

96-04-19a

We're preparing to resume our study in Romans this evening, and as we do, let's take a moment to clear our minds and prepare our hearts and seek the ministry of God the Holy Spirit. Father, we thank you for the privilege of being called Christians, of being saved by the blood of Jesus Christ, of having your grace upon us and your plan enfolding us, being supported by all of your loving kindness. We thank you for the fact that we have lived to this point, that we have time before us in which we can take advantage of everything that you have given us and seek to have your glory reflected in our lives.

We pray that our study this evening will further that goal. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will help us to understand the things that are contained in this wonderful letter from Paul to the Romans. We pray that through these things we will be equipped for every good work.

We ask it in Jesus' name, Amen. We began last time and got partway through chapter four, which is a great illustration of one of the major themes of this letter to the Romans, which is addressing itself to, Paul is addressing himself to, the issue of how we live our life after salvation. It's such a great thing to realize that there is a point to life that goes beyond the common human goals of temporal success or monetary gain or accomplishment or fame or the approval of others, that there are transcendent goals and transcendent objectives.

The difficult thing is to remember that in the daily events of life because we have immediate goals and immediate purposes, immediate pressures, and we often, I think, stop and discover that we've spent many hours or even many days being caught up in the circumstances that we find ourselves in. Our work has requirements, our family has requirements, our circumstances place requirements on us, and it's easy to think in purely temporal terms and the accomplishment of these short-term goals. Here's a project that needs to be finished.

Here's a task that needs to be accomplished. Here is a set of priorities, a set of things that need to take place so that my life will go on in a normal and happy fashion. One of the things that we are called to as believers is to remember in the midst of all these things that there is a way of going about them that brings glory to God.

And I am somewhat painting my own kettle black, I guess, because this is one of the things that I wrestle with and have been here lately because the more hectic the pace, the more difficult it is to remember, I am a believer, I am a spiritual new creation, I have a responsibility and an opportunity to live in the light of spiritual things. It's just hard in the middle of the day to stop short and say, oh yes, where is my thought life, where are my priorities, why am I doing what I'm doing? But that's our calling and that's one of the things that this book addresses itself to. The Jews in Palestine in Paul's day had a way of life in which they were caught up.

It was their culture and even today the Jewish identity is primarily cultural even more so than

religious. It's a culture, it's a way of having a family life, it's a way of having a social life, it's a certain set of people that one associates with and a certain culture and it's a set of circumstances and that becomes the focus and that becomes the guiding set of parameters by which people live. And it goes all the way back and all of us have that, we may or may not have an ethnic cultural background but all of us have some set of circumstances in which we live.

What Paul is doing for these people is causing them to stop and take another look at those givens in their life and say, why are you letting this drive your train? Stop and think about this, what is the ultimate eternal value of this? And the term that he's using for that is righteousness or justification. It's dikaioisune in Greek, D-I-K-A-I-S-U-N-E, I think there's an O in there, D-I-K-A-I-O-S-U-N-E, is dikaioisune and this word is very important in Romans, it is translated variously in its forms as righteousness and as justification. One of the things that we will need to do before too much more time passes is stop and do a categorical study on justification because like many other things in the Word of God, justification has two, at least two meanings in scripture.

We have the justification that takes place at the point of salvation, justification meaning God assigning righteousness to us and that is the position that enters us into union with Christ, into God's family, alleviates the difficulty of facing the eternal wrath of God, the 36 things that happen at the point of salvation, one of those is the imputation or the assigning of divine righteousness to us and that is called in a theological term justification. We have tended to have a single definition for justification and that's it. We haven't really talked too much about justification in daily life.

We tend to use a different term for that which is sanctification and sometimes these are interchangeable, they overlap and so forth. What we want to do is get a good grip on the concept. There is something that happens to us at the point of faith in Christ that is an eternal once for all change in the way God looks at us and that secures our eternal salvation.

