

The History of Faith

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[0:00] Take your Bibles this morning and turn with me over to the book of Romans. We will be in Romans chapter 4 this morning, beginning in verse 1. We'll work our way through verse 12. I know that's 12 verses.

You're probably already looking at your watch thinking, are we going to get out of here on time? And I can assure you this morning, we will do just that. We will get through these 12 verses in about two hours. So Romans chapter 4, verses 1 through 12.

If you're like me, you like an outline, you like a neat and tidy outline, something with a title and some points. And so if you're like me, kind of OCD, you can entitle this morning's message the history of faith or the history of salvation.

This morning's message is going to be more of a history lesson than anything else. And so Romans chapter 4, verses 1 through 12, the history of faith, the history of salvation.

I trust that you have found our text. I'm going to invite everyone to stand as we honor the reading of God's holy and errant word. Paul writes, What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather, according to the flesh?

[1:08] For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the scripture say? Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.

Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift, but as his due. And to the one who works, and to the one who does not work, but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.

Just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works. Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.

Is this blessing then only for the circumcised or also for the uncircumcised? For we say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness. 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. He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised.

[2:19] 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, and to make him the father of the circumcised, who are not merely circumcised, but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

Would you pray with me? Father, this is your word, and Lord, this morning we are here to worship you and to hear from you this morning. And so, Lord, as we dig into your word this morning, we invite your spirit into this place to speak to us, Father, as only you can.

Lord, we love you, and we praise you in Jesus' name. Amen. Thank you. You may be seated. Times change. And you can either go with the times, or you can get left in the dust.

Let's take the telephone, for example. There was a time when the only place you could talk on a telephone was at your house. It had to be plugged into the wall.

I remember those times. And I remember the telephone that I had, I couldn't even really walk around the room with. The cord was so short that I actually had to sit at the desk in order to talk on the telephone.

[3 : 38] And then times changed. And something called the cordless phone came into being. You remember these cordless phones? Now, the receiver still has to be plugged in, but it had this really long antenna.

It was a telescoping antenna. It was made out of metal, and when you tried to collapse it down on itself, if you went too fast, you would bend that antenna, and then you would ruin the phone. These phones, for the first time, allowed us to not just talk on the phone, but we could actually walk around the room and talk on the phone.

Now, you couldn't go two rooms away because it would get staticky, and if you went to the other side of the house, you would probably lose your connection. These phones were good, but you couldn't go far with them. And then times changed again, and you're going to see how big of a geek I am.

The 2.4 gigahertz telephone came out. And for the first time, we were able to actually leave the room and go outside even.

And if you had a really nice 2.4 gigahertz phone, you could even go to your neighbor's house. No longer did we have a telescoping antenna that was made out of metal. It had this little rubber antenna, and they were a game changer.

[4 : 53] When these phones came out, I was a flooring contractor. Before I was in ministry, I installed carpet, hardwood, and all those kinds of good things. And we would a lot of times go to the warehouse to pick up our jobs, and these warehouses were sometimes huge.

And we had no idea in the warehouse where the job was located. And so we were able to take phones just like this, call the main store, and then walk around that big warehouse trying to find out where our job was located in that building.

It was a game changer. But then times changed again. And the first cell phone came out. How many of you all remember that one? Right? If you were born in the 90s, if you were alive in the 90s, you remember these things.

They were huge. Right? They were bulky. They didn't work very well. And they were really, really expensive. And the only people that could afford one of these kinds of cell phones were the rich and famous.

But then times changed again. And the flip phone came out. You all remember the flip phone? Some of you all still carry the flip phone. You know who you are. These phones were great because what they allowed us to do is they allowed us to talk virtually anywhere we wanted.

[6 : 04] They were affordable. They folded up, and they fit in our pockets. Every one of us probably had a flip phone at some point in our lives.

And then times changed again. And we had these little rectangle bricks that came out that had QWERTY keyboards. You remember QWERTY keyboards? They were the kind of keyboards that slid out from the bottom of the cell phone.

I was in ministry at this point. I was doing youth ministry. And these are the phones that our youth would carry. And it was during this time that text messaging became a thing. And they would start text messaging back and forth.

But the problem with that was is back then text messaging was not included on the plan. It cost parents 25 to 50 cents a pop. And I remember parents just getting so angry at their kids for sending like 100 text messages a month and just raising up that cell phone bill.

And then times changed again. Do you all know what happened on June 29, 2007? Apple releases its first iPhone.

[7 : 12] Now, whether you're an iPhone person or you're an Android person, it really doesn't matter. This was the game changer. For the first time, we could literally communicate with anyone all over the world with the click of one button.

