



# The Footsteps of ABRAHAM

## Looking Up

- Romans 4

- Romans 4:1-3

- 1) What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found?
- 2) For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath *whereof* to glory; but not before God.
- 3) For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.

- Romans 4:3 MSG

- 3) What we read in Scripture is, "*Abraham believed in what God was doing for him, and that was the turning point. He trusted God to set him right instead of trying to be right on his own.*"

- *Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness...*

- One of the cornerstone verses of our Faith...

- But, what is it saying?

- The reference seems fairly simple and direct...

- It was the FAITH of Abraham that saved him

- Our goal today is to better appreciate that Faith

- And to find that same saving Faith for our lives

- But, which one of the great Acts of Faith in Abraham's life is Romans 4 referring to?
- Sure, we know that "*Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness...*"
  - But, what specifically did he do?
    - Let's look at a few of the faithful acts in Abraham's life...
- Maybe Romans 4 is referring to the Battle to Reclaim Lot and Sodom
  - Surely that's an amazing story
- The story comes from Genesis 14 (Verses 8-23)
- Four Kings draw up in battle against five...
  - Sodom and Gomorrah are overthrown
  - And Chedorlaomer carries off the goods and people of Sodom...
    - Including Lot, Abraham's nephew
- Abraham rounds up 318 of his servants and pursues after them
  - And, God gives unto Abraham a victorious battle
- As Abraham returns from the battle
  - He comes to the Valley of Shaveh...
  - The King's Dale
- And out to meet him comes Bera, the King of Sodom
  - The King of Sodom...
  - The King of *Sin*...
- Sodom was the most wicked city existing at that time
  - And even now, it is eternally associated with Sin
- This man was the King of Sodom...
- And, one thing is as certain today as it was then...

- Crime Pays... Sin sells... Wickedness is very profitable...
- Sodom was rich... “Filthy” Rich!
- Abraham had travelled over 120 miles each way
  - He had carried out an amazing, daring night raid
- Abraham had brought back all of the people, wealth, and livelihood of this thriving city
- The King of Sodom offers Abraham all of these riches in return for the people...
  - He was making a most magnanimous offer, I’m sure he thought...
  - And one probably quite out of his character...
    - Surely, this speaks to the magnificence of Abraham’s victory!
- Abraham was offered all of these riches...
  - But, he knew he would be in debt to Sodom...
  - He knew he would be subject to Sin....
- And, Abraham would have nothing to do with it...
  - Not even a shoelace
- Abraham didn’t want people to think that he had become rich from Sodom
  - So Abraham refuses him straight out...
- Abraham showed great disrespect to the King of Sodom!
  - This is the “Chief Don” in the biggest mafia in town...
- This action would have placed Abraham’s life in serious danger...
- But, he did it out of faith...
  - Trusting that God would protect him
- Looking forward to a more eternal security, and not just a temporal, physical security
- He saw the effect that Sodom had had on his nephew, and he wanted no part of it...

- He did not want to serve Sin...
  - He didn't want to be subject to the King of Sin
- Is this amazing story of courage, strength and faith what Paul is referring to in Romans?
  - No...
- The defining moment of Abraham's Life of Faith must be the sacrifice of his son...
- Genesis 22:1-2
  - 1) And it came to pass after these things, that God did tempt Abraham, and said unto him, Abraham: and he said, Behold, here I am.
  - 2) And he said, Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and get thee into the land of Moriah; and offer him there for a burnt offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of.
- This is the son that he had waited literally ALL his life for
  - His only son...
- What does Abraham do?
- Genesis 22:3
  - 3) And Abraham rose up early in the morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him.
- He does what God asks of him...
  - *Rising up early in the morning...*
    - 4) Then on the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off.
    - 5) And Abraham said unto his young men, Abide ye here with the ass; and I and the lad will go yonder and worship, and come again to you.
    - 6) And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it upon Isaac his son; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife; and they went both of them together.
    - 7) And Isaac spake unto Abraham his father, and said, My father: and he said, Here am I, my son. And he said, Behold the fire and the wood: but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?

- I don't care how old you think Isaac is at the time...
  - A father hears his son say this, and his heart melts within him...
- 8) And Abraham said, My son, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering: so they went both of them together.
- Abraham had faith that God would provide...
  - 9) And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Abraham built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound Isaac his son, and laid him on the altar upon the wood.
  - 10) And Abraham stretched forth his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.
- He actually does it...
  - He doesn't wait to see what happens next
  - He proceeds forward knowing that God is right...
    - This clearly doesn't make sense to Abraham, but he trusts in God...
  - 11) And the angel of the LORD called unto him out of heaven, and said, Abraham, Abraham: and he said, Here am I.
  - 12) And he said, Lay not thine hand upon the lad, neither do thou any thing unto him: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son from me.
  - 13) And Abraham lifted up his eyes, and looked, and behold behind him a ram caught in a thicket by his horns: and Abraham went and took the ram, and offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son.
- God proves Abraham through this test
  - Consider the faith of Abraham that God would test him in this manner
- Abraham passes the test...
  - *"Do not hurt the boy in any way, for now I know that you truly fear God. You have not withheld even your beloved son from me."*
- Is this amazing act of Faith what Paul is referring to in Romans 4, when he says:?
  - *Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness...*
- I don't think so...

