

***Romans 039***  
***What Did Abraham Find?***  
***Romans 4:1-8***

- 1 What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found?
- 2 For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God.
- 3 For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.
- 4 Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt.
- 5 But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.
- 6 Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works,
- 7 Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.
- 8 Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin. KJV

**Introduction:**

There is no doubt but that Paul began this section of his discussion speaking directly to the Jews, "Abraham our father as pertains to the flesh."

He has built an extraordinary case in the first 3 chapters.

God is...

Man does not like God because of His Laws

Therefore, man has invented his own gods, false gods, which allow him to do what he wants

In response to that, God gave man over to spiritual and moral darkness.

But to mankind this darkness seemed like new-found wisdom. "Professing themselves to be wise they became fools."

All of mankind, both Jews and Gentiles have sinned mightily against God in spite of the fact that their consciences were telling them otherwise and witnessing against them.

They broke every Law that God has given, which makes it impossible for any person to be saved by works... including the work of saying a prayer while refusing to repent of sin.

Justification, that word Paul used here as short-hand for the whole work of salvation, must then be by some other means than man's works. It must be something totally done by God, "justified freely by His Grace," which sets aside all possibility of boasting on the part of man.

Though he turns to speak directly to the Jews here we must remember that the book is addressed to a church composed of both Jew and Gentile.

But it should not surprise us that a question is being anticipated from the Jewish side of the church, probably because he has heard it many times before in other places from the same source.

“What purpose, then, does the Law have?”  
“You are making it useless.”

Paul had denied that, if you recall, in 3:31, “we establish the Law.”

Now, of course, he did not mean that he affirmed the Law as a way to be saved, to be Justified, to be made right with God... he had just proven that to be impossible.

We demonstrated last week in the message that “establishing the Law” means using it for its proper purpose, as a Schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, one to teach us of our sins and the utter impossibility of saving ourselves. It teaches us our absolute need of a Savior Who can do it all for us. You remember what he said in another place.

Eph 2:8-9

8 For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God:

9 Not of works, lest any man should boast. KJV

Now, here in this place, (he did not write in chapters and verses) Paul extended his answer to the Jews.

But before we take that up we must insert here a parenthesis

I want to show you something I have recognized in this passage as being profound on an extreme level.

Much of the “Christian” Theology of our day operates on the idea that Spiritual History is divided into different time periods with each of them having a different set of conditions by which men could be right with God.

Some of them teach that the Jews, at least from Moses to Jesus, were saved by keeping the Law, but since the time of Jesus we are saved by simply believing a few propositional truths. Before Moses, they speculate, men were saved by believing and obeying the revelation they had. For example, some would contend that Abel, the second son of Adam, was saved by offering his sacrifice in faith.

There is even the idea that God changed his plan of salvation during the ministry of Jesus. He came, they say, offering Himself as Messiah, the King of the Jews, and if they had received Him and enthroned Him they would have been saved by that act. But, since they rejected Him, the offer was withdrawn and the “only believe” Gospel now preached was offered as a substitute.

Some want to split the manner of salvation at the cross and say that the believing thief was saved under one set of conditions but those who would come to faith after the Resurrection would be saved under a different arrangement. Thus, some get around the issue that the thief was never baptized but yet was saved.

We will discover in the next few verses that Paul was laying down a principle which eradicates all of those foolish ideas... and even some that no longer exist.

He calls for his witnesses Abraham and David to affirm his doctrine of Justification by Faith.

On the one hand we have an uncircumcised man who lived before the Law and on the other a man from the Glory Days of Israel and the Law system, the man whose son built the Great Temple which has never been equaled. And Paul used them to prove his case to Jews and Gentiles living on this side of the Resurrection and Ascension of Christ as well as the Outpoured Holy Spirit. Three different divisions of time with the same story and the same way of Justification before God.

Three independent 'Dispensations' as some say in which men are made right with God (Justified) in exactly the same way.

If you understand this principle you see why Dispensationalism should never have been allowed into the Evangelical Church.

In addition to that, you will also see that almost every heresy known to Christianity has been formulated around some version of the idea, "God saved people in different ways at different times and now we have the *one and only new way to be saved*."

But Paul was gathering up people from these three very different time periods (Before Moses' Law, During Moses' Law, and After It) to affirm the principle that "*Justification is and always has been by (through, by the means of) Faith.*"

And, by definition that means *not by works*.

