

ROMANS SERIES

Fathers day: Romans 4

Introduction

Working through the book of Romans has been a great reminder of some of the key principles of our faith. Romans has a “grounding” element to it while also challenging our thoughts and understanding of what living in step with God looks like in our day and age.

Last week pastor Ian preached a message that helped us connect the concept of God as creator and judge to the concept of God as our savior through Romans chapter 3. As always, I’d encourage you to take a listen on our YouTube page if missed it.

Today is Father’s Day! A big congratulations to all the father’s out there including all father figures that have taken up this role in the lives of those placed around them. It goes without saying that we all have so much to learn in the area of fatherhood but let us not forget to celebrate all that God has done through so many faithful fathers over the generations.

Whether or not we have had the privilege of being loved and raised by our earthly fathers, we have an amazing father in God. As the scriptures remind us, he identifies as our abba father. We also have another father, the father of our faith and his name is Abraham. I’m sure if I had to start singing “father Abraham had many sons.....” most, if not all of us would be able to complete the rest of this song. Abraham as the father of our faith is a concept we were most likely taught at a very young age and Romans chapter 4 is a great reminder of why we believe this. First a little bit of textual background.

Background

In Chapter 3, Paul had been unpacking a few important truths about our faith. He reminds the believers that they have all fallen short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23). Both Jews and Gentiles have nothing to boast about with regards to the righteousness they have received. Whether circumcised or uncircumcised, God has freely offered grace to all and justified them through Christ. All God’s promises are freely given so that no one can boast of their own ability to save themselves because they all failed to do so. God is therefore, for the Jew and the Gentile alike and offers grace, mercy and righteousness to both. Let’s jump into Romans Chapter 4!

Romans 4: 1-3

“What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, discovered in this matter? ² If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. ³ What does Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”^[a]

1. Belief in God leads to righteousness.

- Picking up from the theme of righteousness by faith, Paul starts this section by making it clear that the greatest man within the Jewish community (Abraham) discovered something in his lifetime: **All his good works could not justify him before God and while he could boast a little in front of man he couldn't boast in before God.**
- If he would boast before people he might feel a sense of accomplishment but before God he would be among those who have “fallen short of the glory of God. “ see romans 3:23.
- **Everything is laid bare before God.**
- **What then was required of Abraham?** Belief in God. This was seen as the credit that was used towards righteousness in God's sight (Right standing before God.)
- *“Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”^[a]*
- Concept: Someone pays for you to gain admission to an event or venue that you know you cannot afford. You are given entrance on the account of someone else, they pay for you to be admitted but you are still required to reproduce the ticket at the door. You must act on what is being offered to you... that's faith.

Romans 4:4-8

⁴ Now to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation. ⁵ However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness. ⁶ David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the one to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: ⁷ “Blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. ⁸ Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord will never count against them.”^[b]

2. Righteousness is offered as a gift, not under obligation.

- **The law requires works that should count towards righteousness.** I.e. if we are able to fulfil the law and all its requirements, we are owed righteousness.
- Example: when you go to work, the work you are doing is rewarded by a pay check. The owner of the business is obligated to compensate you for the work you have done. **However if you do not meet the contractual requirements you agreed to, you will be dismissed and in that case the manager/owner is not obligated to compensate you. You have not done the work.**
- **The law was the “contractual agreement”** for our righteousness and we have already established that we all have breached the contract: we have all fallen short.
- **God decides to offer us what we do not deserve,** someone else to do what we cannot do in order that we would receive what we need (pay check) which in this case is righteousness. Jesus does the work we cannot do so that we are not dismissed from God's presence/community.
- **Notice that the contract is not ignored but fulfilled! Mt. 5:17.**
- *⁷ “Blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. ⁸ Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord will never count against them.”^[b]*

- **NB - When the requirements of the job are met, there is no reason to keep working for what is being offered to us as free gift.**
- *⁵ However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness.*
- **But!** There is still a need for us to live according the rules and principles of the kingdom.
- Phil 2:12 *“¹² Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—**continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling,** ¹³ for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose.”*
- There is still a call to obedience and action! We can't just fold our hands and do as we please. Jesus has done what we cannot so that we can do what we can with his help! We are working from our salvation and not for it!

