

Raised for our Justification

Easter 2010
Romans 4:23-25

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**-Now __it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him,
²⁴-but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe __in Him who
raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, ⁻²⁵⁻ __who was delivered up
because of our offenses, and __was raised because of our justification
(Romans 4:23-25).**

Written for Us

I was recently chastised for writing something about the Christian faith in the public square for general consumption—in a newspaper. One of the accusations hurled in my direction was my folly in promoting the consideration of my medieval religious ideas in regard to today's culture.

Many view the Bible as an anachronism. It was written long ago and it's just out of time and place for the 21st century human. Perhaps you have felt that in your Bible reading. You see historical encounters between armies or individuals and wonder what that means to you. You read of issues in churches related to things like circumcision or covenant or law or meat sacrificed to idols and you just shake your head.

Here we see the Apostle Paul writing about Abraham, who predated his readers by approximately 2000 years. So there was about the same amount of time between Abraham and Paul as there is between Paul and us. Paul seems to indicate that the events and promises by which Abraham found himself surrounded were not merely for him but for "also for us." No matter what date, city or country we find ourselves, there are some things that are both universal and timeless—as one of my professors once said, "The modern man is just the ancient man dressed up in a space suit."

In the fourth chapter of Romans, Paul gives a brief recounting of the story of Abraham. After reviewing the events in Abraham's life, Paul then explains what it means to his readers; and it means the same thing to us. In just three verses we see some of the most profound, comforting and glorious thoughts contained in all of Scripture—imputation, resurrection, justification. The ideas behind these words are the heart of the gospel. When pursued and understood, they provide the soul with the greatest encouragement and solace imaginable—especially to those who, by the

grace of God, have become aware of their own sin and weakness.

What Was the Deal With Abraham?

So what was the deal with Abraham? Why does Paul bring up Abraham to make his point (the point we'll get too shortly)? It seems to be woven into the nature of man to think he has something to offer God for salvation. This was especially true of a number of Christians at the church in Rome (to whom Paul was writing).

There is more than we can get into now, but basically they thought 1) they could be pleasing to God and help save themselves if they worked hard enough or 2) God would save them because they were related to Abraham. In various shapes and forms, these are still ways people think they can go to heaven.

It's not uncommon for people to look at themselves, then others, and then arrive at the conclusion that if God is going to save them, "certainly he'll save me; after all, I'm just as good as that guy." I have friends who, to this day, say things like, "I think I'll make it—you think I'll make it?" Paul begins the chapter by refuting that thinking with the words **"For if Abraham was __justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God"** (Romans 4:2).

Paul goes on to explain that it is not our good deeds or "works" that that justify us, but it is the one who **"believes on Him who justifies _the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, -⁶ just as David also _ _describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works"** (Romans 4:5, 6).

This might be a good time to quickly define a couple of words: "justified" *edikaiothe* means "be put right with, acquittal, or removal of guilt."¹ It wasn't that Abraham was actually was righteous (at least in the sense of being free from sin) but he, because of faith, was "accounted" righteous—that's our other word "accounted or imputed." This word *logizetai* means "to put to one's account." It is a banking term. This same word is used eleven times in this chapter.

Generally speaking, when someone works, they earn a salary—the salary is owed to them. What we learn here is that Abraham did not work to be declared righteous before God, but he was accounted righteous by faith.

Another issue in the church at Rome was the idea that their

¹Swanson, J. (1997). *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains : Greek (New Testament)* (electronic ed.) (DBLG 1470, #2). Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc.

connection to Abraham somehow placed them in God's special favor—this is brought to the fore with Paul's usage of the words "circumcised" and "uncircumcised" peppered throughout the chapter. In the Old Testament, circumcision was the outward sign or sacrament that connected a person with the Old Testament visible church (Israel) in the same way baptism is the outward sign or sacrament that connects us with the New Testament visible church.

We don't often look at it this way (since so many people are already baptized before joining a particular church) but baptism is a sign of inclusion in the church—it would be the first thing a person does to show themselves part of the body of Christ. The danger today, similar to the danger then, is that people think they're justified because they've been baptized. Maybe you've invited someone to church and they respond by talking about their confirmation or baptism or some other religious rite they participated in at some time.

The long and short of the entire fourth chapter of Romans is that we're not saved by what we do, who we're related to or some religious ritual we participated in (including having prayed the sinner's prayer at a crusade—which has become almost a modern sacrament). **"Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness" (Romans 4:3).**

Circumcision (a sign of faith) did not save Abraham; he had faith before he was circumcised (Romans 4:9-11), just like people have faith before they're baptized. Even the promise that Abraham would be the father of many nations (Romans 4:17) was something Abraham couldn't accomplish through his own efforts since he was already about 100 and his wife 90. It was always the faith of Abraham.

