

“The Righteousness of Faith”
(Romans 4:1-8)

I. Introduction.

A. Review.

1. Paul has stated clearly that the Law can only condemn; it cannot justify.
 - a. It's not because there's something wrong with the Law.
 - b. It's because there's something wrong with man: his heart is full of sin.
 - c. The Law was meant to show us our sin, not to save us.
 - d. And so God's purpose in giving it didn't fail.

2. But Paul also reminded us that the righteousness that God will accept has been revealed apart from the Law.
 - a. It is the righteousness that Jesus has provided: the removal of sin, the giving of a perfect record of obedience.
 - b. It is a righteousness that is received by faith, not by works.
 - (i) Everyone has sinned. Everyone has failed to measure up to God's standard.
 - (ii) Therefore, salvation cannot come through works.
 - (iii) It must be by grace.
 - (iv) It has always been that way.
 - (v) God displayed Jesus' death publicly so that we might know that He is and has been the only way.

3. God wanted to remove all possible boasting.
 - a. The law of faith – that one must trust in the righteousness of another – takes away any possibility of out taking any credit.
 - b. Now God receives all the glory for that salvation.

B. Paul goes on now to give us two examples from the OT to show us this very thing: that of Abraham and David.

1. Abraham was not justified by his works.
 - a. If he had been, he might have something to boast about.
 - b. But the Scripture says he believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness.

2. David, in Psalm 32, speaks of this same blessing.
 - a. It is the blessing of forgiveness.
 - b. And it is given apart from works.

3. These two men were highly revered by the Jews.
 - a. Abraham was their father according to the flesh.
 - b. David was their king, a man after God's own heart, and the one through whom the Messiah was to come.
 - c. The Jews would be more apt to pay attention to them.

4. What Paul wants his readers to hear them say is the same thing God wants us to hear this morning: The righteousness of God, if it does come to us by faith, cannot be earned by works.

II. Sermon.

A. Paul would first have his readers consider Abraham.

1. Abraham was their forefather, according to the flesh.
 - a. Notice, in speaking of these Jews – not the Jewish believers, but those who were trusting in their works – he calls them the children of Abraham, according to the flesh.
 - b. They were not considered his spiritual children, but physical, since in this state they wouldn't be saved.

2. What is it that Abraham discovered?
 - a. He found that if he had earned his salvation, then he would be able to boast about it.
 - b. But he can't, because it wasn't something he did.

3. How did Abraham come by salvation?
 - a. "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness" (v. 3).
 - b. He didn't earn it.
 - (i) It was reckoned to him – it was credited to him – freely.
 - (ii) It was given as a free gift.
 - (iii) And it was given on the basis of his faith, not on the basis of his works.
 - (iv) If he had worked for it, the Scripture couldn't say his faith was reckoned as righteousness.
 - (v) It would have to say, "And Abraham worked, and God gave him what he earned, what he deserved."
 - (vi) But he didn't work: he believed in the One who justifies the ungodly, and his faith was reckoned as righteousness.

4. Notice that God is said to justify the ungodly.
 - a. The Roman church believes that God cannot declare a person to be just who isn't personally and really just.
 - b. But here, God is said to justify the ungodly.
 - (i) This doesn't mean that God says something that isn't true.
 - (ii) It is true in the sense that the person in himself is ungodly.
 - (iii) But God doesn't declare the person to be just on the basis of that person's own righteousness, but on the basis of the righteousness credited to him.

5. And realize as well, though it isn't as clear here as it will be later, it is not that person's faith that is credited as righteousness, but Christ's righteousness that is credited or given to him.
 - a. Faith doesn't deserve to be counted by God as righteousness by itself.
 - (i) If it did, then it would be a work we could do to earn salvation.
 - (ii) There are many churches that believe and teach this very thing.

 - b. Rather, faith is an instrument that receives the righteousness God offers in Christ.
 - (i) The righteousness is Christ's.
 - (ii) It is His obedience.
 - (iii) It is His death on the cross that takes away sins.
 - (iv) When Abraham believed God, it was Christ's righteousness that was credited to him, not any righteousness that was his own.

6. But let's not forget what the main point is: this righteousness that Abraham had came by way of faith and not by works.
 - a. Paul is saying to the Jews: if you're going to look to Abraham, don't look to the fact that you're his children; don't look to your own righteousness in the Law.
 - b. Instead, follow in the footsteps of his faith. "It is those who are of faith who are sons of Abraham" (Gal. 3:7).

B. The example of David shows the same thing.

1. David also speaks of God crediting righteousness apart from works.
2. "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven, and whose sins have been covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account" (vv. 7-8).
3. Though David doesn't speak of faith here, this blessing couldn't have come any other way.
4. If it's not by works, it must be a gift, and the only way a man can receive a gift from God is by faith (at least, this is true of saving gifts).

III. Application.

A. So what have you found?

1. Are you looking to your works or to Christ by faith for your salvation?
2. We need to be careful here, because our sin and the devil have a subtle way of bringing works into salvation.
 - a. Sometimes we set up a standard for ourselves: if I am this obedient, or do this much in the way of works, or make these sacrifices for the Lord, or give this much money, or read this much of the Bible, or pray this many hours, then I am saved.
 - b. If we deviate from that commitment, we're afraid we'll lose our salvation.
 - c. We mustn't do this – this is looking to our works for our salvation.
 - d. We should look to them for assurance – for the one who is Christ's will bring forth good fruit. If we're not doing the works of Christ, we should be concerned.
3. But we need to be careful that we don't look to our works as the basis of our salvation.
 - a. Our works do not earn or add anything to our salvation. It is a free gift.
 - b. To receive it, we must look to Christ – to His righteousness, to His death on the cross.
 - c. Those are the works that will save us, not our own.
 - d. Our boasting must be in the cross, not in what we do.
 - e. If you find that you have been looking to your works, I would invite you to look to Christ now and find in Him the perfect righteousness God will accept.

B. The Table again reminds us of this very thing.

1. If a law had been given that could give us this righteousness, then righteousness would have been based on Law (Gal. 3:21).
2. But one wasn't given.
 - a. God's standard of righteousness condemns us.
 - b. But as we saw, it does so to point us to Christ.
3. The Table does the same thing this morning.
 - a. It reminds us that our righteousness isn't acceptable to God.
 - b. If it was, Jesus wouldn't have had to die. But He did die to wash our sins away.
 - c. And so it tells us to look to Him for the righteousness God requires.
 - d. Let's look to Him now, as we prepare to come to the Table.