- I agree that Abraham's life is full of many wonderful and inspiring acts of Faith...
  - But he is remembered most in Scriptures for a simple act of Faith...
- The verse is found in Genesis Chapter 15
- Genesis 15:1-6
  - 1) After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I *am* thy shield, *and* thy exceeding great reward.
  - 2) And Abram said, Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house *is* this Eliezer of Damascus?
  - 3) And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir.
  - 4) And, behold, the word of the LORD *came* unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir.
  - 5) And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be.
  - 6) *And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.*
- It wasn't carrying out a daring victory against five armies...
  - It wasn't sacrificing his only son on an altar of stone...
- Abraham's Faith is counted for righteousness because he simply believed in the Lord
- Standing all alone in the middle of a field in the dead of night...
  - Looking up at the stars in the Heavens above him...
- God promises a 100 year old man that although he had never had a child his whole life, he is going to be the father of an innumerable host
  - And Abraham believed it
- No questions...
  - No doubts...
    - No concerns...
- He simply believed God
  - It is this Simple Act of Faith that God wants from all of us

- God doesn't expect greatness from us...
  - He doesn't call on us to fight battles or sacrifice our children...
- He simply wants us to believe him
  - He simply wants us to trust Him
- As a matter of fact, it is specifically NOT our great acts that save us...
  - It is not our works that bring us salvation
- Paul continues on with this explanation in Romans 4
- Romans 4:4-5
  - 4) Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.
  - 5) But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.
- Romans 4:4-5 NIV
  - 4) Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation.
  - 5) However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.
- Romans 4:4-5 MSG
  - 4) If you're a hard worker and do a good job, you deserve your pay; you don't call your wages a gift.
  - 5) But if you see that the job is too big for you, that it's something only God can do, and you trust him to do it--you could never do it for yourself no matter how hard and long you worked--well, that "trusting-him-to-do-it" is what justifies you with God.
- It was obvious to Abraham that he was unable to solve this problem on his own...
  - They had waited all their life to have a child, and to no avail...
- Abraham trusted in God
  - Abraham realized that God would solve the problem
- This simple act of giving your life over to God is what he wants from us

- This illogical, almost counter-intuitive act of acknowledging that we are incapable of resolving the issues in our own lives...
- That we are unsuccessful in fighting the battle against our own personal sins
- Acknowledging that in the end... We can't make it.
  - No matter how strong our will-power...
  - No matter how quick our wits...
- In the end we need to turn to God for salvation
- This is the simple Faith of Abraham
  - This is the Faith that we need to fill our lives with
- God has promised us that he has given His son to remove our sins, and He has removed them from us as far as the East is from the West
  - All that is asked of us is that we have the Faith to believe Him
- *Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness...*
  - Do we?
- Somehow we feel that we have to do something ourselves to gain this victory
- It's like Mankind has a built-in propensity to believe that Works can save us
  - This problem haunted the Jews for thousands of years, and we are not immune from it either
- *Faith vs. Works* is an extremely complex and confusing topic
  - This is not a concept for the faith of heart
  - Our traditional upbringing tends to cause us to want to stray away from it
- There is error on both ends of the extreme, and therefore we are afraid to take too strong a position
  - But this is vital to our understanding of the Truth, and we need to find comfort somewhere in the "grey" of the issue...
- We don't want to believe like Modern-Day Christians that say:



*“all we have to do is accept Jesus Christ as our Personal Saviour”* and we are saved “once and for all”... Regardless of our actions...

- But, we can't be deluded into somehow thinking that we aren't going to make it into the Kingdom unless we “clean up our lives” and finally stop sinning

- The Scriptural support for both ways of thinking is also rather confusing...

- The Bible tends to agree with both ideas

- From my childhood I always remember verses like:

- Matthew 16:27

27) For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall **reward every man according to his works.**

- In a small New England town full of the ancestors of Puritans and Quakers, this idea plays very well...

- I sat in Sunday School class in a old, converted, 1781 one-room schoolhouse, looking up at a ceramic plaque on the wall, hand-painted in Beige and Brown, that reminded me every Sunday that I was going to be “*rewarded according to my works*”

- I knew what my works *were*, and I was never too excited about looking forward to that day of reckoning...

- Revelation also speaks to this theme:

- Revelation 20:11-13

11) And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them.

12) And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is *the book of life*: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, **according to their works.**

13) And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were **judged every man according to their works.**

- But, how do we understand other verses that we see on this topic?