Abraham was **"fully convinced that was He (God) had promised He was also able to perform. And therefore 'it was accounted to him for righteousness" (Romans 4:21, 22).** Paul doesn't mention it here, but this faith extended all the way to Abraham's offering up of Isaac, **"concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense" (Hebrews 11:19).** Interesting that the author of Hebrews uses the term "figurative" since it militates against the idea that the supernatural activities of God in Scripture should be understood as simple metaphors. That he must inform us that God's command to not harm the boy gave Isaac back to Abraham in a figurative sense all but necessitates our understanding that the whole of the supernatural accounts in Scripture are not themselves mere figures—that "born again" merely means a new attitude or "raised from the dead"

merely means getting a new lease on life!

Again, Paul's point in his lesson on Abraham is that man can only have a right standing with God when, by the grace of God, that right standing is freely given by God Himself—the instrument of which being faith and faith alone. Now to our passage.

Raised Because of Our Justification

Now __it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him,²⁴ -but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe __in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead,²⁵ __who was delivered up because of our offenses, and __was raised because of our justification (Romans 4:23-25).

Paul utilizes the entire chapter as a lead into three verses. Abraham believed in God's power to overcome death itself, whether the death of his, and his wife's, ability to have a child or to bring his son back from the grave. Abraham was to (and apparently did) shed all confidence in his own powers and abilities and cast all his hopes and assurance on the power of God. This brings us to the very basis or substance of our eternal peace and hope.

Unlike Isaac, the resurrection of Christ is no mere figure of speech. We are called to **"believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead" (Romans 4:24)**. In one way or another every story, battle and sacrifice chronicled in the Old Testament pointed to Jesus. It was not without reason that Jesus taught,

_You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and __these are they which testify of Me (John 5:39).

The Scriptures of the Old Testament taught how God would save and the Scriptures of the New Testament teach how God did and does save. And whether it was the saints of the Old Testament who were saved by faith in the promise of Christ or the saints in the New Testament/Covenant who are saved by the promise fulfilled, that point remains the same and ever has—Jesus saves sinners by grace through faith.

Paul elaborates when he speaks of the imputation which is granted by faith. The righteousness that is imputed to us (again, credited to our account) does not come out of thin air; it is the righteousness of Christ.

For _He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become __the righteousness of God in Him (2 Corinthians 5:21).

This is why Paul writes that Jesus was **“delivered up because of our offenses” (Romans 4:25)**. The sin, wrath and condemnation that owned us fell upon someone else in our place. The means by which sinners are saved faith in a God who saves sinners by delivering up His own Son to be what we could never be—a suitable sacrifice—and accomplish what we could never accomplish—the conquering of death itself.

The chapter ends with a reference to the resurrection, that Jesus **“was raised because of our justification” (Romans 4:25)**. Among other things, the resurrection of Christ assures us that Jesus was victorious and that God accepted Him as a suitable sacrifice for our sins. But being sin-free is not the entirety of our salvation—being acquitted by a judge is not the same as being adopted by a father.

And although the resurrection of Christ serves to instruct us on holy living, since Paul teaches that **“we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Romans 6:4)**, the resurrection of Christ serves a much greater purpose than that. For how profound must Paul’s reasoning be to write that if Christ be not raised, our preaching is vain and empty (1 Corinthians 15:14)—as if the entirety of all true piety and religion sat upon this singular event.

We have certainly have a Savior who died to remit our sins, but we also have a living High Priest **“who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens,” (Hebrews 8:2)** who **“ever lives to make intercession for (us)” (Hebrews 7:25)**. Jesus didn’t wash away our sins then walk away (as if that itself wouldn’t be worthy of eternal praise), as our Prophet, He has delivered the message which of salvation through which souls are saved, as our King He ever scrutinizes our path and defeats our enemies, and as our High Priest He ever lives, having entered **“the Presence behind the veil” as “an anchor of the soul” (Hebrew 6:19)**.

We have a living Savior who has entered into the very presence of God on our behalf and promises that where He is, we may be also (John 14:3). After the resurrection the stone was rolled back and the prison of the grave was opened. And yet men stand, as it were, in prison cells with no doors, imprisoned by their own sinful hearts. It is a special act of God’s grace to see that open door and know it has been opened by the very

authority which rightfully lodged us within it.

It is the risen Christ who beckons men trust in Him for what they could never do; overpower the just penalty for sin. Jesus is the only fountain from which the imputation of righteousness flows. There is only one who has conquered death and all its attending miseries—may we ever, by God's grace, trust only in that One, who is Christ the risen Savior.