



Rooted

in the soil of a
vibrant, growing faith

Sermon-Based Study Guide
Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

Romans 4.1-8
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I. Connecting With One Another

There is a sentence in C. S. Lewis' *Mere Christianity* that speaks of the heart and priority God has toward us: "We may think God wants actions of a certain kind, but God wants people of a certain sort."

What do you think of Lewis' statement? What does it suggest about trying to do enough good to merit or earn God's love?

II. Introduction to this Study

We continue to dig into the central doctrines of the Protestant Reformation, known as the five *solas*. We're calling this series "Rooted: In the Soil of a Vibrant, Growing Faith" because we believe that each of these theological truths are planted – and can plant us – firmly in the soil of biblical Christianity. Furthermore, it is out of these truths that we can live fruitful lives as disciples of Jesus Christ. If you missed either the study guide or message the past three weeks, click onto gspc.org/dig-deeper.

This week, we attempt to gain a deeper understanding of and appreciation for the Bible's assertion that "we are justified freely by God's grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus... and received by faith" (Romans 3.24-25)." *Sola Fide*, by faith alone, we are justified by God, we are given a righteousness we could never earn nor deserve, and we are deemed righteous by a holy God. But, what did God have to do in order for this gift to be given?

III. Study the Text

- a. To begin, take a look at Genesis 12.1-3. Abram hears God's voice and believes the promises given. Note the specific things God promises to Abram.
- b. Next turn to Genesis 22.1-12. Abram (exalted father) has been renamed Abraham (father of a multitude). God's promise has been fulfilled in miraculous the birth of a son, Isaac. How does God test Abraham's faith? How would you describe Abraham's faith? What are some ways your faith in the promises of God has been tested?
- c. In his letter to the Romans, the Apostle Paul builds a rich and deep theological statement about God's act of salvation for both Jews and Non-Jews. In the first chapter he shows how human rebellion against God deserves God's wrath (or righteous, holy anger) and distorts human minds and wills. In chapter two he makes the case that God is justified in condemning all humanity. Chapter three brings us to the really good news - the righteousness of God is given through faith in Jesus Christ (3.22-24).

God provided for our salvation when he "presented Christ as a sacrifice of atonement - through the shedding of his blood - to be received by faith" (3.25). This is echoed in Ephesians 2.8: "for it is by grace you have been saved, through faith... it is the gift of God."

Then we come to Romans 4.1-8 where Paul emphasizes that salvation does not come from any human effort or action or any attempt to earn God's favor. To do so he points to Abraham who believed God's promises and acted in response to them. What had Abraham discovered about faith? about "works"? Verse 3 quotes Genesis 15.6. What do you think the phrase "...it (Abraham's faith) was credited to him as righteousness" means? How do verses 4 and 5 help to explain this? It may be helpful to understand that the words "credited" and "credit" come from the root that means "imputed" or "given" or "deemed to be." What does God "deem to be" for those who have faith in Jesus?

- d. By faith, faith alone - Paul asserts - people are deemed by God to be righteous. They receive the righteousness that Jesus had. It is "imputed" to them/us. Let's take a theological excursus and explore the meaning of "Salvation" in order to better understand "imputed righteousness."

In scripture we find that the idea of God's **Salvation** includes the following:

Redemption = we are bought back or delivered from slavery to sin and spiritual death

Expiation = our sins are forgiven, sins forgotten, sins blotted out

Propitiation = the holy wrath of God that we deserved because of sin is turned away

Atonement = God making reparation for sin - once and for all times - in the sacrificial life and death of Jesus. We are made to be "at one" with God

Reconciliation = God overcomes the alienation that sin creates between God and the creature and all creation

Justification = the act by which God imputes the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ to the one who believes (has faith). This means we are pardoned and acquitted of all moral debt

How does this help you understand the gift God has given us through Jesus Christ?

- e. Catholic theologian and professor Peter Kreeft writes: *"The point is amazingly simple, which is why so many of us just don't get it. Heaven is free because love is free. It is ours for the taking. The taking is faith. If I offer you a gift, you have it, if and only if you have the faith to take it."*

How would you define faith? Hebrews 11.1 offers a good definition. Words like "trust" and "believe" help. The phrase "laying hold of God's promises for yourself" is also helpful. Have you exercised faith by taking or receiving the gift God offers you in Jesus Christ?

- f. There's another man who, in my estimation, is an example of real faith. You can read about him in Mark 9.14-29. How does Jesus encourage the father's faith in verse 23? How does the father respond (verse 24)? Do you relate to this man who has faith yet realizes his faith is weak? Have you ever find yourself in circumstances that have caused you to cry out "I believe, but I have doubts and fears... help me overcome my unbelief?" How did Jesus help the father overcome his doubts and lack of faith?

IV. Reflect and Respond

- a. Are there ways you are depending on your own efforts - trying to be religious, doing good things for others, giving money to the church or other worthy causes, just to earn God's favor? Can you instead accept the free gift of justification by faith that God offers you?
- b. Speaking of this free gift, how can you help others to understand the love of God expressed in Jesus and this gift of salvation? For whom can you pray to receive it? To whom can you speak about it?
- V. How does having been credited as righteous - through the death of Jesus - impact you? What is your response to his sacrificial self-giving for you?

VI. Spend some time in prayer:

- a. Respond to God's gift of imputed righteousness by offering Him your gratitude and praise right now;
- b. Pray that through this series, we might rediscover and be re-rooted in true biblical Christianity, and that doing so might guide us in our ongoing discernment process;
- c. Lift up our children, students, and families, praying that they would be rooted in a sincere faith;
- d. Ask that God would use Good Shepherd to declare the good news of the gospel in our community;
- e. Pray that God would give you a heart for those who haven't heard of His salvation, that He would empower you to join Him in His mission to and for them.

"The point the Reformers were trying to make was that our salvation is due solely to the free, unmerited grace of God made concrete and effective in history in the person and work of Jesus Christ. We are justified by faith alone (Sola Fide) and grace alone (Sola Gratia), since Christ alone accomplishes our salvation (Solus Christus), which is acknowledged by faith through the power that comes from the Spirit of God. Not only faith but the very condition to receive faith is a work of the Spirit of God within us." Theologian Donald Bloesch