

# From Abraham's Faith to Ours Today

Thomas Robinson, *Gospel of God's Grace for All of Us 10*, March 1, 2015

## Romans 3:28 – 4:12 (ESV adapted)

<sup>28</sup> For we hold that a person is **declared right** on the basis of **faith** apart from works of the law (Torah). <sup>29</sup> Or **does God belong only to the Jews?** And not also to the **Gentiles** (nations)? Yes, to the Gentiles also! <sup>30</sup> Since **God is one** [Dt 6:4] – who will declare the circumcised right **by faith** and the uncircumcised **through faith**. <sup>31</sup> Do we then overthrow the law by this faith? By no means! On the contrary, **we uphold the law**.

**4:1** What then shall we say? Have we found Abraham as our forefather according to the flesh? <sup>2</sup> For if Abraham was declared in the right by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. <sup>3</sup> For what does the **Scripture** say? "**Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.**" [Gen 15:6; cf Gal 3:6]

<sup>4</sup> Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. <sup>5</sup> And to the one who does not work but **believes/trusts in him who declares the ungodly to be in the right**, his **faith** is counted as **righteousness**, <sup>6</sup> just as **David** also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts **righteousness apart from works**:

<sup>7</sup> "**Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered;**

<sup>8</sup> **Blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.**" [Psa 32:1-2]

<sup>9</sup> Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? For we say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness. <sup>10</sup> How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. <sup>11</sup> He received the **sign of circumcision** as a **seal** of the **righteousness that he had by faith** while he was still uncircumcised [Gen 17:1-14].

The purpose was **to make him the father of all who believe** without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well, <sup>12</sup> **and to make him the father of the circumcised** who are not only circumcised but who also **walk in the footsteps of the faith** that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

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## Genesis 12:2-3

<sup>2</sup> "And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. <sup>3</sup> ... and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

## Genesis 15:5-6, 18

<sup>5</sup> And he (God) brought him (Abraham) outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." <sup>6</sup> And he believed the LORD (Yahweh), and he counted it to him as righteousness. ...

<sup>18</sup> On that day the LORD (Yahweh) made a covenant with Abram.

## Genesis 17:9-11

<sup>9</sup> And God said to Abraham, "As for you, you shall keep my covenant, you and your offspring .... <sup>10</sup> This is my covenant, which you shall keep, between me and you and your offspring after you: Every male among you shall be circumcised. <sup>11</sup>... It shall be a sign of the covenant between me and you."

## Genesis 22:17-18

<sup>17</sup> "I will surely bless you, and I will surely multiply your offspring as the stars of heaven ... <sup>18</sup> and in your offspring shall all the nations (Gentiles) of the earth be blessed ...."

## **Back to the Scriptures...Questioning Old Assumptions**

Who am I? What's the story within which my life has its meaning? Paul is helping Jews, Romans, Greeks, others in Rome to see how what has happened in Jesus opens a window into the reality of God that shows their life and the world in a new light. Part of that is that Jesus' life is both surprising and anticipated. He lives within a great story of God's faithfulness that he now calls both his fellow Jews and all peoples into. Because it is God's story it is vast enough for all people to be themselves, Romans, Jews, Chinese, Africans. But God shows its unity by narrowing the story down to a single point, a person: Jesus. From that one, the event explodes out for all the world. Jesus' own disciples were astonished. Paul had grown up with a story centered on Torah/law as the defining story. The distinctness of Jews, the temple. Works of law/Torah marked out those in covenant with God. It marked boundaries from Gentiles, from lax Jews. It excluded a failed Messiah. But Jesus... Jesus forced Paul to go back to scripture. To read again, to challenge his old assumptions. Jesus was not the first narrowing to one. The story started that way with Abraham – one.

## **“Righteousness” and Trusting God**

But God didn't give Abraham the law, he gave an impossible promise. He challenged him to trust/live on the basis that God is real, living, involved, caring. Abraham wasn't very good at it, but he learned. Abraham believed God, that God's wild promise was more real than the brokenness of his own body. God counted that trust as “righteousness,” the basis of a real/right relationship/covenant with the God of the universe. Paul saw that was the key. Abraham was a mix of good and bad. God's grace was everything. He counted trust as the basis for a right relationship. Later God gave Abraham the beginning of law, the mark of circumcision, but scripture says it was a sign of the covenant, the relationship by grace. What emerges from the story is astonishing. Abraham trusts not in a God who will treat him fairly, do good to him if he fulfills his vows, stays pure, etc. He trusts in a God who counts the ungodly as in the right and establishes his covenant with them. A God who looks for a person who trusts him and is willing to live by his impossible promises. Think of Jesus calling people not to worry about food and clothing, trust God who knows your needs. Paul points to David through Ps 32. Blessing is not a fair evaluation of my sin and lawless deeds. It is the forgiveness that writes a new story, a new beginning, that lets me see my life not in the narrative of my mistakes and rebellion, but of God's promise, love, grace.

## **Why is Abraham's Story so Complicated?**

Paul's point is that God knew what he was doing from the beginning of this story. We are all there in Abraham, Jew and Gentile, not as our ancestor in flesh but as our father in faith. Abraham's story is complicated and multi-stage because it's a human story – like Israel's, ours. The covenant is not the end but the beginning. There is yet growing, failing, understanding, challenging, testing to come. Abraham believes but doubts. He trusts but fears. He grows. He marks out the path of a walk of growing faith. That path is there not only for his physical descendants but for all peoples who trust the promises of the God who created them. When God narrowed the story of his covenant with humanity in a sense to one person, it was never to exclude all the rest. Rather Abraham was there only for all the families of earth. That was God's repeated and increasingly emphatic promise – all the nations (Gentiles). So even more emphatically in Jesus. God's wild promises of his transforming love, his Spirit within us and resurrection life, call all people to be most fully themselves and one in Him.