

Romans Session 53 Abraham Justified by Faith 2

Genesis 12:1-3 (NASB77)

¹ Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go forth from your country, And from your relatives And from your father's house, To the land which I will show you;

² And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing;

³ And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

I asked the question last when we were together last, How and why did this man get the attention of God? Why was he chosen?

When God called Abraham, or Abram, which was his original name, He gave no reason for selecting that pagan from the millions of others in the world.

Nowhere in scripture is the reason given.

God chose Abraham because that was His divine will, which needs no justification or explanation.

Now after commanding Abraham to leave his country and his relatives and to go to the land that would be shown to him, God sovereignly and unconditionally promised,

Genesis 12:2-3 (NASB77)

² And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing;

³ And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

With no guarantee but God's word, Abraham left his business, his homeland, his friends, most of his relatives, and probably many of his possessions.

He abandoned his temporal security for a future uncertainty, as far as his human eyes could see or his human mind could comprehend.

The land he was promised to inherit was inhabited by pagans perhaps even more wicked and idolatrous than those of his home country.

Abraham may have had only a remote idea of where the land of Canaan was, and it is possible that he had never heard of it at all.

But when God called him to go there, Abraham obeyed and began the long journey.

Because he only partly obeyed God, however, bringing along his father and his nephew Lot, Abraham wasted fifteen years in Haran, where the group lived until Terah died. (*Gen 11:32*).

By that time Abraham was seventy-five years old, and as he continued to journey to Canaan, he also continued to obey God only partly by taking Lot with him (*12:4*)

When Abraham, Sarah, and Lot reached Shechem in Canaan, Abraham received another sovereign and unconditional promise from God:

The Lord appeared to Abraham and said;

Genesis 12:7 (NASB77)

⁷ And the LORD appeared to Abram and said, "To your descendants I will give this land." So he built an altar there to the LORD who had appeared to him.

So as he continued to journey through Canaan, he built another altar;

Genesis 12:8 (NASB77)

⁸ Then he proceeded from there to the mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, with Bethel on the west and Ai on the east; and there he built an altar to the LORD and called upon the name of the LORD.

Now lest we think so, Abrahams faith was not perfect, just as no believer's faith is perfect.

The first test he faced was a famine in Canaan, and Abraham went to Egypt for help instead of to God.

That disobedience put him in a compromising situation with Pharaoh.

He claimed that his beautiful wife was his sister, fearing that the pharaoh might kill him in order to have her for himself. In so doing, Abraham dishonored the Lord and caused plagues to come upon the pharaoh's family, (*Gen 12:10-17*)

The Lord gave repeated assurances to Abraham, and Abraham responded in faith, which God reckoned to him as righteousness (*Gen 15:6*)

But again, when testing came, he relied on his own judgment rather than the Lord's word.

When Sarah was getting beyond normal child bearing age and remained barren, Abraham took her foolish advice and took matters into his own hands.

He committed adultery with Hagar, Sarah's maid in hopes of having a male heir by her.

But as always his disobedience backfired and again caused misery to his own descendants, with whom the Arab descendants of Ishmael, the son by Hagar, would be in continuous conflict, as they are to this day.

Despite his spiritual imperfection, Abraham always came back to the Lord in faith, and the Lord honored that faith and continued to renew his promises to Abraham.

God caused miraculously caused Sarah to bear a son in her old age, the son whom God had promised to give Abraham. So when then, the greatest of all tests came, Abraham did not waver in his trust of the Lord.

When God commanded him to sacrifice Isaac, the only human means through which the promise could be fulfilled, Abraham responded with immediate obedience, and God responded by providing a substitute for Isaac. (*Gen 22:118*)

The writer of Hebrews declared that it was by faith that Abraham, when he was tested offered up Isaac; and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son; it was by faith that that was happening.