But in daily life as we go through circumstances and we make decisions and pursue choices and observe priorities and engage in the activities of each day, those thoughts and actions are being evaluated by God and they either come up as righteous or as not righteous. And that scale is in use every hour, every waking hour of every day and that's the one that we have a harder time keeping track of and that's what Paul is addressing himself to here and in this particular section of Romans when he's talking about justification and being declared righteous, he's talking about those daily lifestyle choices. He's talking about the turning points in our life.

We have routine daily choices and then we often come to a point where there's a more major decision to be made whether it's with regard to family or where we are going to be or an employment change or a decision to be made with regard to relatives and our association with them or whatever it may be. These rise above the ordinary in our consciousness because they can be very determinative for the future and those are also weighed in that same balance. It's easy for us to see the important decisions like what church are we going to attend, what person are we going to marry, what career are we going to pursue and we pray and we raise the roof

and try to bring down heaven to get God's will shown to us in those major areas because we know that there's a lot riding on it.

But in our mind, what's riding on it is our future happiness and our future circumstances and we want to make the right choice and we usually have kind of an amalgam of reasons. We certainly want to please God but we also don't want to make a desperately unhappy choice that we will regret and so we have something of self-interest at heart when we pursue God's will and God's thinking on this because all of us naturally want a happy life and there's nothing wrong with that. However, if we would pay the same amount of attention to many of the smaller choices that we make on a day-to-day basis and seek equally in the small choices to please God and to be in the center of His will and to evaluate the factors influencing those choices based on God's word and what is the standard of righteousness, why am I doing this, what is my motivation, that is when we begin to look at our life more the way that God does because God isn't worried about how our circumstances are going to turn out.

He knows our circumstances are going to be okay. It's like the Allstate commercial, you're in good hands with Allstate and they show the house and the front yard in these two great big hands. That's the way we are and any impending disaster that we may see is more of an illusion than the reality of God's promise that we are held in His hands, we're sustained by His grace and there is no evil that can befall us that is not a part of His plan and that He hasn't already anticipated and made provision for.

So it's sort of a false motivation for us to get overly concerned by impending doom or the appearance of disaster or the possibility that we may make some terrible, awful decision that will lock us into a set of crummy circumstances for a long time. If we look at these things in the light of God's righteousness and God's desire to manifest His righteousness in us, this is when we start to understand what Jesus said when He said, He that is faithful in that which is least will be faithful also in that which is great. So Paul is addressing himself to this area of our life and when he's talking about this righteousness and whether or not we have a boast and whether or not we're living by faith, he's trying to get us over the hump, trying to get us to turn the corner between looking at life in terms of circumstances and what the circumstantial outcome will be because that's basically works, isn't it? Works is getting something accomplished that's visible to us and visible to other people that takes a bad circumstance and turns it good or takes something ugly and makes it beautiful or takes something that's not right and makes it right.

And we look at those things and we say, here it is, we've accomplished something in the material universe. What Paul has been telling us and arguing for the past three and a half chapters in Romans is that's not the right measure. Unbelievers can make a difference in this earth.

Unbelievers can do a good deed. Unbelievers can follow a rule. Unbelievers can conform to a code.

Unbelievers can be moral. The value in our life comes from operating in faith. Faith requires an object and that is what God has said and what God has promised and what God has set forth and revealed about himself.

And when we learn the things that Paul is trying to teach us here and all of us, it's a lifelong ambition to gain a greater grip on these things. Paul himself says, I do not consider myself to have already attained and he's the one writing the inspired scripture that communicates it to us. But that's the goal and that's the calling to which we are called.

We are called to be holy, to be set apart and to be a place where God's righteousness can be revealed and it's only revealed through faith. So what Paul is doing here in chapter four is he's trying to look to an example that will be clear and make an impact on the minds of people who, like us, need to understand this lesson. So he said he might have thought to himself, what will communicate most clearly to people who are in this particular culture, in this particular set of circumstances? Well, these are Jewish people who claim Abraham as their father.

