

Christ Always The Saviour

Clearing the Debt

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Glad to be here once more and preaching the word of God among you and we turn in the word of God to Romans 4. The book of Romans and chapter 4 and we read from the beginning of the chapter. Book of Romans and chapter 4.

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. 9 Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness. 10 How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision. 11 And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also: 12 And the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised. 13 For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. 14 For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect: 15 Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression. 16 Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is

of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all, 17 (As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were. 18 Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be. 19 And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sara's womb: 20 He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; 21 And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform. 22 And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness. 23 Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; 24 But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; 25 Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.

Amen. Thus far we read the word of God.

In verse 23 we read,

23 Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him;
24 But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead; 25 Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.

Our theme is "Christ Always The Savior." Christ always the Savior. We've seen previous evenings that the gospel of Christ comes from God. It declares to us what Christ has done in his perfect life and in bearing God's wrath on the cross in the place of sinners. This is God's provided righteousness for sinners. Christ was God manifest in the flesh. He was the second person of the Godhead. He never ceased to be the second person of the Godhead but he became a man without ceasing to be God, and as such he fulfilled God's law throughout his life in this world and yet he bore the just judgment, the punishment of God against sin in the place of sinners, and this is God's provision of righteousness for guilty sinners who believe on his name. Those who trust in him, then Christ's righteousness is imputed, it is reckoned to the account of every sinner who trusts only in Christ for acceptance with God, and because the gospel tells us this, it is through this gospel that the power of God works in saving sinners.

So that's why we've looked at Christ the power of God and Christ the righteousness of God, but now there is another question to answer: if God only saves sinners through Jesus Christ, if he only saves sinners through this gospel of Christ now, was it always so, was it always the case that God only saves sinners this way? And the apostle, by the Spirit of God in giving the scripture here, he now turns to the Old Testament for confirmation of the truth of this gospel and he looks at the example of Abraham and also, in passing, the example of David in the Psalms.

Let us consider, firstly, there is no consecutive multifaith. There is no consecutive multifaith. At the first of these meetings on the Lord's day, we stressed that multifaith, that is the idea that there are many ways to God, is wrong. It is a falsehood and no one who knows Christ as his Savior could possibly think otherwise. There is none other name given under heaven amongst men whereby we must be saved other than Jesus Christ, the way, the truth and the life. No man comes to the Father but by him. If we think there are many ways to heaven, we have never understood our guilt before God and the uniqueness of Christ as God manifest in the flesh who came to bear the guilt of sin, but just as there is no multifaith now, so neither has there been or is there consecutive multifaith either; that is to say, not only is one way to God now but there never has been and never will be any other way to God other than through Jesus Christ.

What is sometimes called dispensationalism is the false idea that history is to be divided up into seven dispensations and this form of doctrine in its worst forms, in its worst manifestations, teaches that there were seven different messages from God and a different way to God in each of these divisions of time. Such an idea is utterly insulting to our Lord Jesus Christ. If men could be accepted with God other than through Christ, then why did Christ come? If salvation through Christ was merely some after-thought slotted in for only one segment of history, this idea is utterly dishonoring to the Lord Jesus Christ, as if Christ came and bore the sin of many, endured the agonies of Gethsemane and of Calvary and it was simply to provide one way for a particular time but God can save sinners in some other way at other times. This must be utterly and absolutely rejected. From the fall of man until the final judgment there will only be one way of salvation and every sinner who goes to heaven will go to heaven through Jesus Christ, and those who are not saved by Jesus Christ will not be saved at all, not in any time or place or generation. And our passage shows that this is the case, that in the Old Testament there were indeed sinners who were saved sinners whose sins were forgiven, but their sins were forgiven because they trusted in the Savior who was promised and who would come in the future, whereas we are to trust in the Savior who has now come and fulfilled all righteousness and bore the guilt of sin, who is now at God's right hand exalted and who will return to judge the world in righteousness.

Let us see how Abraham was forgiven. How was Abraham justified? You remember that word "justified," we saw last night, is simply the opposite of being condemned. If someone appears before a judge, if he is found guilty that is condemnation. If he is declared not guilty, that is justification, to be declared not guilty by the judge, and the judge in this case is God beyond whom there is no appeal. So to be justified is to be declared not guilty and forgiven by God, and we saw yesterday that God is just, he always punishes sin, and yet he is the justifier of him that believeth in Jesus because the Lord Jesus has borne the wrath of God in the place of his people who trust in his name.

