

## Romans 4:1-8

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, to open your Bibles to Romans 4 and Romans chapter 4.!

As righteous in his sight. So he acquits and he forgives us of our sin. And he makes us righteous in his sight. And as the Apostle has worked through Romans so far.

He's made it clear that the nature of faith. This gift of righteousness. This gift of being declared right with God.

That doesn't belong to you and I. It is a gift from God. The faith that you have is a gift from God. And what he does now is he comes to give you an illustration of that.

Good teachers do that, don't they? They give you a living, walking, talking example. They show us a real human being. They say, well, this is how it works out in practice.

[ 1 : 19 ] And they put a face on it. And that's what Abraham does. That's what Paul does here in Romans. He puts a face on it. He shows you Abraham. You'll remember, Abraham, he was called while he was a pagan.

While he was not a believer. He's somebody who is from a pagan background. Abraham in the Old Testament was an outsider. And so anyone who is an outsider, reading the Apostle Paul or listening this morning, can think, well, he's like me.

Abraham was nowhere. And God invaded his life and called him. But the Jews also who would be listening and reading this book will think, Abraham, well, he's the friend of God and the father of the faithful.

He's Father Abraham. He is the perfect example of a Jew. He's the man that the Jews would have chosen to talk about. How God worked with Abraham or how God related to Abraham.

He's the perfect example. And so what Paul does and what God says to us in Romans chapter 4, he's saying we think of God approaching God in two ways.

[ 2 : 30 ] The first way is a line of people. There's two lines. One line is a line of people who are lining up for their paycheck. They've worked all day.

And there's some people, Paul says, that is how they view God, approaching God. Paul will argue that's how we all view this to begin with. That you line up at the end of your work.

That you've done something and there'll be a reckoning or there'll be a crediting. And at the end you think, well, my good will outweigh my bad. And there'll be enough.

God will know all the bad things, but he'll see, well, exactly what I've been like. And that bad will be taken away and there'll be more good things. And so you line up before God waiting for your paycheck.

You don't stand there thinking that God is treating you with grace. You stand there thinking, I'm getting what I deserved. I've earned this in some way or other.

[ 3 : 37 ] You deserve God's favour. You deserve God's pardon. And God has to give you your due. What is right. And so in Romans 4, what Paul is going to do is he's going to ask you this.

Is that the line that Abraham was in? Was Abraham standing in that line thinking, well, when you balance up the scales of my life, the good outweighs the bad. Was Abraham thinking, I've done something to impress God or that in some way God would put me in his debt.

That God would find himself obliged to pay wages to Abraham and the wages that God pays would be, well, I'll welcome you to heaven. I'll accept you. Peace and pardon.

So the people in that line, they're not standing there thinking they're in line for a gift. They're standing thinking, give me what I've earned. And when you receive what you've earned, when you get your wages each month, you don't write a card to you, to your employer.

And you don't write them a thank you email saying, well, I'm so grateful that you've given me my wages. No, you think, well, it was kind of you, but I've earned it. I did the work.

[ 4 : 45 ] It's now my right to spend it. You gave it to me, but yeah, I earned it. And the apostle Paul takes Abraham and he says, there is a line of people and they think wages work.

Wages work. Wages work. But there's another line. And in that line of people, their chant is faith, grace. Faith, grace.

Faith, grace. Which line was Abraham in? The Jews were saying, he's at the front of this line. Because Abraham was a great worker.

And we're all standing behind Abraham, thinking this is the way we approach God. But Paul says, no, there's a second line. And it's that line that's outlined clearly in Romans.

That it's not lining up this morning as a workman to get your wages. It's rather lining up as a beggar. A beggar to beg God for something that you don't deserve.

[ 5 : 46 ] Or you could put it in a worse light. It's not just beggars. It's criminals. Criminal beggars. And you're asking for something. You're asking the very reverse of what you deserve.

That if God is handing out these things in wages, you know the people in this line, they know that is the exact opposite of what they deserve. The people in this line, they trust in someone else.

They're standing in this line. None of them are saying, give us what we deserve. They're saying, please don't give us what we deserve. Please give us mercy and grace and pardon and cleansing. And in this line, the people are helpless and they're hopeless. And they have nothing to rely upon themselves.

But their cry is only for mercy from God. And so Paul says, listen, there's two lines. Everyone's in one. Which one are you in? Everyone thinks like this.

[ 6 : 52 ] And so let's put the human face on it. Let's look at Abraham. Which of the lines was he in? Well, the Jews think he's standing in this long line of workers doing something really good.

Romans tells us there's a massive amount of people in this line. A long, long line of people thinking they're earning favor with God. Earning wages from God.

But Paul is adamant Abraham is not in that line. What does Paul say not? Paul says, if Abraham was in that line, he'd have something to boast about.