**2 For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God.**

This is an interesting structure of grammar because Paul used a technique called an 'ellipsis' which is a set of words understood to be present although they are not. He used it often. What we should hear is this, "if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory, but (he does not have anything to glory of) before God." It is an affirmation, again, that he was not made right with God by his works. There is nothing about his Justification for which he can take credit, just as there is not for anyone else among the Justified.

It may be difficult for many to grasp but this one act of gathering Abraham and David into the discussion of Justification by Faith is one of the Really Large Things that Paul has done here.

It is sad that it is missed by so many.

End of parenthesis

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**That being said, let us return to Paul's question, "What shall we say that Abraham.... hath found?"** What has he discovered? What has God shown him?

He discovered that God had Justified him, had it "counted unto him for righteousness."

Rom 4:3

3 For what saith the scripture? And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness. ASV

There are theologians who would probably want to argue with Paul. The act of giving someone righteousness is technically contained in the term "Sanctification" not "Justification." But, I have been showing you that Paul was using the one term "Justification" as a short-hand reference to the whole work of God in Salvation.

We can separate the terms logically for the sake of study but they are never separated in action. He who is "Justified" is also Called, Redeemed, Pardoned, Saved, Forgiven, Sanctified and Glorified. It all comes together, not as separate elements. It is one package.

Now, let us look at this thing that Abraham found. Paul might have said that "Abraham had faith" because Faith and Justification is the topic of discussion, but, instead he wrote, "Abraham believed God."

We remember that in the original language Faith is the noun form of the verb translated as "Believe" in our Bible. Paul was demonstrating that to "have faith" and to "believe God" are one and the same thing, at least in his mind and in the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

But focus for a bit, if you will, on what both Moses (writer of Genesis) and Paul said, "Abraham believed God." They did not say:

believed in God

believed about God

believed there is a God

no.... he "believed God" and that was Paul's definition of Faith here. But what does it mean?

**He believed everything that God told him, showed him and commanded him with a confidence that moved him to obey even very difficult and scary things.**

The first issue was God's call to move a very long distance from his home and the apparent home of his ancestors.

Gen 11:27-12:8

27 Now these are the generations of Terah: Terah begat Abram, Nahor, and Haran; and Haran begat Lot.

28 And Haran died before his father Terah in the land of his nativity, in Ur of the Chaldees.

29 And Abram and Nahor took them wives: the name of Abram's wife was Sarai; and the name of Nahor's wife, Milcah, the daughter of Haran, the father of

- Milcah, and the father of Iscah.
- 30 But Sarai was barren; she had no child.
- 31 And Terah took Abram his son, and Lot the son of Haran his son's son, and Sarai his daughter in law, his son Abram's wife; and they went forth with them from Ur of the Chaldees, to go into the land of Canaan; and they came unto Haran, and dwelt there.
- 32 And the days of Terah were two hundred and five years: and Terah died in Haran.
- Genesis 12
- 1 Now the LORD had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee:
- 2 And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing:
- 3 And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.
- 4 So Abram departed, as the LORD had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran.
- 5 And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came.
- 6 And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land.
- 7 And the LORD appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give this land: and there builded he an altar unto the LORD, who appeared unto him.
- 8 And he removed from thence unto a mountain on the east of Bethel, and pitched his tent, having Bethel on the west, and Hai on the east: and there he builded an altar unto the LORD, and called upon the name of the LORD. KJV

It was a double move and the moves were separated by some years. In a later text the Lord is recorded as having been the motivator for both of the moves.

It is interesting that the first record of Abraham is not his faith but God coming to speak to him. We have no record of a history of faith in the man, that is only mentioned after he arrived in Canaan (which was to become Israel).

We are reminded that in order for one to have a relationship with God, He must initiate it. One cannot do it for himself nor can any of God's servants. Remember what Jesus said, "No man can come unto me except the Father which has sent me draw him." Any sinner interested in the state of his soul must begin by crying out to heaven for the mercy of God to bring life and faith to his/her soul.

But, we do see that Abram (that was his original name) obeyed God on both accounts. That, in and of itself, is an evidence of some kind of confidence in Him.

In a later passage we have the Promise repeated and further evidence of Abram's faith, but still no open declaration of it.

- 14 And the LORD said unto Abram, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward:
- 15 For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever.
- 16 And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth: so that if a man can number the dust of the earth, then shall thy seed also be numbered.
- 17 Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee.
- 18 Then Abram removed his tent, and came and dwelt in the plain of Mamre, which is in Hebron, and built there an altar unto the LORD. KJV

Evidence is that he obeyed and he worshiped.