- The Scriptures also clearly speak of the opposite:

• 2<sup>nd</sup> Timothy 1:8-10

- 8) Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God;
- 9) Who hath saved us, and called *us* with an holy calling, **not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace**, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began,
- 10) But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel:

• It's not contingent on our own works... No matter how good they are...

• And they specifically are not always good...

• Titus 3:3-5

- 3) For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, *and* hating one another.
- 4) *But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared,*
- 5) **Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us**, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost;

• We are all more comfortable with one side of this equation, than with the other...

• We all clearly understand that we cannot EARN our way into the Kingdom regardless of our Good Actions...

• But, we are not as comfortable with the idea of being GIVEN salvation REGARDLESS of our Sinful Actions...

• Coming to accept this **Unconditional Love** of God is hard for us...

• *There's nothing that I can do to make myself more lovable to God*

• *He wouldn't love me more if I were perfect*

• *He doesn't love me less because I am imperfect*

• Sure, we don't go so far as to say that we are DUE a place in the Kingdom because we've been so good

- But we talk **too often** about losing our place in the Kingdom because we've been bad
- Do you really think you are going to stop sinning?
- God didn't wait until Abraham was perfect before he chose him
  - In the next class we'll see that Abraham had "less-than-perfect" moments also
- Thankfully, God didn't wait until we were perfect to call us...
  - *"While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us..."*
- The answer to the riddle lies in the next verses of Titus 3...
- Titus 3:5-7
  - 6) Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour;
  - 7) That being **justified by his grace**, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.
- We are justified by God's Grace
- I love the word Justify...
  - I'm a closet-graphics-designer...
  - I love laying things out on paper and seeing the beauty and symmetry of a well designed page...
  - Ask my wife, I am totally into symmetry... She claims that I have spent half of my life organizing the Icons on my Desktop...
- For me the best Command on a Word Processor is "Justify"...
  - There are few things in life as beautiful to me as a nicely justified column...
- When you click on Justify, everything becomes perfect...
  - All of the extra spaces that weren't supposed to be there are taken away...
  - Spaces that you were missing are added in to make everything complete
- We are Justified by the Grace of God!
  - Our shortcomings are made complete...

- The fullness of our sins is removed...
- We look Perfect in God's eyes!
- God wants us to come to trust in this
  - To have Faith in the FACT that He CAN and WILL extend His Mercy to us, and carry us home like the wayward sheep that we are
- God wants us to come to trust in His mercy, His grace, and His love for us
  - To realize that we are unable to earn righteousness through our actions
  - That we all need to have God "*impute*" righteousness to us...
- That is what Paul is writing about back in Romans 4
- Romans 4:6-8
  - 6) Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works,
  - 7) Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.
  - 8) Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.
- The point of Romans 4 is that we have this righteousness "*imputed*" (credited, ascribed, assigned) to us **not because of any works that we do**, but because of our faith
- Paul continues in Verse 16
- Romans 4:16-25
  - 16) Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all,
- God does this to show His greatness, not our strength
  - 17) (As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were.
- What things does God call "that are not as though they are"?
  - **Us!** He calls us Righteous, even though we aren't!

- Abraham knew that he calls someone alive, even though they are dead...
  - He called Abraham the Father of Many Nations, even though he was childless
  - 18) Who **against hope believed in hope**, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be.
  - 19) And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sara's womb:
- Abraham believed what God told him...
  - 20) **He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief**; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God;
  - 21) And being **fully persuaded** that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.
- Abraham was convinced that God was going to perform what He promised...
  - 22) And therefore it was **imputed to him for righteousness**.
- That message was written for us also...
  - 23) Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him;
  - 24) But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead;
  - 25) Who was **delivered for our offences**, and was raised again for our **justification**.
- We have had our sins forgiven by Jesus
  - God raised Jesus for our Justification
  - To make us RIGHT with God
- The faith that saved Abraham was the simple act of **believing** what God promised him as he stood outside on a dark, quiet night looking up at the stars...
- We are saved by that same faith if we believe that God is able (and actually willing) to wash away our sins and justify us...
  - If we have that kind of Faith
- We will be justified by that Faith...

- Romans 5:1-2

- 1) Therefore being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:
- 2) By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

- Like Abraham looking up at the stars and believing...

- We find ourselves looking up at the Cross of Christ

- We must believe...

- The sacrifice of our Lord saves us...

- We are washed clean...

- *Justified*...

- Not because we were so good that we had somehow earned it...

- But, because we were such sinners that we needed it...

- Romans 5:8

- 8) But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

- And while we are still sinners, that sacrifice still covers us

- Even though we sin, we are saved by the Grace of God...

- While we shall see in the next class that this grace we've received does not free us to sin all we want...

- We have to believe, like Abraham, in the Grace of God...

- That God wants us in His Kingdom...

- **That God Loves us...**