He'd be able to boast that his good outweighs his bad. He'd be able to boast that he'd been pretty obedient. And what have we seen in the last few weeks in Romans?

We have seen that God loathes. God hates boasters. God hates human beings, men and women, boys and girls, who boast about themselves.

[ 7 : 58 ] There's nothing, I think, that we understand more clearly from the end of Romans 3. God says there's no place for it. There's nothing that can bring you before God and say, God, I deserve this.

God loathes to hear sinful, fallen people boasting about themselves. So what is true about Abraham? Let's put a face on this gospel. How does it work for him?

Because how it works for Abraham is how it works for you and me. What's he saying? Let's look at verses 3, 4 and 5. Alright? Look at verse 3. Verse 3. He says, for what does the Bible say?

Abraham believed God. And it was counted to him as righteousness. 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. Now I think this leads us to a hard question when you look at this carefully.

[ 9 : 11 ] Because it looks like Paul is saying something slightly different to what he's been saying so far in Romans. All along he's been saying, do you remember?

Abraham is not in the works line. He's not in the works line. He believed God and it was counted to him for righteousness.

What does it mean that it was counted to him for righteousness? The text, as you look at it really carefully, it appears to say that his faith was counted for righteousness, not his works.

His believing in God was counted for righteousness but not his works. We need to stop here and we need to do a bit of hard thinking this morning. What is the apostle saying?

Why is he putting it this way? And so two points. The first point is this, do not count your faith in Jesus Christ as a work.

[ 10 : 14 ] That's the first thing I say. Do not count your faith in Jesus Christ as a work. I say that because that is how you could read these words.

You could misunderstand them. And the fact is, Paul says it in this particular way a number of times. So he says it in verse 3. That it was Abraham who believed God and it was counted to him

for righteousness.

Verse 5, if you look there, it says his faith is counted for righteousness. Verse 9, for we say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness. So is faith a substitute for work?

Some people want to think it is. Some people think that God demanded works in the Old Testament and the people failed.

So God comes up with a new plan. And his new plan is that he will give them something much easier to do that they can accomplish by themselves. And that is just believe and trust in Jesus Christ.

[11:16] And he will count their trusting in Jesus as though that, that faith was their righteousness. So he quotes from Genesis chapter 15 in verse 6.

Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness. What does that mean? Is it that Abraham in Genesis 15 amongst all the mass of humanity, Abraham had a little bit of faith?

And because Abraham had a little bit of faith, God rewards Abraham on the basis of that faith. It appears to say that. But the point we need to make is that this passage is set within a wider section of Romans, isn't it?

And the whole thrust of what we've been saying since the start of the year is that it's not by works. You don't earn something with God, neither do I.

So don't count faith as a work, as something that you earn wages from God. The whole passage is saying do not count your faith as a work.

[12:24] Do not think of your faith in Jesus Christ as a substitute for righteousness. Okay, I'm going to give you five things that I hope will make it a bit clearer, alright? So number one, in the context, as we've said, all works are excluded.

That's the point he's making towards Abraham, and he's making it really clearly. He does not view faith as a work, faith as a deed, or an action on your part that God sees and God rewards.

Then it would be faith wages, wouldn't it? And he's not talking about that. Do you remember what the chant of this line is? It's not faith wages. It is faith grace.

Faith grace. What does this line chant? They chant, works wages. Works wages. They're saying, what have we earned? What do we deserve? This line is saying the exact opposite.

It's the grace of God. It's a gift you don't deserve. It means that we've got to be really clear about our faith.

[13:31] That the faith we have does not put God in our debt. That God somehow or other must reward me because I believe.

Do you remember that really wonderful verse that we looked at as our assurance of pardon this morning? You can see it on your service sheet. Titus 3 verse 5. That it's not by works that we have done.

It's not by works that we have been done. So if we take faith and we make it a work, we're doing something it was never meant to do.

Never meant to be. So why is faith not to be construed in that way? Why is faith not to be understood in that way? Second thing is this. The New Testament's definition of faith is always really precise.

The New Testament's definition of faith is always precise. It's never vague. There's precision in the way that the Bible defines faith. And the New Testament never says that we are declared right with God.

[14:39] We are justified before God on account of our faith. It looks like it may be being said here, but that isn't what is being said. Everywhere in the New Testament, with the utmost precision, the New Testament always uses the preposition by.

In the sense of through, it's always really careful. It's stunning, in fact. But there's such precision. It's always through faith.

Never on account of faith. Never on account of our faith that God accepts us. But it's through faith that God accepts us. What this means is this.

It means that it's pointing you away from yourself. It means that it's pointing you to Jesus Christ. It's pointing you to someone else.