So he says, let's take a look at Abraham. What was the outcome of his life? Abraham is a great example and that's why he shows up so often in the New Testament. It's amazing if you look in a concordance to see how many times Abraham is mentioned.

Part of the reason is the New Testament church was largely Jewish and he was a great example. Both Paul and James use Abraham as an example to make their point about faith and works. We're going to see Paul make a very James-like point in one of the passages that we look at tonight.

But Paul goes to Abraham and he says, what shall we say that Abraham, our father, found? Jerusalem, according to the flesh, for if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. It doesn't matter how closely we conform works-wise to the external standard. It can be a very good thing, but it's not the standard.

The standard is what went on in our soul before we ever engaged in those works. And so he says to him who works in Romans 4.4, the wages are not counted as grace, but as a debt. Why does Paul make this point that we don't want our blessing from God or our righteousness from God to be a recompense, a repayment? That we did what God wanted us to do, and so God is now going to pay a wage in terms of blessing or reward.

Well, what is the issue in our life? What is God wanting to do? God's wanting to reflect his glory. He's wanting to communicate his character. And what is the greatest expression of God's character? It's grace.

It's unmerited favor. It's God's commending his love toward us, and that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. And that after salvation, when we are still plagued with sin and we still fail and come short of the glory of God, that we can be justified freely by his grace.

This was the point in Romans 3.23 and 24. It's a tremendous insight into God's character that God doesn't love us and bless us based on who and what we are, but on who and what he is. And we are a great arena for God to display his character and his grace.

So whatever happens in our life, if it doesn't involve God's grace, it doesn't contribute to God's purpose. God's purpose in our life is to show his grace. If we are not a place where God's grace can be shown because we are busy trying to do all of the work ourselves, we're trying to generate all of the righteousness ourselves, whatever it is we accomplish is going to die in the dust of the heavens and the earth when God rolls it up like a blanket.

The things that count in an eternal perspective are those things that reflect God and show forth God. And so that's why verse 4 is there. There's no point in working and trying to earn something from God because that's not God's purpose in our life.

God wants to show grace. And so if we were able to work, which we can't, and earn something from God, it still wouldn't accomplish God's purpose. It needs to be by grace.

And therefore in verse 5, to him who does not work, but believes on him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness. Faith puts us in the position to receive the righteousness of God, to be declared righteous by God just because we accept what God has said and what God has done. And so the logical inference to make from that is, well, then Christianity is just passive.

All we have to do is just sit there and believe, and God's purpose will be accomplished. Well, James, of course, addresses that issue. We saw that last time.

And Paul does as well. Turn over to Galatians chapter 3. We know, as we've mentioned a few times before, that Romans and Galatians were written very close together, and many of the same issues were on Paul's mind in both of these letters in Galatians chapter 3. He begins by saying, O foolish Galatians, who has bewitched you that you should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ was clearly portrayed among you as crucified? This only I want to learn from you. Did you receive the Spirit by the works of the law or by the hearing of faith? And this is a reference to their initial salvation.

How did your salvation come about? Did you do works and earn it from God, and it was a recompense, or did it come by the hearing of faith? Well, everyone understood the gospel that had listened to Paul, and so that's what he taught. And so it was clear that this was the result of faith and not of works. So he continues and says, Are you so foolish, having begun in the Spirit? Are you now being made perfect by the flesh? And this being made perfect is what we're talking about.

This is the daily life justification before God. Being declared righteous daily. Paul says also in Colossians, As you have received Christ, so walk.

And it's such a simple point, and yet it's a difficult one for us to remember as we go from day to day. So this is what he's addressing himself to in Romans chapter 4. To him who does not work but believes on him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness. Just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works.

Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin. And we concluded last time with this final statement.

Does this blessedness then come upon the circumcised only or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness. And then in Romans 4.10, how then was it accounted? While he was circumcised or uncircumcised? And Paul makes the point that this declaration by God that righteousness was imputed to Abraham, that declaration was made before Abraham ever engaged in the covenant of circumcision, which came some 29 or 30 years later. Now, the thing we want to look at is this, most of the time when we go through Romans and we get to chapter 4 and we're looking at Abraham, we're thinking of justification in terms of salvation.