Now then we're told in verse 2, "For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God." If Abraham had been justified by his works, he would have ground of boasting, but he hasn't such grounds of boasting before God. Abraham lived a godly life but his godliness was the result of his being born of the Spirit and trusting in

the Lord. He was godly because he was forgiven. He was not godly in order to be forgiven. Psalm 130:4, "LORD, if thou shouldst mark iniquity, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with thee, that thou mayest be feared." That says there is forgiveness with God in order that he should be feared, feared in the sense of that loving reverence and desire to do what is right in his sight. The psalmist there is saying that the true fear of God, the true loving obedience to God is found only in the man whom is forgiven.

We can't love the Lord in order to be forgiven; it's only those who are forgiven who love the Lord. And this was true for Abraham. His sins were forgiven because he trusted in the promises of God in Christ Jesus, and it was as the outworking of the life of God in him as a forgiven sinner that he followed the Lord. Verse 3 tells us, "For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." It wasn't a mixture of faith and works, it was entirely by grace, God's undeserved favor, God's favor to the undeserving, the ill-deserving, the hell-deserving. It was by God's grace, God's unmerited favor bringing Abraham to faith in the coming Savior that his sins were forgiven. It was not of debt. It was not of any entitlement. It was not because of Abraham's personal merit. And the apostle here treats these two things of grace and debt as mutually exclusive; there's no mixture. Salvation is of grace. If we get what we deserve, we go to hell. "The wages of sin is death but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

So Abraham was justified, forgiven, accepted with God by God's grace, by being brought to trust in the promised Savior Jesus Christ. God promised to him, "In thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed," and that was speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ, the coming Savior. Abraham was not justified by religious ordinances, he was not justified by the ordinance of circumcision. Look at verse 9, "Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness. How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision. And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also."

The Pharisees, the self-righteous Jews laid great stress on their possession of the outward ordinances of God and especially the ordinance of circumcision, but the apostle is saying here, "When was Abraham justified? When were his sins forgiven? Was it before or after he was circumcised?" He says, "It was before he was circumcised." Yes, circumcision was a sign and seal, it was a sign given by God of cleansing from sin, a cleansing from sin that belonged to those who trusted in the promised Savior, but Abraham's sins were forgiven before he was circumcised. So his acceptance with God could not be dependent upon the ordinance of circumcision. Abraham received believer's circumcision, he believed then he was circumcised. Isaac, on the other hand, was circumcised as an infant, the same sign given to Abraham as a believer and then to Isaac as an infant. But the sign

and the things signified by it are distinct and the blessing of cleansing from guilt before God is not dependent upon nor conveyed by the sign of circumcision.

The same is true of baptism; whether baptism is received in infancy or in adulthood, baptism itself does not cleanse from sin. Yes, the meaning of it is cleansing from sin through union with Christ, but just as many in Israel had the outward sign of circumcision but not cleansing from sin and not acceptance with God, so it is with baptism, that there are many who are baptized, have the sign of cleansing from sin and union with Christ but not the reality. So in Acts 8 we read in chapter 8 of Acts when Philip preached to the Samaritans that a man, Simon, a magician, that he professed to believe, he was baptized, but then later on Peter the apostle says to him, "Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter...in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity." And so it is true with all outward ordinances and church privileges. They will not take away sin. Only Christ can take away sin and he does so for those who trust entirely in him.

So then Abraham was forgiven not because he was a godly man, he was a godly man because he was forgiven through faith in the coming Savior. That's why the Lord Jesus Christ in John's gospel speaks of Abraham as seeing his day. In the gospel of John where the Pharisees strove with the Lord Jesus Christ and the Lord Jesus Christ says to them, "Abraham rejoiced to see my day and he saw it and was glad." John 8:54, "Jesus answered, If I honour myself, my honour is nothing: it is my Father that honoureth me; of whom ye say, that he is your God: Yet ye have not known him; but I know him: and if I should say, I know him not, I shall be a liar like unto you: but I know him, and keep his saying. Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw it, and was glad." They were saying, "We're the children of Abraham." Christ is saying, "No, you're not. Abraham rejoiced to see my day. You don't." They said, "We're the children of God." He said, "No, you're not because the Father loves me and you don't. You are of your father the devil and the works of your father ye will do." But the point is that Christ said, "Abraham rejoiced to see my day." Abraham had the promises. He didn't have a full Bible as we have. How inexcusable our unbelief when we have a whole Bible telling us about Christ. But Abraham, he had the promises and he believed them and his sins were forgiven.