It changed how we do life, essentially. Today, many businesses and even churches require their staff members to have a smartphone.

And for good reason. These phones make communication easy. It makes life easy. I remember one time I was without my iPhone for about three days.

And life got really hard for me. It was hard to communicate with folks. Many of you in here know. I can communicate with you at the click of a button. Right? I can send out a lot of text messages in the click of a button and communicate with the whole church.

It's amazing. Cell phones have changed the way we live. Times change. People change. And life changes.

[8 : 20] But I would submit to you this morning that there is one thing that never, ever, ever changes. And that's salvation. Salvation has been and always will be by grace through faith.

In 15 plus years of vocational student ministry, one question I get asked quite a bit is how were the people in the Old Testament saved? I mean, Jesus hadn't come yet.

That's a good question. I sincerely believe that. This morning, we're going to look at Romans chapter 4, verses 1 through 12. And we're going to see that salvation has never changed.

It's always been by grace through faith. And we're going to look at three truths regarding that statement. Number one. Salvation was never earned through work.

Salvation can't be earned. You can't do enough good things. You can't do enough religious rituals. You can't come to church enough. You can't read your Bible enough. Because salvation cannot be earned through works.

[9 : 27] Look what Paul says. What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather, according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.

For what does the scripture say? Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness. Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift, but as his due.

And so Paul begins this section of scripture by asking a very, very simple question. What was gained by Abraham? And so what Paul is doing here is he's anticipating an argument from the Jews.

And he uses Abraham as his illustration to prove that salvation never has been by works. You see, the Jews back then believed that since Abraham was called by God, since Abraham was circumcised, since Abraham is the father of the Jewish nation, that somehow, somehow he would be saved because of that.

It's about earning it. And today, if you go out on the street and you ask the person who believes that there is a God, how do you get to heaven? More often than not, what they will essentially say to you is, well, I believe that if my good deeds outweigh my bad deeds, in the end, God is going to bless that and he's going to allow me into heaven.

[11 : 00] A matter of fact, every major world religion teaches that in some way or form. Christianity, for a lack of better words, is the only world religion that does not teach that.

We're the only ones that are different. Because the Bible teaches that salvation is by grace through faith. And so Paul says, what shall we say was gained by Abraham if he was justified, if he was saved by his works?

And Paul is insinuating here that he was not. And in order to prove his point, he doesn't go to the book of Deuteronomy. He doesn't go to the book of Numbers. He doesn't even go to the book of Exodus.

He goes all the way back to the beginning into the book of Genesis. And he quotes verse 6, Genesis 15, verse 6 in this passage. I want to put up Genesis 15, 1 through 6.

I want to read the whole thing to you to give you a bigger context. But Paul shows us right here, Abraham didn't earn his salvation. He believed God. Look what it says.

[12 : 15] After these things, the word of the Lord came to Abram, and that's Abraham, in a vision. Fear not, Abram. I am your shield.

Your reward shall be very great. But Abram said, O Lord God, what will you give me? For I continue childless, and the heir of my house is an Eliezer of Damascus.

And Abram said, Behold, you have given me no offspring, and the member of my household will be my heir. And behold, the word of the Lord came to him. This man shall not be your heir.

Your very own son shall be your heir. And he brought him outside and said, Look toward heaven and number the stars, if you're able to number them. And then he said to him, So shall your offspring be.

And here's verse 6. This is what Paul quotes in Romans 4. And Abraham believed the Lord, and God counted it to him as righteousness.

[13 : 09] In this passage, God is making a covenant with Abraham to give him a child. That child, we later find out, is named Isaac. And he's going to give him numerous offspring that's going to bless the world.

And that, as we read, is ultimately fulfilled in the person of Jesus Christ. And so we see all the way back into the book of Genesis. Abraham wasn't saved because of something that he did.

Abraham was saved because of his belief. And so Paul says in verse 4, Now to the one who works for his salvation, his wages are counted, not counted as a gift, but as something that he is owed.

Let's illustrate it kind of like this. Let me see who I can pick on this morning. Joe Dunn. I'm going to pick on Joe Dunn this morning. Let's pretend for a second that I'm going out of town.

Let's pretend it's July. It's the middle of the summertime. And I'm going on a missions trip and taking a bunch of students on a missions trip for the next 30 days. And so I go to Joe and I say, Hey, Joe, I'm going on a missions trip for 30 days.

[14 : 16] And my wife's not going to be there. The kids are not going to be there. We're all leaving. I need someone to go buy the house. Maybe cut the grass once a week. Gather the mail. Just make sure no one's broke into my house while we're gone.

And if you could do that each week, I'll mail you a check for \$100 every single week. Four weeks, \$400 just to do that. And of course, Joe would say, I'll do it.