Romans 4:9-12

⁹ Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness. ¹⁰ Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! ¹¹ And he received circumcision as a sign, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them. ¹² And he is then also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also follow in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

3. Circumcision is nullified.

- Paul needs to remind the Jews as to the timing of Abraham's receiving of God's righteousness. This is important because the Jews, who view Abraham as their father have tried to gain righteousness through works required by the law.
- **Circumcision was a symbol of the covenant that God had made between himself and those he approved of in the OT.**
- When did God actually approve of Abraham? Before or after he was circumcised? Before!
- NB - The sign (circumcision) came after he was already approved. Circumcision did not gain the approval for him, it was a confirmation of what had already taken place!
- Jews and Gentiles also receive their approval from God in much the same way, and what was the mark of God's covenant people (circumcision) is not necessary to us now because God accepts and approves all who receive his righteousness by faith as Abraham chose to have faith in God.
- This would be a knock to the Jews at the time who wanted to claim that God was in favour of the Jew over the Gentile.
- Personal story of initiation school: Inclusion into a community of Xhosa men. "I have become all things to all men"

Romans 4: 16-17

**skipped v: 13-15*

- *¹⁶ Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the **faith of Abraham**. He is the father of us all. ¹⁷ As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations."^[c] He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the **God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not.***

4. Abraham's spiritual Fatherhood.

- Paul is reminding us that we need God's promises but cannot earn them.
- Abraham is not necessarily our father by biological or natural means: We are not all Jews.
- **Abraham is our father if we have the faith that he had**, a faith that completely relied on God and his provision alone. The circumcised and the uncircumcised are the same in the faith if they believe in God in the same way.
- **Abraham is as much the father of believing Gentiles as he is of the Jews.**
- *¹⁷ As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations."^[c] He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the **God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not.***
- Fatherhood should be exemplary. If we have to use force we are going about this the wrong way. Our legacy as father's and men is to model what life and faith in Christ look like far beyond the societal picture of a father that we often have buy in to..
- **We don't only have an obligation to our biological children!** We are placed as spiritual fathers amongst so many people around us... who have you nurtured and invested in?
- **Distant fatherhood is not biblical!**
- The truth is, when we get this right in our generation, we provide a spiritual map for the next!
- Story of my father and others.

Romans 4:18-25

¹⁸ Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be."^[d] ¹⁹ Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah's womb was also dead. ²⁰ Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, ²¹ being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. ²² This is why "it was credited to him as righteousness."

5. Spiritual fatherhood is practical.

Paul reminds the believers of the practicality of Abraham's spiritual fatherhood to us. According to this passage he notes that Abraham:

1. Believed God against all odds.
2. He was steadfast – hung on to every word that God spoke despite what had been lost in years.
3. He monitored the strength of his faith – never weakened or wavered in his faith in God.
4. He was committed to God's glory and honour and acknowledged him by giving him glory.
5. Recognized God's power to bring about what was required.

I'm sure you can find more!

Romans 4: 23-25

“²³ The words “it was credited to him” were written not for him alone,²⁴ but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. ²⁵ He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.”

6. Jesus: the source of our righteousness.

- Abraham's spiritual fatherhood and all the blessings that it brings is held together by one person, Jesus.
- We are not obligated to follow the law because it has already been fulfilled.
- **Following Abraham's faith in God directly connects us to the source of our justification.** As righteousness was credited to him, righteousness is credit to anyone who **believes God**. More specifically, to anyone who believes that God sent Jesus for our salvation.
- **We too believe God, by accepting what Jesus has done and that he came on behalf of the father so that we may be justified.**
- It is one thing to know about Jesus, and yet another to really believe in him. Like Abraham, you may not see him in the flesh but faith leans on God's word regardless of can be seen and felt in the moment. The rewarded is a deep intimacy with the ultimate Father, God himself. Right standing with God is the promise.

Recap

1. **Believing in God leads us to righteousness.**
2. **Righteousness is freely offered and received as a gift: God is not obligated to offer it to us.**
3. **Circumcision is not a requirement for God's people.**
4. **Spiritual fatherhood is practical.**

5. Right standing with God is available to you right now!