So what about David? You see that one of David's Psalms, a reference to it is here put in between the discussion on Abraham in our chapter in Romans 4:6, "Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." There the quotation is from Psalm 32 and the first two verses, and you see there that as well as Abraham David also was accepted with God through faith in the coming Savior. And the apostle having stated the gospel in these first three chapters, he's saying this is nothing other than the very same gospel that, in essence, Abraham believed and David believed. That's why in Galatians 3 speaking of the promises given to Abraham, the apostle says the scripture preaching the gospel to Abraham. It was this gospel that Abraham believed. It was this gospel that David believed. And it was this gospel that Moses believed. Hebrews 11:24, "By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's

daughter; Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward."

Moses knew the reproach of Christ. But you say, "What about all those sacrifices? What about the tabernacle and the altar and the priesthood, wasn't that the way sinners were saved?" Not at all. Hebrews 10:1, "For the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect. For then would they not have ceased to be offered? because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins. But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins." It is not possible. Do we really imagine that the God of heaven could be appeased by the blood of goats and of bulls? That was not their purpose. The purpose of the sacrifices were to act as a figure of the true, the ultimate, the real thing. They were not a way of salvation but they were to teach the way of salvation. That was their purpose, to instruct in the way of salvation in Jesus Christ. They were never intended to be a means of saving, of atoning before God. They were to teach. They were means of grace. They were ordinances of worship to instruct the people in the way of salvation in Christ who is yet to come.

So Christ is the only Savior there ever was. No one in any generation who has ever been forgiven their sins and delivered from hell and gone to heaven when they leave this world, they have never been saved other than by Jesus Christ now manifest in the New Testament and the gospel preached fully to you. Secondly then, a lesson for us. A lesson for us. Romans 4:23, "Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead." We must learn from Abraham; that's what the apostle is telling these Romans. We must learn. We must believe as Abraham believed and as David believed and as all the Old Testament believers trusted in the coming Savior.

Let me ask you a question: do you really think that you don't need Abraham's Savior? Do you think you're so righteous that you don't need David's Redeemer or Moses' Savior? Have you such a high opinion of yourself that you think that, "Oh well, they needed to trust in the Savior who was promised to them in their day but we're beyond all that." Well, you're not and the scriptures of the Old Testament give us some sobering examples not only of faith but of unbelief. In the book of Hebrews 3:17 we read of the children of Israel who fell in the wilderness who didn't enter into the Promised Land. Hebrews 3:17, "But with whom was he grieved forty years? was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? And to whom sware he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief. Let us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it." He's saying the same gospel was preached to the children of Israel in the wilderness as is preached to us but they've, many of them fell in the wilderness under the

wrath of God, they could not enter in because of unbelief, and he's saying the word preached, the gospel preached to them did not profit them because it was not mixed in their hearts with faith.

These Israelites brought up in the outward form of the church of God on earth, which was Israel in the Old Testament, but they still didn't believe and they still bore the wrath of God for their sins. Well, do you think God is going to make some special arrangement for you? And what a warning that despite all their privileges, despite being brought up in the congregation of God, they entered not in because of unbelief. Perhaps some of you have heard the gospel all your lives but has it profited or has it increased your guilt? To hear God's word, to hear the gospel and not to embrace its truth increases guilt, treasuring up wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God.

Our Lord Jesus Christ speaks of this in Matthew 8:10 when the Centurion shows such faith and he says, Matthew 8:10, "When Jesus heard it, he marvelled, and said to them that followed, Verily I say unto you, I have not found so great faith, no, not in Israel. And I say unto you, That many shall come from the east and west, and shall sit down with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven. But the children of the kingdom shall be cast out into outer darkness: there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth." He talks about people coming from the east and the west, people being brought in to the kingdom of God, true citizens of the kingdom of heaven brought to faith in the Lord Jesus and then in the glorified kingdom they sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But the children of the kingdom, who are these? He's talking about the Israelites, the Israelites who were brought up in the outward form of the church of God but who despised the truth as it is in Jesus. And all their upbringing, all their privileges, all their hearing of the truth does not profit but increases their guilt and they shall be cast into outer darkness and there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

But what about you? Is this the first time you've heard the gospel? Or have you heard it hundreds of times? But hearing isn't enough. But even after so long a time in which you have heard and heard and heard and yet despised the truth of God, even yet God sends his word to you, to you is this word of salvation sent. But without Christ, to have heard of him so much and yet not trust in him, it will be more tolerable for Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for you. But the Lord is gracious and of great kindness. He is rich in mercy and ready to forgive. And he receives sinners, even sinners who have long rejected his word, yet he receives all who seek mercy from him through Christ Jesus.

Then thirdly, what Christ has done. What Christ has done. Verse 25, "Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." Faith does not earn forgiveness, that would be a great mistake, not for Abraham, not for David, not for us, not for anyone. It's not that faith is itself a merit. Our confidence is not to be in our faith but in Christ and faith in Christ brings us into the possession of his righteousness, his merit, his bearing the guilt of sin. His merits are imputed, reckoned to the account of those who trust in him. That's why the apostle closes this chapter with, "Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification." Delivered. Delivered up. Delivered up by who? By God.