I'll do it. And so I go out on my trip and Joe comes to my house that first week. He cuts the grass and does a little weeding, checks the house, makes sure nothing has been broken into, gets my mail.

The end of the week comes and Joe goes out to the mailbox. Expects to find a \$100 check. But there's no check. And Joe's thinking to himself, You know what?

Mike's a good guy. He's on a missions trip. He's got a lot going on. I'm sure the check is in the mail. So the second week comes and he goes back to my house. He cuts the grass. He checks the mail.

- [15 : 16] Checks out the house, makes sure nothing has been broken into. He goes out to his mailbox that second week expecting to find two \$100 checks. Opens that mailbox up. Guess what? No check. So Joe thinks to himself, Mike's a good guy. He's a friend. I mean, Mike's a pastor. He's good for it, right? And so he comes back that third week. Cuts the grass. Checks the house. Gets my mail. Goes to his mailbox at the end of that week. No check. Now Joe's getting a little, I don't know, a little concerned, should we say. But he still comes back that last fourth week. Cuts the grass. Gets the mail. Does everything that he did before. And the fourth week comes. He goes out to that mailbox expecting to find \$400. And guess what? No check. I come back off my missions trip. I get home and I get up into my bedroom with my suitcase. I start unpacking and all of a sudden I hear at my front door.

- [16 : 17] It's Joe Dunn. What does Joe want? He wants his money. Why? Because he earned it. I want you to take that for a second and apply that to salvation. Okay? If we think that we can earn our salvation based upon what we do, what we are saying is, God, you have to let me into heaven because I earned it. I worked for it. I was good enough. And what we do in that situation is we take God out of the process. And salvation becomes all about what we do, not about what he has done. And that's the point Paul is trying to make here. Salvation has always been and always will be through faith. It has never, ever been earned. Second point I want to make this morning comes from verses 5 through 8. And we've kind of touched on this already. And it's this. Salvation has always been through faith. It's always been through faith.

- [17 : 26] From the book of Genesis all the way through the book of Revelation, it's always by faith. Look at verses 5 through 8. And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness. Just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works. Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin. And so what Paul begins to do here, he begins to make a contrast with the Joe Dunn, the wage earner, the one who has earned it. Okay? Versus the one who gets it by grace. He says in verse 5, to the one who does not work. Okay? He's not trying to earn it. But believes, has faith in him who justifies the ungodly. His faith is counted as righteousness. Righteousness and justification does not come through working. It does not come through good deeds.

- [18 : 30] Because when we compare ourselves with a good God, just how good are our deeds anyway? God is the ultimate standard of good. And when we compare our good deeds to a holy and good God, oh my goodness, we fall incredibly short. And so Paul is contrasting these two, saying that a right standing before God comes through faith.

Comes through belief. Comes through trust. It does not come through religious rituals, deeds, or being a good person. In fact, Jesus told a parable in Luke chapter 18, and it's going to be on the screen, verses 9 through 14, where he talks about the person trying to earn their salvation versus the person who was given it by grace through faith.

Listen to it with me. Luke 18, 9 through 14. It should be on the screen. Jesus also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and treated others with contempt.

Two men went up into the temple to pray, a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus, God, I thank you that I'm not like the other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector.

[19 : 58] I fast twice a week. I give tithes of all that I get. But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, God, be merciful to me, a sinner.

I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.

And so, in this parable, you have two very different men. You have a Pharisee. Okay? And during Jesus' time, the community viewed the Pharisees as very religious people.

I mean, they had the staves, they had the gowns, they walked around kind of pious and holy, and then you had the tax collector. And the Pharisee, even here, looks like he's devout.

He looks good. I mean, he says that he fasted twice a week. I mean, when was the last time you fasted, right? But he fasted twice a week. He tithes.

[21 : 01] He tithes everything that he gets. He gives it back. He even avoids certain sins. He looks religious. And then you have one of the most hated people of Jesus' time, the tax collector.

Tax collectors who were known to be extortioners, for being unjust, for being greedy. But since the tax collector confessed his sin and went to God and asked for his mercy and grace, Jesus said that the tax collector, not the Pharisee, walked away justified.

You see, the Pharisee was trying to earn his salvation, and you cannot do that. It's only by grace alone through faith alone.

And I would submit that faith impacts who you are. It impacts who you live, how you live. It impacts your priorities, even your view on life.

In his book, *Living Above the Level of Mediocrity*, Charles Swindell wrote this. Legend has it that a man was lost in the desert, just dying for a drink of water.

[22 : 14] He stumbled upon an old shack, a ramshackled, windowless, roofless, weather-beaten old shack. He looked about this place and found a little shade from the heat of the desert sun.