We started out tonight talking about the fact that there are two different kinds of justification in the scriptures. There's the justification that takes place at salvation, but there's also justification on a daily basis. Because what is justification? It's a fancy word that says God looks at us and declares us to be righteous.

That declaration positionally was made when we expressed faith in Christ. It's made on a daily basis when we live by faith. That's why the just will live by his faith.

The fact that he is just is a result of the fact that he does have faith. And we more commonly refer to this as sanctification or experiential sanctification or whatever. But the important thing for us to know as we go through Romans is that in most of our English translations here, all of these words come from *dikaioisune*.

And they have to do very simply with what God decides when he evaluates our life. He looks at us, first of all, and sees that we are in Christ and we have the righteousness that comes through faith in Christ for salvation. He then is going to weigh us in the scale as to where we are today.

What is driving the thoughts and intents of our heart? Why are we doing what we do? The fact that we perform a deed that is judged righteous by the world doesn't mean anything. It's only the evaluation of God. And God is not evaluating the deed, he's evaluating the motive.

Al Capone was very generous to charities in Chicago, but it was not imputed to him for righteousness. The very same action can be performed by two believers. God will declare one righteous and another unrighteous, not because of the deed, but because of why it was done.

That's what Paul is trying to get across in Romans. And the thing to keep in mind is what is at stake. If we construe this as talking about salvation, we're going to miss this great lesson that Paul is trying to get across in this letter.

And many, many times in coming to Romans, we are thinking about some very right and proper principles having to do with salvation, but that's not Paul's message in this part of the book. He's not talking about salvation faith and salvation justification. He has addressed this to believers, and he's talking about their daily life.

And we're going to see that here in chapter four. Last time we reviewed, and I appreciate your endurance, we went through 15 or 16 reasons why we conclude that Paul is talking to believers about the Christian life. And we won't review those tonight, but we're going to see another one here in chapter four.

So let's continue now in verse 11 of chapter four of Romans. He has just said and made the point that God declared Abraham righteous before he was circumcised. Now if we go back to Genesis chapter 17, what was the occasion upon which God made this declaration? Why don't we go back there and look? We're fairly familiar with this passage, but let's just review it and make sure we have the issue clear in our mind.

Genesis chapter 17, when Abram was 99 years old, the Lord appeared to Abram and said, I am almighty God, walk before me and be blameless. And I will make my covenant between me and you and will multiply you exceedingly. And the Abrahamic covenant is given in the next several verses here, but notice the very first thing that God says to Abraham.

He says, I am almighty God, walk before me and be blameless and I will make my covenant with you. Now let me ask you, do you think that this is talking about Abraham's salvation at this point? It isn't, is it? God has come and appeared to someone and is talking to him and says, walk before me and be blameless and I will make my covenant with you. This is God talking to someone who's already a believer and commanding obedience, isn't it? Walk before me and be blameless is a command to obedience.

Now is salvation based on our obedience? Heaven be praised, it's not. If it was, the lake of fire would be full and God's kingdom would be empty. So this is something that God says to Abraham, he is already a believer.

This is a commandment for a believer, walk before me and be blameless, I will make my covenant with you. Now is this covenant in chapter 17 talking about Abraham's eternal life? Does the Abrahamic covenant promise Abraham eternal life? It implies the fact that Abraham is going to be around to receive the blessings of God and the blessings that are included in the covenant, but it assumes that as a fact, doesn't it? It doesn't say, Abraham, walk before me and be blameless and I will give you eternal life and you will walk with me in white and partake of the

hidden manna and have the white stone and rule with me in my kingdom and so forth, it doesn't say that. It assumes that Abraham is going to be around and that Abraham will be able to experience the blessing of being the father of many nations.

