

Lent 2
March 12, 2017

"We Are True Children of Abraham"

ROMANS 4:1-5, 13-17

What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? ² If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about-- but not before God. ³ What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." ⁴ Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. ⁵ However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. ¹³ It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. ¹⁴ For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless, ¹⁵ because law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression. ¹⁶ Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring-- not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. ¹⁷ As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed-- the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.

Some years ago I was picking up some horse manure for my garden from the horse ranch nearby on Solomon Road. Also at the ranch was a man who was loading manure for his garden into his old beat up Chevy station wagon. We struck up a conversation. He asked me what I did and I told him I was the pastor of Star of Bethlehem Lutheran Church on Blosser Road. Then he said, "I am of a different persuasion." Then he added, "I believe there is only one God." He was Jewish and did not believe there is one God and yet three persons, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. I wish I would have responded by saying, "I am a true son of Abraham" and then told him how I believe what Abraham believed about the promised Messiah.

We are true children of Abraham. When you believe you are justified or declared not guilty on the basis of what Christ has done, then you are a true Jew, a true child of Abraham, because you believe what Abraham believed.

Credited with righteousness

What did Abraham believe? He believed in a Savior who would bless all nations. Through this Savior he was credited with the blessing of righteousness. Paul writes, "What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about-but now before God."

Some of the Jewish people reading this letter from Paul might have been thinking that Abraham was blessed by God because he had such great faith and did wonderful things. As Paul says, "Abraham had something to boast about, but not before God" Abraham

could have boasted about going where God wanted him to go. He could have boasted about helping other people in his community. Yet, he could not boast before God, because even great father Abraham had fallen far short of the glory of God. You will recall how he once lied about his wife Sarah or even committed adultery by having a child through his wife's servant Hagar. Abraham had his shining moments but he had his low moments as well. He could not be justified by his works.

How was Abraham justified or declared righteous before God if it was not by his works and the life he lived? Verse 3 says, "What does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.'" Abraham did not put his trust and hope in what he could do for God. Abraham put his trust and hope in what God would do for him. Abraham believed God's promise that the whole world would be blessed through one of his descendants. Believing in that promise credited him with righteousness.

Saving faith is truly amazing whether it is found in the life of Abraham or found in your life and mine. Saving faith takes a hold of Christ and his righteousness. Saving faith says I can find nothing in myself to offer God to be justified or declared righteous. Saving faith says I have everything I need in Christ alone. Abraham looked forward to what Christ would do while we look back at what Christ has done. He was credited with Christ's righteousness and so are we.

We love that word "credited." This ATM card can transfer money from my account and give me cash at an ATM machine. Jesus transfers or credits us with his righteousness. Isaiah 61 says, "I delight greatly in the Lord; my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness."

To show us even more clearly how Abraham was saved by being credited with righteousness, Paul uses the example of getting paid for work you do. "Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness." If you work hard at your job you expect to get paid for what you do. That's the way it is in life, but that is not the way it is when it comes to being forgiven and being saved and having eternal life. Martin Luther once believed God would reward and bless him for working hard. Then he discovered the truth that no matter how hard you try to please God you will always fall short. He discovered that the just live by their faith in what Christ has done not in what they try to do.

The only way to survive the judgment to come is to believe in a righteousness outside of yourself that is found in Christ. Faith trusts in God who justifies the ungodly. Who are the ungodly mentioned here? This is all of humanity that falls short of God's glory. When Jesus died on the cross he took every sin of every person in the world, past, present and future upon himself and paid for it completely. Then the heavenly Father raised him from the dead as proof the wicked people of the world, including us, had been justified or forgiven.

Faith trusts that this actually happened and believes it is true. How do I know my sin was paid for at the cross? I believe that God declared the wicked forgiven at the cross and that includes me. Faith believes this is true. Faith believes this pronouncement of forgiveness

applies to me. I share that same faith with Abraham. I agree with the evangelist preacher Billy Sunday who said of his life, "He saved the guttermost to the uttermost." Of all the blessings you have in life, and there are so many, your greatest blessing is being credited with Christ's righteousness.

Blessed with promises

Because you are sons and daughters of Abraham who are credited with Christ's righteousness, you are also blessed with promises the way Abraham was. We turn our attention to verse 13. "It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith." Abraham received a cluster of promises from God including the promise he and his people would be richly blessed. They would be heirs of the world because of all the blessings the Lord would pour out to them. How did these blessings come to Abraham? Did he earn them by keeping God's laws and doing all the right things? No, these blessings came to him because he was credited with righteousness. Through his faith given to him by God all the righteousness that was in Christ was given to him. That opened the door to all sorts of other important promises from the Lord.

The same is also true in your life. You know you do not receive promises from your God because of how righteous you are and how good you are at keeping God's laws. These promises come to you because God has declared you to be righteous through his Son. There are thousands of promises found here in the Bible. You can read these promises of eternal life, of the Lord being with you, of his love that won't fail you, of everything working out for you good, of the Lord hearing your prayers. You can joyfully say to every promise given, "That's mine." "That is given to me." "I know it is mine because Jesus has declared me to righteous through him."

You cannot and you dare not go back to thinking you can keep God's law to earn his promises because then you will invalidate the best promise of all that you are righteous through Jesus. "For if those who live by the law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless because law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression." Do you earn an inheritance? No, it is given to you as a gift. So it is with the inheritance Jesus has won for us. We cannot go back into thinking we can earn this or we will cause it to become worthless. You cannot go back to thinking keeping God's laws will earn his promises because as Paul says, "God's law brings wrath." It constantly tells me I have failed and that I have no hope of an inheritance.

So, here we are this morning believing what Abraham believed about Christ and being credited with Christ's righteousness. That makes us true children of Abraham. Paul writes, "He is the father of us all." Then he quotes from Genesis, "As it is written, 'I have made you a father of many people.'" Abraham's name was changed from Abram to Abraham which means a father of nations. Even before he had his son Isaac the Lord God changed his name to "Father of many nations" because of all the people like you and me who be spiritual sons and daughters of Abraham who believe what he believed.

You and have something in common with Abraham because of the faith we share with him. As Paul says, "He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed- the God who gives

life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they be." The Lord God gave life to Abraham. He called him out of darkness into this life. He created the faith by which Abraham believed and he created the faith by which we believe. He calls things that are not as though they be. Martin Luther said in his explanation to the third article, "I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Christ Jesus my Lord, but the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gift. That's the blessing that came into Abraham's life. That is the blessing that came into your life and mine.

Perhaps you will someday have a discussion about your Christian faith with someone who is Jewish. You might consider telling them, "I am true child of Abraham." Then explain to them how you and Abraham share the same faith. You and Abraham share the same belief that you are credited with righteousness not because of what you do but because of what Christ has done for you. Amen.