he became a Jew!

Now, this might not seem like such a big deal to us. But for the early church, it was a big deal. Because they were battling the issue of the inclusion of the Gentiles into the church. You simply need to read the book of Acts to see the battle that the early church faced. The first battle was over the inclusion of the Gentiles into the church at all!

Perhaps you remember how it took divine intervention to change Peter's perspective! He was up on the rooftop praying. He saw a vision of a sheet coming down upon the earth with "all kinds of animals and reptiles and birds of the air" (Acts 10:12). And a voice came to him: "Rise Peter, kill and eat" (Acts 10:13). And Peter refused! Because he was a follower of the law, and had never eaten such unclean animals before! But a voice came a second time, "What God has made clean, do not call common" (Acts 10:15). The vision repeated itself three times, with Peter refusing to eat each time.

Soon afterwards, there was a knock on the door. Cornelius, a god-fearing Gentile, had sent some of his servants to request of Peter that he would come to Joppa and speak with Cornelius, his family, and his friends (Acts 10:24). And Peter went and preached the gospel to them. And they believed! And the Holy Spirit was poured out upon them all!

And when he returned, he told the story to the church in Jerusalem. And the leaders of the church "fell silent," (Acts 11:18). Perhaps with a bit of reluctance that Gentiles were believing in their Messiah! But, they did accept it, saying, ...

Acts 11:18

Then to the Gentiles also God has granted repentance that leads to life.

Soon afterwards, the questions came about how to include the Gentiles into the church. The battle of circumcision was front and center in the entire controversy. Some Jews were saying that the Gentiles could be included, if only they would first be circumcised. But Peter and Paul and Barnabas won the day by insisting that, "We (Jews) believe that we will be saved through the grace of the Lord Jesus, just as they will" (Acts 15:11). Thereby saying that the Gentiles don't need to be circumcised to be a part of the church.

And this is Paul's argument here in Romans 4. That Abraham is the father of faith for the uncircumcised, every bit as much as he is the father of faith for the circumcised. But, the Jews can also look to Abraham. Look at verse 12, ...

Romans 4:12

and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

And thus, I trust you can see the reasoning for the title of my message this morning: "The Father of Faith for All." Abraham is the father of faith for the uncircumcised. Abraham is the father of faith for the circumcised. Abraham is "The Father of Faith for All." Both Jews and Gentiles can claim Abraham as their father in the faith.

It's at this point that Paul brings the religious ritual into proper perspective. For the Jew, circumcision was to be accompanied by faith. Look at the first half of verse 11.

Romans 4:11

He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised.

In other words, circumcision was an affirmation of Abraham's faith. It was a seal of God's delight in Abraham, as one who believed in the promises of God. Circumcision was not a means to justification. Circumcision was a sign of faith.

Paul nowhere told the Jews to abandon their circumcision. But, he always turned people back to faith. In Galatians 5:6, Paul gives a good perspective. He writes ...

Galatians 5:6

For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision counts for anything, but only faith working through love.

Circumcision doesn't count for anything! It's not going to make you righteous before God! Nor does uncircumcision count for anything either!

But, what counts for anything is faith! That's the only path to righteousness. It's not your own righteousness, but the righteousness that God credits to your account by faith. This is the same emphasis of verse 12.

Romans 4:12

and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

It's not the mere outward religious observance. It's the faith that makes the difference. In all religious activity, it is faith that makes a difference!

Matthew 3:7-10

But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, "You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not presume to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father,' for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

There is an application to evangelism here. John Piper writes, "Paul is passionate about reaching every people group in the world with the gospel and showing that they can be children of Abraham and heirs of the promise by faith in Jesus Christ alone apart from Jewish ritual - or American culture" (Piper). So should we be passionate about sharing the gospel with all peoples. Abraham is the father of faith for all, and we should share the gospel with all!

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on February 19, 2017 by Steve Brandon.
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