Abraham didn't see himself become the father of many nations during his earthly life, did he? But he will be resurrected and in the millennial kingdom, he will see all of the nations that have sprung from the fulfillment of this covenant by God. And so this is the Abrahamic covenant. When we go back even earlier to the promise that Abraham would have a son, do you remember that? God tells Abraham back in Genesis chapter 12, get out of your country, from your family, from your father's house to a land that I will show you.

I will make you a great nation. I will bless you, make your name great and you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and I will curse him who curses you and in you all families of the earth shall be blessed.

Now, this is a command to Abraham, but we're not talking about salvation here, are we? God has given Abraham a command to obey and Abraham obeys. Abraham, I submit to you, is already a believer at this point. Otherwise, we would have to say that obedience and leaving Ur and going to Palestine is somehow involved in Abraham's salvation.

Does God make a habit of appearing to unbelievers and giving them commands in his geographic will, telling them to obey, making covenants with them? If someone doesn't believe in God, they would say, I wonder what that was that I ate last night that gave me such a strange dream. Obviously, it couldn't have been God since I don't believe in God. These things are happening to a believer and that's an important point as we look at Romans because whether you're looking at Paul or James or any of the other Jesus Christ himself, when they use Abraham as an example, they're not talking about how Abraham came to faith in God or when Abraham was saved.

They're talking about Abraham in his relationship with God as a believer. The Abrahamic covenant came to Abraham in much the same way that the Davidic covenant came to David. We don't tend to confuse David's salvation with the Davidic covenant.

But why was David, out of all of the believers in Israel, chosen to be the recipient of the Davidic covenant? Why was he chosen to sit on the throne of Israel? Not because he was saved at the point that Samuel poured the anointing oil on his head, but because David was a man of faith. He was a believer who took advantage of the opportunity to be obedient and live by faith. Abraham did the same thing.

And because of that, he was in a position to receive promises from God that God could fulfill, promises that were contingent upon obedience. If Abraham, as a believer, had not left Ur of the Chaldees and gone to the place that God would show him, the covenant would not have been fulfilled. If Abraham had decided not to be circumcised and have his son circumcised on the

eighth day and so forth, it tells us in Genesis that anyone who doesn't obey in that covenant regard is cut off from their people.

They don't get the inheritance. Being cut off from the people in Israel meant you lose your right to the land. You lose your right to the inheritance.

So we have to sort of shift our mindset a little bit when we think about these things, because this is in the realm of believers and their relationship with God. We're going to see, we have seen, and we'll continue to see that throughout the book of Romans, when we talk about the law, the law was not a system of salvation, was it? God didn't say, keep the law and thou shalt be saved. The law was a system of obedience for believers.

If you weren't a believer, you weren't in Israel and you weren't under the law. And we just saw Paul say in chapter three, what the law says, it speaks to those who are under the law. And when the law says you believers are sinning and falling short of the glory of God, that makes the whole world guilty.

Because if God's people are still sinning, what about the people who are outside the faith? It's that much worse. So the point here is when we see the law referred to, the law is a system of worship. The law is a system of approach to God.

The law specified what you had to do to come near to God. Sacrifices were not a means of obtaining salvation. They were a means of acknowledging sin.

They were a means of worship, a means of thanksgiving, a means of acknowledging God's grace, the Feast of Firstfruits, the Feast of Booths. These were all avenues of worship for believers in the Mosaic Law. It was never a system of salvation.

And it was never a system of righteousness. But that's what it was turned into by the Jews. They said, well, if I keep these rules, I will be righteous.

And that brings us back to Romans and Paul's argument, because Paul is trying to point out through that system of the law, it isn't the works that you do that make you righteous. It's what you believe. And so he's going back and referring to Abraham.

And so in verse 11 of chapter 4, he says, Abram received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of faith, which he had while he was still uncircumcised. The obedience that Abraham expressed, he and his family, and in seeing to it that the people in his household were obedient in this regard. That was the sign of his righteousness.

