

ABRAHAM WAS JUSTIFIED BY FAITH

Romans 4:1-8

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."

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In the early to middle part of this century, Harry Ironside was Pastor of the Moody Church in Chicago.

Dr. Ironside said that while presenting the Gospel on the street of a California City during an evangelistic campaign, his team was often interrupted by someone who would say something like, "Look here, sir! There are hundreds of religions in this country, and the followers of each sect think theirs is the only right one. How can poor plain men like us find out what really is the truth?"

Dr. Ironside said he generally replied something like this: "Hundreds of religions, you say? That's strange; I've heard of only two?"

"Oh, but you surely know there are more than that?"

"Not at all, sir. I find, I admit, many shades of difference in the opinions of those comprising the two great schools; but after all there are but two. The one covers all who expect salvation by doing; the other all who have been saved by something done. So you see the whole question is very simple. Can you save yourself, or must you be saved by another? If you can be your own savior, you do not need my message. If you can not, you may well listen to it."

Our passage this morning tells us that Abraham did not try to save himself. Instead, he trusted God to provide his salvation. And God provided that salvation, for Abraham and for you and for me, when Jesus died on the cross and was raised from the dead!

Satan has his counterfeits and some of them are truly remarkable from the human point of view. Sometimes, we really can't be completely certain whether a given person is a child of God or a child of Satan.

We know that one or the other is true, because these are the only two possibilities that exist. But we can't be certain which is which.

There are, of course, exceptions to this lack of knowledge.

More definitely than the word on any other man in the Bible, we are told that Abraham had saving faith. His works were spotty; he did the same very dishonorable thing on two different occasions, when he was willing to sacrifice his wife's honor to save himself in a moment of possible danger.

But, without question, we can say that he was and is a saved man because God flatly declares that it is so. Romans 4:3 leaves no room for doubt:

3. "For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness."

What does it mean to "believe" God the way Abraham did? This is about the most important question in the world! Because, if it is this kind of belief that guarantees us Heaven, we must be especially careful to make sure we understand what is actually required!

John G. Paton, pioneer missionary to the New Hebrides in the Pacific, was hard put to find a word for "believe," in the sense of trust, in the language of the South Sea Islanders, for whom he was translating the new testament.

Finally he found the solution, by thus translating the answer of Paul and Silas to the question of the Philippian jailer, "What must I do to be saved?": "Lean your whole weight upon the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved."

That's what it means to believe: Lean your whole weight upon the Lord Jesus Christ.

Or consider this: A huge crowd was once watching the famous tightrope walker, Blondin, cross Niagara Falls on a tightrope one day in 1860. He crossed it numerous times, a 1000 foot trip. 160 feet above the raging waters. He asked the crowd if they believed he could carry one of them across safely. All assented. Then he approached one man and asked him to get on his back and go with him. The man refused!

Mental assent or even verbal assent is not real belief. Lean your whole weight upon the Lord Jesus Christ!

The word for "counted" here is rendered as "reckoned" in the Revised Standard Version, as "credited" in the Roman Catholic Confraternity Version, and as "imputed" in Segond's French Version.

The original greek is logizomai which literally means "to

take an inventory." The word comes from the field of accounting and clearly refers to the idea that God keeps books.

There are several sets of books mentioned in the Bible. There is the book of life, which seems to be a sort of population roll of all those who have lived in our world, and it is apparent that some names may be blotted out from that book.

There is also the Lamb's Book of Life, which is the roll of those who are saved: of those who were chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. From this book, no name can ever be erased!

Then again, there are books in which God records spiritual actions and even the spiritual thoughts of those who believe in Christ. Even if you do no more than think upon the name of our Lord, the thought is not lost, but enters into the eternal record! Malachi 3:16 says, "When those who feared the Lord spoke with one another; the Lord heeded and heard them, and a book of remembrance was written before him of those who feared the Lord and thought on his name."

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In accounting, an addition to your balance is called a credit and a subtraction from your balance is called a debit. A positive balance is a net credit and a negative balance is a net debit.