Gen 15:1-7

- 1 After these things the word of the LORD came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram: I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward.
- 2 And Abram said, Lord GOD, what wilt thou give me, seeing I go childless, and the steward of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus?
- 3 And Abram said, Behold, to me thou hast given no seed: and, lo, one born in my house is mine heir.
- 4 And, behold, the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, This shall not be thine heir; but he that shall come forth out of thine own bowels shall be thine heir.
- 5 And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and tell the stars, if thou be able to number them: and he said unto him, So shall thy seed be.
- 6 And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness.
  
- 7 And he said unto him, I am the LORD that brought thee out of Ur of the Chaldees, to give thee this land to inherit it. KJV

Some years have gone by and still Abram had no child, but the promise is still being affirmed that he would have numerous descendants. We also have the affirmation of the Lord that He was behind the original move from Ur although the story did not originally state that.

Most important is that we have the declaration of Abram's faith as well as his right standing before God. Moses said that he was counted as Righteous while Paul declared that he was Justified by Faith. The two terms, as we said earlier, are not technically identical but one is never real without the other.

Remember, too, that God being Righteous cannot declare anything or anyone as Holy who is not actually so. The only mechanism God ever gave to make men Holy is the Finished Work of Jesus Christ. Therefore, we logically and safely infer from Paul's writings that the Work of Christ was a finished and accomplished transaction in the mind of God from the beginning, so much so that He could truthfully and perfectly declare Abram to be Righteous before Him without any conflict or lack of truthfulness.

We find another interesting repetition of the promise with some additional information.

Gen 17:1-10

- 1 And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the LORD appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect.
- 2 And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly.
- 3 And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying,
- 4 As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations.
- 5 Neither shall thy name any more be called Abram, but thy name shall be Abraham; for a father of many nations have I made thee.
- 6 And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kings shall come out of thee.
- 7 And I will establish my covenant between me and thee and thy seed after thee in their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee.
- 8 And I will give unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land wherein thou art a stranger, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God.
- 9 And God said unto Abraham, Thou shalt keep my covenant therefore, thou, and thy seed after thee in their generations.
- 10 This is my covenant, which ye shall keep, between me and you and thy seed after thee; Every man child among you shall be circumcised. KJV

We have the command of God for Abraham to be “perfect,” and we are sure that it means for him to be upright and obey the moral laws of God as well as whatever spiritual laws were given to him. This is another evidence that some version of the Law of God existed in the world from the beginning.

We also see this command stated in close proximity to the promise but their relationship is not ‘cause and effect’ for the promise had already been given and repeated. Abraham had already believed God concerning it.

It is only here that his name is changed to Abraham and only now does he received the ordinance of circumcision as a sign of the covenant. This means, as Paul points out, that he was Justified and Sanctified *before, not after*, his circumcision. This rules circumcision and all other rites and ceremonies, whatever their origin, as not ever being the cause of anyone’s Justification before God.

Being Established, then, that Abraham was Justified by Grace and through Faith, we follow the story further and find him being required to do some difficult things.

He was required to send his firstborn son, Ishmael, away from the family so that Isaac might have his rightful place as the son promised by God.

Then he was required by God to take Isaac and offer him as a burnt offering to God.

He faithfully followed the commands of God and it was only God's angel which restrained him from following through on the sacrifice.

Abraham believed God and God counted him as righteous. Then, Abraham lived a life of obeying God as a demonstration of the fact that he believed and actually was righteous.

Heb 11:17-19

- 17 By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son,
- 18 Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called:
- 19 Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure. KJV

What we do not find in our OT scriptures (and we do not know the source of this information) was that Abraham had some understanding of the afterlife and resurrection. But the writer of Hebrews obviously had access to information that is not preserved to us.

Heb 11:8-10

- 8 By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.
- 9 By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise:
- 10 For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. KJV

Undoubtedly he knew that no such city existed on this earth, so he was not wandering around seeking it. His heart was set on the New Jerusalem, not a pile of dirt here.

This is what it means to "believe God" or to "have Faith." It means to listen to Him, trust Him and obey what He says.

And, what has He said to you? "This is my Beloved Son, hear Him," concerning Jesus.

And, what did Jesus say? "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

All of His servants say that and the text that Paul quotes here from David tells us exactly what Repentance looks like. We will take that up next Sunday, Lord willing.