

Romans 4:16-25

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[0:00] Do turn with me to Romans chapter 4. Romans chapter 4, it's heartless now, so feel free to take off your tie.

! Where's Peter? No, he's not here. So, Romans chapter 4. Romans 4, and we're coming to the end of Romans 4 today.

Paul has been teaching us about the great example, the great example of faith, which is Abraham. And he says, Abraham is a great example of what it means to be a Christian. He's a model believer. He's a model of what it means to believe, and what it means to be saved. And Paul has said, listen, you've got to understand that Abraham was not saved, he was not justified, he was not made right with God in a different way than you are.

I think that's really helpful for understanding the Bible. Abraham was saved, he was justified, he was made right with God in exactly the same way you are. By faith in Jesus Christ.

[1:07] Jesus said, didn't he, I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father but through me. He doesn't say, well, now I am. I wasn't. But now I am. And now, all the way through the Bible, that's the way to being right with God.

It's accepting God at his word. And the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ was counted to Abraham in exactly the same way it's counted to you and I this morning.

And that's great news. And Abraham is a great example of the way that God justifies sinners. Of the way that God accepts men and women and boys and girls in his presence.

And so, in the first eight verses, if you remember that, it's clear that this way of accepting sinners by faith is what Abraham found. Abraham was given a promise.

He accepted God's word. He believed God's word. And so, righteousness was counted to him. Abraham had nothing to boast about. There was nothing about Abraham that he could say, I'm different to everyone else.

[2:17] And verses 9 to 12 says, it's clear that it wasn't by circumcision that Abraham was right with God. Circumcision was important. It was a sign and seal of righteousness.

It pointed forward to that. But it was added much later. It came to Abraham 14 years after he'd been accepted by God. And was righteous in God's sight.

And so, it wasn't circumcision that got Abraham right with God. And then in verses 13 to 15, which we read earlier, tells us it wasn't by a work of the law that he was accepted by God.

And he was righteous in God's sight. It wasn't his obedience. It wasn't by him trying his best. It wasn't by him doing any work of the law at all.

It wasn't the performance-driven life. It was the promise-driven life. It was accepting the promises that God had made to him. And so, we come now to the end of the chapter in verse 16.

[3:18] And I really think that the apostle adds a kind of crescendo to the chapter. One more thought. He says, it was by faith that Abraham was right with God.

So, there's no grounds to boast. It was by faith, so it wasn't circumcision. It was by faith, so it wasn't obedience to the law. It wasn't his performance in any way. It was always by grace.

And here's the one extra thought. He says, and all of this, when you understand it, brings the glory to God. That's the final thought.

All of Abraham's faith brings glory to God. His faith brings glory to God, and his hope brings glory to God. Believing the gospel, the good news of the Lord Jesus, glorifies God.

And that's a really important point to make, because the danger that the Jews fell into is that they glorified Abraham. And they were probably delighted when they heard that Paul had picked him as the example.

[4 : 24] Although they were troubled as they began to listen to him. And they realized the full force of the gospel. Because Paul summarizes this, and he says, all of what Abraham had, and all of that Abraham was, as he believed, in such a way it was all by grace, and so God is glorified.

Look at verse 20. Verse 20, I think, makes it really clear. Verse 20. No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God.

But Abraham grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God. And so often, we overlook the primary purpose of God.

If I said to you, what is the chief end of man? I hope those of you who have been around the church for a little bit could say the chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever. But if I asked you, what's the chief end of God?

What would you say? What is the main purpose of God? And the primary purpose of God is glorifying himself.

[5 : 37] And bringing glory to his own name and to his own name's sake. The primary purpose of God is not the exaltation of Abraham. And the gospel of God is not about the exaltation of any man or woman or boy or girl.

Though we are exalted, aren't we, to rule and reign with Christ. We saw last week, to be heirs of the world. But the main aim of the gospel is the glory of God. And the glory of God is, if you like the bottom line, or it's the umbrella that overarches everything.

And so, what has God done in your life if you've trusted in the Lord Jesus? God has reached out, and he has drawn you to believe in him. And as he has done that, God is glorified, and he is exalted, and his worth is known.