And so we need to keep that really clear in our minds as well. Faith is never stated in the Bible as the reason or the ground of our salvation. It is viewed as the channel.

[ 15 : 45 ] The channel that brings you to the Lord Jesus. The vehicle that brings you to righteousness. The power line, if I can put it like that, that connects you to electricity.

So you are not to count faith as a work, as a substitute for righteousness. The third thing to say on this. It's in the next chapter, in chapter 5.

God clearly points out that we are justified because of Christ's work. Look at me. Look at me at chapter 5, verses 18 and 19. So therefore, as one trespass, one rebellion, led to condemnation for all men.

That's Adam. So one act of righteousness, that is Christ's death on the cross, leads to justification in life for all men. Verse 19.

For as by one man's disobedience, Adam, the many were made sinners. So by the one man's obedience, Jesus, the many will be made righteous. So he's clearly saying to you and I that in this line, our only hope is Christ's obedience.

[ 16 : 53 ] His obedience, the whole of his life, from his birth to his death. Through his suffering in the place of sinners. And he speaks in verse 17 of chapter 5 of this gift of righteousness.

And so within a couple of paragraphs, Paul is saying to you, the only way that the people in this line can be made right with God, is because of Christ's death.

And so how can it be on account of your believing? Are you right with God because you believe? Or because Christ died?

And he is saying to you, it is because Christ died. And the fourth point, I want to say this, is the word reckoned and the word counted and the word credited are really important.

They refer, don't they, to an accurate kind of record keeping. It's financial accounting. So accounting is an exact science, isn't it?

[ 17 : 59 ] There's a few accountants here. I get my tax return. It doesn't say to me, Paul Levy, you owe £320-ish.

It doesn't say to me, you owe around £325, give or take £15 or something like that. It never says that, does it? Because accounting is exact.

And that's the point here. God does not do reckoning as a fraud. He is exact. He is precise. He doesn't reckon righteousness to your account when there is no righteousness to be put into your account.

He doesn't reckon faith as a substitute for righteousness. Because that doesn't balance. What does he do? What happens in the gospel?

God takes the righteousness of Christ, the perfect life of Christ, and he credits it to my account, which is in debit of righteousness. And he takes my debit of righteousness and he credits it to the Lord Jesus Christ.

[ 19 : 11 ] He who knew no sin became sin for us. That we might become the righteousness of God. And it's really important for you and I to grasp counted as righteousness.

Reckoned as righteous. And the fifth thing why we shouldn't think of faith as a work, literally his faith is counted for righteousness. Not as righteousness.

When you see this, you begin to understand what Paul is saying here. Paul is saying faith is counted to or towards righteousness.

In the sense that faith carries you in that direction. To or towards righteousness. It's not counted as righteousness. It's just a little word, isn't it?

To or towards. And Paul is saying in kind of compressed language. That faith puts you in the direction of righteousness. And that is all these words should be taken to mean.

[ 20 : 23 ] They shouldn't be forced into a position that contradicts the rest of the New Testament. What he said before immediately and what he's going to say immediately after. He's saying faith puts you in the direction of righteousness.

He doesn't explain how. He's explained that before and he'll explain that again. But the point he's making is not how his righteousness reckoned to us.

In terms of Christ's death. His point is this. Which line was Abraham standing in? Well he wasn't standing in the workers line. Saying work wages, work wages.

No he was standing in the believers line. He was standing in the group of people. Who were very unimpressive. And were not boasting about themselves.

He was standing in the line of those who had nothing to give. And nothing to offer. And so every aspect of faith is looking to someone else.

[ 21 : 29 ] And Abraham is trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ. And so do not count faith as a work. Do not think of faith as a substitute for righteousness.

Paul has compressed his language to illustrate the point. Abraham's not in the workers line. Abraham is not expecting wages. He's the one begging. He's the one asking for a free gift. Because faith puts you in that direction. He's trusting in another. Okay second point. Remember then that you can only be made right with God.

By faith alone. You can only be right with God. By faith alone. I'm going to make four points onto this point.

Number one. God justifies the one who does not work. Number two. God justifies the ungodly. Number three. God reckons righteousness to us.

[ 22 : 26 ] There's an accounting going on. And number four. God does not reckon our transgressions to us. We'll be quick. We'll be quick. We abandon ourselves into the hands of someone else.

And that someone else is Jesus Christ. His life and his death. And he gives us these four great facts. So look at verse four. Of Romans chapter four.

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. And so his faith takes him to the place. Where there can be a proper crediting. Where there can be a proper counting of righteousness. And so God justifies the one who doesn't work.

And we know that don't we. I know that. If you've been in this church for any length of time. You will know that. And yet we still don't we. We still find ourselves.

