

Psalm 32:1-5

- 1 *Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven,
whose sin is covered.*
- 2 *Blessed is the man against whom the LORD counts no iniquity,
and in whose spirit there is no deceit.*
- 3 *For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away
through my groaning all day long.*
- 4 *For day and night your hand was heavy upon me;
my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. Selah*
- 5 *I acknowledged my sin to you,
and I did not cover my iniquity;
I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD,"
and you forgave the iniquity of my sin. Selah*

Faith.

Faith has become a loaded word. It's one of those words that has gathered up a lot of definitions over the years, and everyone has their own little twist on what it means to them.

Let's look at another word before we look at faith, though. Something with a little less baggage, shall we say.

How about the word "fast"? When I say fast, what am I talking about? Is it a verb, or an adjective? If I tell you to go fast, does that mean I want you to run, or does that mean I want you to not eat for a while?

Let's stick with the adjective form of the word fast. How fast is fast? If you talk to a kid on a bicycle, 20 miles an hour is fast; 30 miles an hour is outrageously fast! But if you're driving in a car, 20 miles an hour is pathetically slow. So slow it's almost aggravating; especially if you're in traffic. Here in the US, when it comes to driving, 75 miles an hour is fast. But if you go over to Europe, 75 miles an hour, or 120 kilometers an hour, is normal on the highways, and may even be considered slow. When I was over in Germany, my poor little rental car had a hard time keeping up with traffic on the highways and would start to really complain when I would get it up to "real" highway speeds, say around 160 kilometers an hour (that's about 100 miles an hour). That's fast.

So, we can see that the adjective fast is subjective. It depends on who you're talking to as to what "fast" really is.

Now that we see the kind of confusion we can get if we say something is fast, let's move on to a harder word in English, and that's faith.

There are several definitions of faith. Whenever you talk about faith in a religious context and are talking to a group of mixed religions, people tend to think of faith as your particular religious flavor; Jewish faith, Catholic faith, Protestant faith, Muslim faith.

But what about faith defined the way it is in the Bible? We talked a little bit about it last week, but I want to look at faith a little more in-depth today.

Last week we looked at Hebrews 11:1-3 and James 2:14-26, and concluded that faith is a belief that leads to an action. Let me expound on that just a little.

Let's say you just moved to a new town, and now you're having car problems, so you need to find a mechanic you can trust. Since you're new in town, you ask your neighbor, who's lived here for the past 10 years, where they get their car worked on. Because your neighbor has experience with mechanics in town, you assume that you can trust their judgment regarding the capabilities of mechanics. You take your car to the mechanic they recommend to get the work done. When you head home from the garage, everything is fine. The next morning when you get up to go to work, you don't think twice, you just grab your keys and go out to the car, because you have faith that it will start and run correctly, because of what you've learned from your experience and your neighbor's experiences with that mechanic.

Now, let me just say that this is a rather watered-down description of faith from a Biblical standpoint. Because you actually experienced something, you have faith that it will continue to be true; since the car worked OK when you left the garage, you have faith that the mechanic correctly repaired the problem you were having.

So, with our rough definition and description of faith, let's take a look at Romans 4:1-12.

Romans 4:1-12

¹ What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? ² For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. ³ For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as

righteousness.”⁴ Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due.⁵ And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness,⁶ just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works:

⁷ “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven,
and whose sins are covered;
⁸ blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.”

⁹ Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? For we say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness.¹⁰ How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised.¹¹ He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well,¹² and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

Paul uses the story of Abraham in Genesis as an example of justification by faith. He uses a few words here that tie together. In verse 3, Paul quotes from Genesis 15:6, saying that Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness. Paul earlier is talking about justification. Justification and righteousness are linked here. Paul connects Abraham being made righteous with being justified. He also connects Abraham’s belief with his faith.

Righteous and justified are from the same Greek root word, which is generally considered to be a legal term, to make right. In the negative sense, it’s used in Classical Greek to mean chastise or punish, and in the positive to set free. You can see the legal aspects of the word here. But the key is that being justified is something that is done to a person, and

the result is that they are righteous. These little nuances are things we lose when we translate things into English.

Just

Just as justified and righteous come from the same Greek word, if you remember we talked about the fact that belief and faith come from the same Greek word. Without belief, you can't have faith; without justification you can't have righteousness.

So, since belief leads to faith through some action, justification leads to righteousness through some action. The question is, where is that action; who is the one that is acting here?

Paul points out in verse 4 of Romans 4 that when we work, we expect to get paid. Even animals deserve payment for their work, like it says in Deuteronomy 25:4

Deuteronomy 25:4

⁴ *"You shall not muzzle an ox when it is treading out the grain.*

If the ox wants to stop and eat some of the grain it's working on, so be it. It won't make a significant dent in the production of grain, and it will keep the animal happy. It's the same with paying workers. Workers expect to get paid for what they do.

Paul says workers don't consider their pay a gift. The Greek word here translated as gift is the same word that is translated as grace: charis. If you work, grace is not involved; you get what you deserve.

