

Abraham: Paul's "go-to guy"

When I worked in the building maintenance section of the Parks and Recreation Department of the City of Charlotte, I was the go-to man for our section. That means whenever one of our crews needed to purchase parts for repairing an air conditioner or picking up plumbing parts or anything that pertained to maintaining our rec centers or any facility we kept up, they would call back to my office and then I would call our purchasing department and get them a purchase number. Our crews couldn't buy anything by themselves, it had to be authorized by yours truly and our purchasing department. There were many other ways I was the go-to man for our section and everyone knew it.

I had never thought of it this way until one day this past week when I realized that the apostle Paul had go-to men when it came to explaining the gospel and how sinners are to be justified. One of them was King David and he was a key go-to guy. ⁶ *just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:*

⁷ *"BLESSED ARE THOSE WHOSE LAWLESS DEEDS HAVE BEEN FORGIVEN, AND WHOSE SINS HAVE BEEN COVERED.*

⁸ *"BLESSED IS THE MAN WHOSE SIN THE LORD WILL NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT."* (Rom. 4:6-8 NAU) You can see just from this one passage that there was more to David's life than just being one of many kings in Israel. David's life was not a pretty one. But the mercy and grace David came to know through his sins and rebellion were used by God to manifest His righteousness and patience with sinful, fallen men.

But "the" go-to man Paul used more than any other was Abraham. Abraham was the quintessential go-to guy. He was the perfect example or illustration of the love and mercy and patience and righteousness of God Almighty. Now, take your Bibles and turn to Romans chapter 4, beginning with v.1, Romans 4, v.1 through v5., and I'm going to then drop down to v.18 and read through to chapter 5 and v.1. So Romans 4:1, **Romans 4:1** *What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found?*

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

³ *For what does the Scripture say? "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS."*

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

⁵ *But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness,
(Rom. 4:1-5 NAU)*

Now drop down to v.18,

¹⁸ *In hope against hope he believed, so that he might become a father of many nations according to that which had been spoken, "SO SHALL YOUR DESCENDANTS BE."*

¹⁹ *Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb;*

²⁰ *yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God,*

²¹ *and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform.*

²² *Therefore IT WAS ALSO CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.*

²³ *Now not for his sake only was it written that it was credited to him,*

²⁴ *but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead,*

²⁵ *He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.*

^{NAU} **Romans 5:1** *Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,
(Rom. 4:18-5:1 NAU)*

Paul, who had been a dyed-in-the-wool Pharisee, had learned what the life and death and resurrection of Jesus meant for the whole world, not just his fellow Jews. And the Lord Himself had taught him how Abraham fit into the picture. Now back to Romans 4:1.

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

I want to call your attention to something that I noticed this week and that is, this is the first time Paul has mentioned Abraham in this letter. He will mention him by name 8 times in all and with all the pronouns that refer to Abraham it's a bunch of times. But Paul just drops Abraham's name into this letter at this point in this letter by inspiration of the Spirit. That makes 4:1 what we call a "pivotal" verse. It takes us from all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God to God has provided the means by which we are saved. And Abraham is the God-given illustration of justification by faith alone that causes us to stand in the grace we're standing in right now.

Romans 5:1 *Therefore, **having been justified** by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,*

² through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith into this grace in which we stand (Rom. 5:1-2 NAU)

I hope this will help us remember that phrase, "***this grace in which we stand.***" When I worked on a grounds crew, I had pruned several trees and I carried the limbs off to the place where we usually dumped 'em. I was standing at the end of the trailer pulling the limbs off and throwing them over the little embankment down into the woods below when my legs felt like they were on fire. I had stopped the tractor and backed the trailer up to the embankment right over a fire ant nest and that's where I was standing the whole time. You know the rest. My legs were covered in fire ants and they were biting the dickens out of me. I had to run to the emergency shower we had in our shop and swat and wash those little devils off as fast as I could. Then I had to get our nurse to give me antibiotics and something for pain. Ouch! Remember that I was standing on the ant hill. We are standing in grace.

Abraham was far from perfect and he certainly wasn't sinless, no one is, and no one has ever been with the exception, of course, of the Son of God. We're going to see in a few minutes how Paul described Abraham.