In Acts 2:23 the apostle on the day of Pentecost, the Apostle Peter, he says, "Him," that is Christ, "being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." He says it was by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. God knew it would happen because he had determined that it would happen. God knows the future because he has determined the future. Foreknowledge and foreordination go together. God knows what's going to happen because he has planned it and determined it. And yet it says, "ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain." God had planned it but their hands in doing it were wicked. But it was planned by God. Things hadn't gone off the rails as far as the plan of God was concerned. That's why God in his word through the prophets prophesied so much about the sufferings of Christ who was to come, because it wasn't an afterthought or a mistake but it was eternally planned by God.

And the Lord Jesus was not just suffering at the hands of men but all his sufferings, even those by human hands, were an expression of God's wrath against sin. Christ was bearing the guilt of sin. So Isaiah 53:4, "Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed." There you see that he is smitten of God. And there in verse 10, "Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise him; he hath put him to grief."

God was pouring out his wrath as Christ bore the sins of his people. "His name shall be called Jesus for he shall save his people from their sins." He was delivered up, delivered for our offenses, that is, the people of God, they can say he was delivered for our offenses and raised again for our justification. When Christ was raised from the dead, God the Father was declaring that all his claims were true, and declaring that the penalty of sin, the punishment of sin had been fully borne, and Christ ascended to the Father's right hand to make intercession for his people. And this provides the ground for justification. God justifies those who believe in Jesus because the Lord Jesus has fully met the requirements of God's law and sanctions its penalty on their behalf.

"It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us." Do we understand, then, that Christ is the Savior, always was the Savior, and he is the only Savior, and he is the Savior that you must seek and find or you will die in your sins? And it is this Savior, the only Savior of sinners that we declare unto you and his promises in Isaiah 55:6, "Seek ye the LORD while he may be found, call ye upon him while he is near: Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts: and let him return unto the LORD, and he will have mercy upon him; and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD." That passage tells you let the wicked forsake his way and the unrighteous man his thoughts and let him return unto the Lord. And here is the reason, "for my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are my ways your ways."

And yours are wrong, not God's. Perhaps you thought, you thought that because you're a decent sort, because you thought that because you tried to be a decent neighbor, and you go to church, and you do many respectable things, you thought that that was enough but your thoughts are not God's thoughts. That's not how the God of heaven sees it and you must forsake your thoughts. Or perhaps you thought that God doesn't take sin so seriously as to punish it in hell. These were your thoughts but they were wrong thoughts. They reflect your wretched view of God as to what he's like and you must forsake your thoughts, you must abandon your proud, self-righteous thoughts, you must abandon your wrong thoughts of God. You see, God isn't going to change to suit your ideas. God will remain this holy, just, righteous God who punishes iniquity and who receives sinners only in Jesus Christ.

He will not change. His thoughts will not change. His gospel will not change. His standard of judgment will not change. You must forsake your thoughts and return unto the Lord and seek mercy from the God of heaven in the manner commanded by him through Jesus Christ. There is forgiveness with God but he tells us how it must be sought. He not only tells us, he graciously invites sinners, all kinds of sinners, to come and to seek from him forgiveness in Christ Jesus. No sinner ever sought forgiveness from God through Christ and was turned empty away for he is a God who delights in mercy, and the Lord Jesus Christ is the one who died and rose again and who is able to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by faith.

This great God against whom you have sinned so much, this glorious God, this holy God in his mercy and in his kindness has sent his gospel to you and remonstrates with you in his word to seek from him the riches of forgiveness of sins and of peace with God and of life everlasting through Jesus Christ. "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool." It is Christ, Christ alone, who can make sinners whole.

Let us pray.

O gracious and eternal God, bless thy truth to our hearts. We thank thee that the Lord Jesus Christ is that promised Savior, that seed of the woman, who would crush the head of the serpent and that in the fullness of time, he came and triumphed gloriously over sin and Satan and death and we thank thee that none perish who trust in him. Grant that each one gathered this evening might know him as the rock of their salvation, that by thy Spirit they might be willing in the day of thy power to trust in the Lord Jesus and to rest altogether on him alone. We bless thee that thou art a just God and a Savior, that in the cross of our Lord Jesus that mercy and truth are met together and righteousness and peace have kissed each other. Bless this gospel to all our hearts and look upon us in Christ Jesus, that the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Ghost be with all that love our Lord Jesus in sincerity. Amen.