In verse 5 Paul talks about the one who doesn't work but believes. Those who don't work don't expect to get paid, and live on the gifts of others. This verse kind of makes me think of the people who are always standing out by the rotary over on the other side of town. They stand there with signs, asking for help. They don't work, and what they get is a gift.

Paul uses a quote from Psalm 32 to strengthen his argument. The first five verses of Psalm 32 was our opening scripture this morning. In the larger context of this Psalm, David says in verse 5 that when he didn't try to hide his sin from God and confessed his sin, he was forgiven. That forgiveness is a gift from God, because we don't deserve to be forgiven.

It's important to point out here in verses 5 through 8 that Paul isn't talking about a person who is putting his faith in God for the first time. The Greek in this section implies that the faith is supported by previous actions on both sides of the event; the individual here has an existing faith and trust in God based on previous events, so his works are not what keeps justifying him, he is justified because of his continuing faith.

I'd like to point out something I found interesting here. This belief in verse 5 reminds me of what Jesus says in John 6. Jesus had just crossed the Sea of Galilee after feeding the 5,000 the before. The crowd had just caught up with him, and were trying to get him to provide lunch for them again.

John 6:28-29

²⁸ Then they said to him, "What must we do, to be doing the works of God?" ²⁹ Jesus answered them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent."

The people are asking Jesus what good things God wants them to do. As if they didn't already have a list of things that God wanted them to do. But Jesus tells them what they should be doing, believing in Him, and not thinking that what they can do would make them right with God. It implies that belief is a work.

Now that Paul has discussed justification by faith, and tied in David and Abraham, he asks a very important question for his readers. This blessing of being justified through the righteousness of God, is it only

for the Jews? Let's look at some background on Abraham or Abram before we go on here.

In verse 3, Paul quotes from Genesis 15:6. This is the second time that God talks with Abram. The first time is in Genesis 12. Let's look at that scripture before we look at chapter 15.

Genesis 12:1-3

¹ Now the LORD said to Abram, "Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. ² And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. ³ I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

This is the first promise that God gives to Abram, and this is the most important. He tells Abram "Leave the place you live and where you're comfortable, and walk. I'll show you where to go and how to get there. If you trust me (that is, have faith in me), good things will happen, not just for you but for everyone." The most important thing to understand from God's promise to Abram here in Genesis 12 is the last part of verse 3. That's the part that applies to you and me. God tells Abram that "in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

Did Abram understand what God was saying here? I really doubt it, but he believed God, he trusted God, and did what he was told.

The second time God spoke to Abram is in Genesis 15.

Genesis 15:1-6

¹ After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great." ² But Abram said, "O Lord GOD, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?" ³ And

Abram said, "Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir."⁴ And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: "This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir."⁵ And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."⁶ And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

Abram already had experience with God, and he knew that God was Righteous. In fact, God had just helped Abram win a decisive battle against one of the local kings who had captured Abram's nephew Lot. Abram successfully saved his nephew with God's help, and ended up with a lot of spoils from the battle. God was blessing Abram greatly in everything he did. Except for the fact that Abram knew he still didn't have an heir yet.

I'm sure we can understand where Abram was coming from here. God's timing is not like our timing, and sometimes we get impatient when God seems to be waiting a long time to make things happen. But God, of course, knew what was going on and was going to make good on His promise in a way that was going to be spectacular. That's just the way that God does things.

Abram believed God, because of his previous experiences with God. Abram knew that God was righteous, and from experience knew that God cannot lie. So based on his existing faith in God and God's righteousness, he believed what God told him.

The Greek that Paul uses to quote from Genesis 15 is interesting. The word translated as counted in verse 3 is a business term, similar to balancing accounts. Abram's faith put God's righteousness on his account.

Now, where were we before we jumped back to verse 3? Oh, yeah. We were looking at the last paragraph, talking about whether this faith of Abram's was available only to the Jews.

I've been very deliberate in my use of names here. Paul talks about Abraham, but I've been calling him Abram all this time. Why is that? Well, he's not named Abraham until Genesis 17, when God makes the covenant of circumcision with him. Abram's faith was counted as righteousness before he was under the covenant of circumcision. And Abraham was never under the Law of Moses, which came some 400 years later, but he was still justified by God.

The first promise that God made with Abram, in Genesis 12, God promises to bless all the families or tribes of the world. How did He do that? First, He blessed us through the Law, which was given through Moses, a descendent of Abraham. The Law was sent to be a guide for us to understand Jesus. Jesus was the second part of that blessing for us, who was sent to complete or fulfill the law and the prophets.

Paul's discussion of faith in Romans chapter 4 focuses on Abraham and how his faith was accounted to him as righteousness. But what was that faith?

2 Corinthians 5:15-21 (closing)

¹⁶ *From now on, therefore, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we once regarded Christ according to the flesh, we regard him thus no longer. ¹⁷ Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has passed away; behold, the new has come.*

¹⁸ *All this is from God, who through Christ reconciled us to himself and gave us the ministry of reconciliation; ¹⁹ that is, in Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the message of reconciliation. ²⁰ Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be reconciled to God. ²¹ For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*