And furthermore, he refers to him as "our forefather according to the flesh," meaning humanly speaking, he's the Jews and the Gentiles' father in the faith as far as we human beings go. Do you see it? As much as the Jews hated to hear it back then, Abraham is our father in the faith as much as he is theirs.

And the second thing I want you to see is this, Abraham found something. What was it?

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

So, what did Abraham find? Righteousness, Abraham found righteousness through faith in Jesus. Abraham found justification and righteousness through faith in the Christ. Abraham found the forgiveness of his sins through faith in a Man who wouldn't be born for another 1500 years.

⁸ *The Scripture, **foreseeing** that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, **preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham**, saying, "ALL THE NATIONS WILL BE BLESSED IN YOU." (Gal. 3:8 NAU). And that's it, that's the gospel that was preached to Abraham, he would be the conduit, so to speak, to bring salvation for both Jews and Gentiles 1500 years later through his Seed. ^{NAU} **Galatians 3:16** *Now the promises were spoken to Abraham and to his Seed. He does not say, "And to seeds," as referring to many, but rather to one, "And to your seed," that is, Christ. (Gal. 3:16 NAU)**

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

I love that, "But not before God." Imagine Abraham doing a lot of really good stuff trying to please God and then coming to God saying

something like, “Yahweh, look at me. Look what I’ve done. I have justified myself by all these good works. I have made myself righteous. Isn’t that good? When You called me and told me to leave my home in Ur and my family, didn’t I obey You? And when You told me to make that strange sacrifice with the divide carcass, didn’t I obey You? I am a good man. I know I’m going to heaven.” And God responds with what? “No, Abraham, your good deeds don’t amount to a hill of beans.” ² *For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.*”

Over the last 46 years I have been in dozens of homes doing visitation after a guest visited a church I had joined and when we asked the residents if they were sure they would go to heaven when they died, they almost always said, “Yes.” When we asked them why they were so sure, again, they almost always answered, “I think I’m a good person. I’ve always tried to be a good person.” And God responds with what? “No, your good deeds don’t amount to a hill of beans. Except you repent and call on the name of My Son, you will perish.” And I know the “hill of beans” thing is a little crude, but you get the idea. Actually, God’s response to the whole “I’ve tried to be a good person response” is much stronger than that. ¹¹ *THERE IS NONE WHO UNDERSTANDS, THERE IS NONE WHO SEEKS FOR GOD;*

¹² *ALL HAVE TURNED ASIDE, TOGETHER THEY HAVE BECOME USELESS; THERE IS NONE WHO DOES GOOD, THERE IS NOT EVEN ONE.*” (Rom. 3:11-12 NAU)

Now back to Abraham:

V.3, Romans 4 and verse 3:

³ *For what does the Scripture say? "ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND **IT** WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS."* In just a minute we’ll get to verses 23 and 24 where Paul applies this same wonderful truth to you and me. *AND **IT** WAS CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS."*

That’s it? All Abraham had to do to be justified was he simply had to believe the promise of God?

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⁴ *Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due.* I also heard a co-worker say to our boss when our boss thanked him for doing something, “My thanks is my pay check.”

⁵ *But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness,*
(Rom. 4:1-5 NAU)

Remember what I said earlier about Paul describing Abraham? Well, there it is, Abraham was an ungodly man. ⁵ *But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness,*

Abraham came from a family of idolaters. They had worshipped other gods. Nothing had changed within Abraham and Sara. They were in the same spiritual state when God made this promise as they were when they were in Ur of the Chaldees. And all he had to do in order to be made right with God was believe? Yes, that’s it. God justifies the ungodly on account of their believing His gospel. ²³ *Now not for his sake only was it written that it was credited to him,*

²⁴ *but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead,*

²⁵ *He who was delivered over because of our transgressions, and was raised because of our justification.*

^{NAU} **Romans 5:1** *Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ,*
(Rom. 4:23-5:1 NAU)

All who are in Christ are in Him solely by the grace of God who gave them the gifts of life and light and faith and justification. And what do I like to say? “Once justified, always justified.”

Aren’t you glad you’re ungodly? Have you ever been thankful that you’re a sinner, lost and undone? Of course not. However, Jesus said we’re the ones He came to seek and to save. Amen?

¹⁰ *"For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost."* (Lk. 19:10 NAU)

We once were lost, but now we’re found. “Once found? ...”