That was a result of his faith and his attitude toward God. It wasn't the means. And so Paul is pointing out, Abram believed God.

It was credited to him for righteousness. And when God spoke, Abraham obeyed. So there are

two separate and distinct components.

There's cause and there's effect. The thing that places Abram in a position to receive God's righteousness is faith. It's believing what God said.

And this is talking about a believer. The principle applies in salvation. We express faith in Christ and we are in a position to receive God's righteousness and salvation.

We believe what God has said. We make that the reality in our soul. That puts us in a position to be accounted righteous by God.

The result of that will be righteous deeds. Paul is focusing here on the accounting of righteousness. And this word that is translated account or impute or declare righteous or justify throughout here is making that point.

Logizomai, in fact, if you have a Schofield Bible, I think he's got a note down here at the bottom. Logizomai occurs 11 times in this chapter. Translated account, count and impute.

That's the point that Paul is making here. Other places, Paul and James will make the point that your faith doesn't end with a passive belief. But he's he's trying to magnify this and show us the sequence that the righteousness, the declaration of justification happens when we believe, not when we do.

The doing should be an outgrowth and a result of the faith. And if we skip the faith test and that step, you can read Paul or John or the Lord Jesus Christ or Peter or James or anybody in the New Testament. No one says works without faith is great.

Faith without works is dead, being fruitless. Paul is pointing out here that no one is justified by works. We're justified by faith.

And so he's not dismissing the importance of good deeds, but he is pointing out that without faith, we are not going to be declared righteous. So this circumcision, this obedience that the Jews placed so much stock in and felt like they were cut above the Gentiles and the pagans and the barbarians and the Greeks, especially. Remember when they chased Titus around to see if he was circumcised or not? That was their idea of righteousness.

If Titus is not circumcised, he's not up there on the level of satisfaction in God's eyes that we are because we're Jewish and we've been circumcised. And they had the totally wrong idea. So this was a sign, a seal of the righteousness of faith, which he had when he was still uncircumcised, so that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also.

And Paul is using this as a lever to pry the Jews off of their high horse, that they are somehow better. Jesus Christ was a Jew. The law of Moses, we've had it for fourteen hundred years.

And this is a wonderful thing that Christ has come. And we understand all of the gospel and so forth. But still, we're a little bit better and a little bit finer because we're Jewish.

We're God's chosen people. And a lot of people still felt like, well, this was just an expansion of Judaism and not something entirely new. And so Paul says, look, you're placing stock in the wrong thing.

What makes you think that because you're Jewish or because you keep the law, God is going to declare you righteous? The basis for that declaration is faith. The basis for that declaration is faith, not works. And look at Abraham.

Abraham was declared righteous by faith before he did the circumcision thing. And so he is a great example for Jews and for Gentiles. He's a great example for the Gentiles because God declared him righteous and he didn't have to be circumcised to get that declaration.

He's a great example for the Jews because not only was he circumcised, but he did it as a result of his faith. It was a sign and a seal of his faith and the righteousness that came from it. So that's the point that he makes.

He is the father of the uncircumcised and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith, which our father Abraham had while still uncircumcised. Now, this is verse 13. This is what we're we've been leading up to.

The promise of his salvation. Is that what it's talking about? It's the promise that he would be heir of the world. Heirship is the issue here, not salvation.

And we're going to see as we look at Scripture that heirship is not automatic with salvation. Being saved does not make us an heir. Heirship is a promise.

It's a potential for believers, but it's not an automatic thing that we have tended to bundle these together. And we've got verses that say such and such, and we are an heir of salvation. But we're going to take our break.

And when we come back from the break, we're going to look at this concept of inheritance and what it means to be an heir. Specifically, as it pertains to this promise and this inheritance of Abraham. And we'll see that in the same way that Abraham had an issue with God as a believer, with faith and inheritance, we have an issue in our lives as believers with faith as it relates to our inheritance.

And we'll see the scriptures that teaches that when we come back from our break.