Listen, Abraham had heard God say;

Hebrews 11:17-19 (NASB77)

¹⁷ *By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac; and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son;*

¹⁸ *it was he to whom it was said, "IN ISAAC YOUR DESCENDANTS SHALL BE CALLED."*

¹⁹ *He considered that God is able to raise men even from the dead; from which he also received him back as a type.*

Neither Abraham, nor his most immediate heirs, his son, Isaac and his grandson Jacob ever owned any land in Canaan, except for a small field near Mamre in which the cave of Machpelah was located.

Abraham bought this lot from Ephron, a Hittite, for the burial of Sarah, and for himself and for Isaac, Rebekah, and Leah who were also buried there.

Many years later, according to Jacob's request, his body was brought back from Egypt by Joseph and his brothers for burial alongside Jacob's father and grandfather (*Gen 50:13-14*)

As is always the case with true belief, the Holy Spirit enlightened Abraham's mind and heart to recognize the true and only God, and enabled him to respond in faith.

Abraham saw the promised land and wandered through it as a nomad, but he never possessed it. Even his descendants did not possess the land until more than a half century after the promise of it was first given.

Just as Abraham trusted God's word to give him a land he had never seen, he trusted God's power to raise Isaac from the dead, if necessary, by a divine miracle he had never seen.

It was in response to Abraham's faith in God that it **was reckoned to him as righteousness**.

Was reckoned is from *logizomai*, which carried the economic and legal meaning of crediting something to another's account.

The only thing God received from Abraham was his imperfect faith, but by His divine grace and mercy, He **reckoned** it to Abraham's spiritual account **as righteousness**.

That gracious reckoning reflects the heart of God's redemptive revelation and is the focus of both the Old and New Testaments.

God has never provided and means of justification except through faith in Him.

Even though Abraham's repeated disobedience was sinful and brought harm to himself and others, God even used that disobedience to glorify Himself.

Those acts of disobedience testify that, contrary to rabbinical teaching, Abraham was sovereignly chosen by God for His own divine reasons and purposes, not because of Abraham's faithfulness or righteousness.

Abraham was chosen by God's sovereign, elective grace, not because of his works or even because of his faith. His faith was acceptable to God only because God graciously **reckoned**, or counted, it **as righteousness**.

It was not the greatness of Abraham's faith that saved him but the greatness of the gracious Lord in whom he placed his faith.

Faith is never the basis or the reason for justification, but only the channel through which God works His redeeming grace.

Faith is simply a convicted heart reaching out to receive God's free and un-merited gift of **salvation**.

What is true of Abraham's faith is true of every believer's faith.

Romans 4:3-5 (NASB77)

³ *For what does the Scripture say? "AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS."*

⁴ *Now to the one who works, his wage is not reckoned as a favor, but as what is due.*

⁵ *But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness,*

Although faith is required for salvation, it has no power in itself to save.

It is the power of God's redemptive grace alone, working through the atoning work of His Son on the cross, that has power to save.

Faith is not, as some claim, a type of work.

Paul is very clear on that; the saving faith is completely apart from any kind of human **works**.

In the parable of the vineyard, Jesus illustrated God's impartial grace. (*Matt 20:1-16*)

From the human perspective, the men who had worked all day deserved more than those who worked only the last hour.

But Jesus point was that the landowner, representing God, had the right to do as he willed.

He did not defraud the all-day workers, but paid them exactly what He had promised them and that they agreed to.

By God's standard, every person's work falls short of earning the redemption He provides.

On the divine scale of perfect righteousness, even the most devoted and long-serving Christian is not a hair's breadth closer to earning his salvation than is the, most vile, criminal who accepts Christ on his deathbed.

Even genuine faith does not in itself merit or produce the perfect righteousness apart from which no man can come to God.

His faith is rather reckoned as that required righteousness.

Thus God justifies the ungodly and that is the only way He does.

Because God credits the believer's sin to Christ's account, He can credit Christ's righteousness to the believer's account. We will talk more of this next time.