Suppose for a moment that God's books were such that a positive balance (a net credit) were needed to get into Heaven. That's not how it really works, but it's how a lot of people think it works. They say, "If my good deeds outweigh my bad deeds, I'll make it." That's not true, but let's explore the idea anyway.

If a net credit was the ticket to Heaven, the problem would be that everything we do is a debit (a subtraction from the balance). And we start with a negative balance to begin with, because of Adam's sin in the Garden of Eden. So, there is no way to ever achieve a net credit on our own.

Little Johnny tears his sister's school paper out of sheer meanness: debit 500. Martin sells cocaine to school kids on the corner: debit 5,000. Mary very sweetly does the dishes for mother: debit 25. Kathy spends her entire life trying to help others: debit 10. Jack lays down his life for a friend: debit 5.

No matter how good the deed, the result is a debit; not a credit. The source of man's righteousness is in the sinful nature and being of man.

But then, one day, in one man's book, was written: "Dave Johnson believed on Christ: credit infinity." Credit infinity!

Now, it is the nature of the mathematics of transcendental numbers (the mathematics of infinity) that, no matter what you do to "infinity", the result is still infinity. Infinity plus any number is still infinity. Infinity minus any number is still infinity. Even infinity minus infinity is still infinity!

The righteousness of God has its source in the <sup>nature</sup> nature and being of God. And, since God is infinite, his righteousness is also infinite. Credit infinity! An infinite credit has been marked in the book by God! No matter what else ever happens, no matter what else has ever happened in the past, the result will always be a net infinite credit!

Abraham believed God and it was credited to him for righteousness. I believed God and it was credited to me for righteousness. If you believe God, it is also credited to you for righteousness. Credit infinity!

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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."

Grace is a free, undeserved gift. Nothing in Abraham's nature forced God to save him and choose him to be the father of the nation through whom our Savior was to come. Abraham was an idol worshiper who didn't know God. But God decided to love him and save him. It was a totally undeserved free gift. It was pure grace.

Felix Jardio, 60, a Filipino farmer had been saving his money for years to buy a carabao to pull his plow. He finally saved 1,300 Phillipine dollars and went out looking for the work animal, which he soon found. But, alas, he did not know that the government had ordered all Philippine paper bills

exchanged for the "Bagong Lipunan" issue, and his savings stashed up in the old currency issue were useless.

And so in 1975, he sent a letter - with the help of some schoolboys - to the President. After all, he was only a poor ignorant rice farmer. The answer came back. It said, "The law must be followed. Because the deadline for exchanging bills has already passed, the government can no longer change your bills with the new ones. Even the President of the Philippines is not exempt from this rule."

The letter did not end there. It added: "However, because I believe that you really worked hard to save this money, I am changing them with the new ones from my own personal funds. I hope that you will be able to buy your carabao." And the letter was signed by the President himself.

Felix Jardio did not deserve any consideration. He had been stupid and had not paid attention to the official announcements the way he should have. He was saved from the penalty he deserved by a free gift from the President. It was undeserved grace.

And that is how God saves you and me. We don't deserve anything but Hell and damnation! But God has chosen to love us and offer us the free gift of salvation through the death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. It is undeserved grace!

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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."

How terrible it is to refuse to be forgiven. God wants to forgive us and to fold us in his arms of love. But we often refuse him and turn away.

A flippant youth once asked a preacher, "You say that unsaved people carry a weight of sin. I feel nothing. How heavy is sin? Is it ten pounds? Eighty pounds?"

The preacher replied by asking the youth, "If you laid a

four hundred pound weight on a corpse, would it feel the load?"

The youth replied, "It would feel nothing, because it is dead."

The preacher concluded, "That spirit, too, is indeed dead which feels no load of sin or is indifferent to its burden and flippant about its presence." The youth was silenced.

But a little boy, being asked what forgiveness is, gave the beautiful answer: "It is the odor that flowers breathe when they are trampled upon."

We have trampled upon God. But he loves us and wants to forgive us. Lean your whole weight on the Lord Jesus Christ, and be saved!

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Hallelujah! Amen!

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