And as he glanced around, he saw a pump 15 feet away. An old rusty pump. He stumbled over to it, grabbed the handle, and began to pump up and down, up and down, up and down.

Nothing came out. Disappointed, he staggered back. He noticed off to the side an old jug, and he looked at it, wiped away the dirt and dust, and read a message that said, You have to prime the pump with all of the water in this jug, my friend.

P.S., be sure you fill the jug again before you leave. He popped the cork out of the jug, and sure enough, it was almost full of water, and suddenly he was faced with a decision.

If he drank the water, he could live, but if he poured all of the water in the old rusty pump, maybe, just maybe, it would yield fresh, cool water from deep down in the well. All the water he wanted. And so he studied the possibility of both options.

[23 : 21] What should he do? Pour it into the old pump and take a chance on fresh, cool water? Or drink what was in that old jug and ignore its message? Should he waste all the water on the hopes those flimsy instructions written not telling how long ago?

Reluctantly, he poured all of that water into the pump. And then he grabbed the handle and began to pump it. Squeak, squeak, squeak. Nothing came out.

Pumped it again. Squeak, squeak, squeak. A little bit began to dribble out, and then a small stream. And finally, it gushed into his relief. Fresh, cool water poured out of that rusty pump.

Eagerly, he filled the jug and drank from it. He filled it another time and drank again of its refreshing contents. And then he filled the jug for the next traveler. He filled it to the top, popped the cork back on, and added this little note.

Believe me, it really works. You have to give it all away before you can get anything back. Now, this illustration breaks down just a little bit.

[24 : 29] But our faith in Christ is similar to it. God has given us everything that we need for salvation. He has given us the water of life, which in this story is that pump.

But God's also given us the jug. He's given us the faith. He's given us the grace. Everything we need to prime that pump, he has given us everything that we need.

Throughout the pages of Scripture, from beginning to end, we see that salvation cannot be earned. It is something that is only given to us by grace through faith.

Salvation cannot be earned. Salvation has always been by faith. And then finally, salvation through faith results in a changed life. Look at verses 9 through 12 in closing.

Paul says, And so the question at hand is this.

[26 : 17] How did Abraham obtain a right standing before God? Paul tells us in verse 9 that faith is what God counted to Abraham as righteousness. And then again in verse 11 says, He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith before he was circumcised.

And so the answer is by faith. And his faith impacted how he lived. And as you read through the book of Genesis and read about Abraham, you see how his faith had impacted his life.

Many of the Jews believed that because of their ethnicity, because of their religion, because of circumcision, they were going to be right with God.

And what Paul does here in chapter 4 is he shows us that before the Jewish race began, before Judaism ever existed, before circumcision was ever instituted, it was faith that made people right with God.

They were depending on themselves to have a right standing with God. Let me ask you, what are you depending on?

[27 : 43] Are you depending on church membership, coming to church, being a good person, once again, good deeds outweighing bad deeds? Or are you depending on the finished work of Jesus Christ, whose birth we just celebrated?

My appeal to you this morning is that if you're here and you don't know Christ as your Savior and your Lord, don't walk out of these doors this morning without doing business with God.

Don't walk out of these doors this morning knowing that you know that I have faith in the complete work of Jesus. His death, His burial, His resurrection, and through faith in Him, I will be in a right standing with the Lord.

I will one day see Him for who He is. I will be with Him in eternity. Would you pray with me? Father, we come before You right now.

Lord, such a simple message. It's the gospel. And that's what Christmas was about. The gospel. Jesus coming into this world.

[29 : 01] Who took on flesh. Took our sins. He led a perfect life. But yet died for us. So we could be forgiven.

And so Lord, this morning. In a room this size. There are people all over that, Father, don't know Jesus as their Savior. And I pray this morning, this last Sunday of 2019, that they would give their life to You.

There may be some here this morning that have strayed away. Father, for a lack of better words, a resolution, a New Year's resolution they need to make is to get right with You.

To make their life right with You. To follow You with all of their heart, soul, mind, and strength once again as they did it at one point in their life. I pray this morning that Lord, they too would come to You.

And so Father, this morning be with us. We thank You for our time together. We thank You for the church. We thank You for Your love and most of all for Your precious Son, Jesus Christ.

[30 : 09] In whose name we pray. Amen. I'll be down here at the front. And if you would like to pray, I'd love to pray with you. If you do not know Jesus as your Savior and your Lord, you've got questions, I'll be down here.

And I'd love to spend some time with you. I'll stay here as long as it takes. But thank you so much for coming. And let's just go to the Lord in an attitude of prayer.