[ 23 : 32 ] Wanting. Some reason to say. I know. But Lord you would take this. Take these good works I've done. We struggle.

God gives us this great gift of righteousness. And pardon. And acceptance. And peace of conscience. And the whole glory of delighting ourselves in him.

And we stand back. And we say. I don't deserve it. I know you don't deserve it.

But you feel like you want to deserve a little bit. We want to feel as if we deserve something from God. As if we're worthy of it in some way.

And the gospel humbles us. And the gospel says you've done nothing to deserve this. God justifies those who don't work. You've not done anything.

[ 24 : 29 ] You can't do anything. And that is magnificent. And yet we struggle with it. And we stumble on it. Because we want to work.

Don't we? Rather than be completely dependent upon someone else. And we'll recognize that we're beggars. But we want to be small beggars. And the word of God.

Tells you this morning. That you're a total beggar. But God accepts beggars. Second. He justifies the ungodly.

The Jews are saying. Abraham is a great guy. Isn't he a really great guy? He was godly. No he wasn't. He was ungodly. Abraham and his fathers worshipped idols. They lived in air of the colonies.

But here's the point. God justifies the ungodly. And if you were to take that little statement. And you were to dislodge it from the rest of the gospel. From what God tells us.

[ 25 : 27 ] That God justifies the ungodly. It would be the greatest violation. Because he's saying. Here is an ungodly man.

Is he right just to keep on sinning? Is he justified in his crimes? How can that be? If you dislodge this statement from the passage.

It makes God look horrible. It makes God look unjust. But it's stated for you again and again and again. That he justifies the ungodly in this way. Because Christ died for the ungodly.

There's that great exchange that is taking place. And the ungodly sin is counted to Christ. And the righteousness of Christ is counted to the ungodly.

So he does justify the ungodly. And it's not a violation of justice. It's based on the fact that God is just. And the justifier of those who believe in Jesus Christ.

[ 26 : 26 ] Abraham was ungodly when God called him. And he believed God. And it wasn't the act of faith that made him godly.

It was the grace of God. That declared him godly. And went to work changing him. And sanctifying him to make him godly. It's not wages, work, wages, work.

It is grace, faith. Grace, faith. God justifies the one who doesn't work. And so this morning what do we have to do?

We have to abandon ourselves to him and trust in him. What a great thing it is that God justifies the ungodly. We only have demerit.

And he only has credit. And God credits the righteousness of Christ to us. And God takes all our demerit and puts them onto his son.

[ 27 : 28 ] Number three. God reckons righteousness to us. It's a strict accounting. God never makes a mistake. God never cooks the books. God never puts to our account something which didn't exist.

If he did that the gospel would be a fraud. No he doesn't do that. It is a great exchange. A great reckoning. Christ is condemned. He dies. I live.

I am justified. I am the sinner. He is the saviour. That is not wages. That is grace.

That is mercy. And faith leads us to Jesus Christ. Number four. With regards to living by faith. Made by faith.

He goes on to look at it from another angle. Can you see who he introduces? He puts another face. He looks at David. Look at David verse six. And David says this is what it means to be blessed by God.

[ 28 : 29 ] He says this is what it means to enjoy the favour of God. And just as David speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness. Apart from works.

Here is the other side. Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven. Whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.

That is written by an adulterer. It is written by a murderer. And that is such good news isn't it? God says to you if you will trust my son.

I will not count your sin against you. He won't. Why will he not count our sin against us? Because he has counted our sin in his son.

For you and in your place. And so God says I will count you as righteous in my sight. Do you see how David is putting it? It is the same thing. It is what being counted righteous means.

[ 29 : 31 ] It means your sins are forgiven. It means your sins are covered. They are not counted to you. And those two things go hand in hand. You can't have one without the other. He declares our righteousness.

And he pardons our sins. And he doesn't pardon our sin without declaring our righteousness. They stand together. Do you know how much you've sinned against him?

Do you know the horror? The horror of your conscience? Accusing you of sin? And so come and stand in this line.

Come and stand in this line. Because here is a beautiful, genuine, sweet, generous, free, free gift. That God says I will give you joy in myself.

Just come and trust in my son. That is all. It's that easy. And it's not even counted as a work.

[ 30 : 30 ] It's a gift of grace. He gives you everything you need. All you have needed is hand that's provided. And so when we look at the human picture.

When we look at Abraham. We see what it means to stand in the right line. The line of beggars finding mercy. Because that is the way you find mercy.

It's the way to find the grace of God in Jesus Christ. You come to Jesus Christ. And you waste no more time trying to earn your wages. In order to impress God. You get nowhere.

You get nowhere that way. But you come to Christ. And you receive righteousness. And you receive grace and mercy and forgiveness by faith.

Let's pray.