And his name is spread throughout all the world. Often, we can think that the only big thing, the only real big thing, is the conversion of sinners.

And the one and only aim of the conversion of sinners is that sinners wouldn't go to hell. They wouldn't suffer the torments of hell forever. And that can really motivate us.

[6 : 57] So we think, I've got to tell others. And that is, I think, one of the aims of evangelism, but it's certainly not the highest aim. It's certainly not the highest accomplishment of the gospel.

It is one of them. But it's not the highest aim. It's not the highest accomplishment of the good news of God. The highest accomplishment of the gospel is that God is glorified.

It's that God is known for his worth and his majesty, and his dignity, and his honor, and his love, and his mercy. That God is seen for who he is.

And so, when we speak about glorifying God, we're not saying that we add anything to God's glory. But it's that we come to see more of his character, and more of his majesty, and more of his ways.

And it is interesting, in this last section, where Paul comes to that theme, he looks at the gospel, about how God counts sinful men and women, and boys and girls, as righteous, when we're not righteous, we're sinners.

[8 : 07] How come God counts our sin as though it belongs to Christ, when it's not his sin, it's ours? And he says, all of that glorifies God.

And it's interesting, when it comes to this last point, and the glory of God, that that is what is right at the center of the passage. That's what's driving God. And you'll notice that Paul reverts again, and again, and again, they're teaching us about God.

We've seen that in Romans, again, and again, and again, over, and over, and over. I think it's one of the things that's really missed in many of the commentaries, that the book of Romans is a book about God. It is about the gospel, but primarily, and firstly, it's about God.

We're naturally, aren't we, kind of human being centered. We're naturally very people-centered. Self-centered. We're self-centered often in our understanding of what God has done.

What does it mean to me? But it's really clear, isn't it? Over and over again in this passage, you'll see that God is at the center of it. And so God is the one who gives grace.

[9 : 27] And God is the one who makes the promise sure. And God is the one who makes a nation out of one man. And God is the one who gives life to the dead.

And God is the one who calls into being what did not exist. And God is the one who perfects, and God is the one who performs what he promises. And God is the one who reckons sinners as righteous in his sight.

God is the one who has raised Jesus Christ from the dead. And God is the one who delivered him over to death. And so, in all this passage, we're told about God and what he's doing.

And Abraham, who was at the center, suddenly receded into the background. And every sinner, like you and me, whom God has worked in, we suddenly recede into the background.

Because when we come to understand the gospel, we understand that it's primarily about the glory of God. And so I do think the key verse is in verse 20. It teaches us that faith and hope glorify God. [10:35] Martin Luther, in his commentary, is really fresh on this passage. And what he does is a really interesting thing, is he turns it round. And so he turns it round. He doesn't speak about faith and hope.

He speaks about unbelief and despair insulting God. I think that's quite helpful. So faith and hope, on one hand, they glorify God.

But unbelief and despair insult God. And when you look at the example of Abraham, you see that the example is not of when he comes to faith in Jesus Christ.

You'll see that he hopes in Jesus Christ. He keeps believing in Jesus Christ. He keeps holding on to the promise of God, even when it appears that everything is absolutely contradicting the promises of God.

And you'll see the good things that God has promised to him. And so he keeps believing, and he keeps hoping. And it is that which glorifies God.

[11:44] And Martin Luther's words are really searching, if we've come to faith in Jesus Christ. That we keep believing, and we keep hoping, when there are obstacles in the way.

Because when the obstacles come, as we keep believing, and as we keep hoping, it shows our view of the worth of God, and the majesty of God.

And so unbelief and despair, or unbelief and hopelessness, what do they do? They insult God. And so this passage is teaching us, that nothing that Abraham does, either his believing, or his being circumcised, or his obeying the law, raises him above any of the rest.

He's leveling the field, if you like. The Jews exalted Abraham, Paul brings him down to the same level that you and I are on. And he says to you, I'm writing Romans 4, not just for him, but it's written for you.

For you. And so you and I, as the people of God in Ealing today, you and I need to keep believing the gospel of God.

[13:01] And you and I need to keep hoping. Nothing about...