**Romans 4:1-17**

Introduction

I. Last week we talked about a righteousness that is given BY GRACE ALONE

A. Courtroom: while we were guilty, Christ takes our sentence on himself

B. Slavery: while we were in bondage to sin, Christ pays redemption price and frees us

C. Sacrifice: while we were objects of God’s wrath, Christ sacrifice propitiates

(appeases) God’s wrath so that we can have peace with God

II. Today we focus on the fact that this grace is received BY FAITH ALONE

The Passage

I. The example of Abraham (v. 1-3, and v. 9-17)

A. Background

To a 1st century Jew, Abraham was the ultimate example of obedience. So Paul takes their example of obedience and shows that even he was justified by faith alone

B. The story of Abraham

1. Abraham’s call (Genesis 12: 1-3)

God graciously promises him countless descendants even though he is 75 and his wife is unable to have children

2. God’s promise and Abraham’s faith (Genesis 15:1-6)

a. God’s promise of numerous descendants (v. 1-5)

b. Abraham’s faith in God’s promise (v. 6)

1) “Abraham believed God”

Faith = taking God at his Word. Trusting in God’s promises (sometimes in spite of the circumstances)

2) “God credited it to him as righteousness”

God credits to Abraham’s account a perfect standing before Him, not because of his perfect obedience, but because of his trust in God. He grants Abraham righteousness as a free gift because of his trust in God

C. Addressing the Jewish temptation to be justified by works (through circumcision and the law)

1. Abraham was justified by faith, not circumcision (v. 9-12)

 Proof: He was justified by faith before he was ever circumcised (v. 10)

 2. Abraham was justified by faith, not the law (v. 13-17)

Proof: If he was justified by the law, his faith would have no value, but clearly it did have value, so therefore he wasn’t justified by the law (v. 14)

II. Application to our lives today (v. 4-8)

A. The gospel message

1. God justifies the wicked (v. 5)

 Scandalous: The holy and just God is letting guilty people go free

2. God’s “new accounting”

a. He is crediting righteousness to our account even though we aren’t righteous in ourselves (v. 5-6)

b. He is not crediting sin to our account even though we are sinners (v. 7-8) c. He is doing this on the basis of faith (v. 5) apart from works (v. 6)

B. Consider two very different ways to live in our relationship with God (v. 4-5)

1. The person who works (v. 4)

= Working for God and earning a wage as something God is obligated to give us

 2. The person who does not work but trusts (v. 5)

= Not working at all for a wage, but rather simply trusting that God will give us righteousness, not as an obligation but as a free gift of grace

C. Which way are you living?

1. Are you working for God’s acceptance and forgiveness or are you simply trusting in what God has done through Jesus Christ?

 2. Are you living a life of “obligation” (v. 4)?

 a. When I’m bad, I owe God something (penance, resolutions, religious behavior)

 b. When I’m good, God owes me something (rewards for good behavior)

c. It’s hard to leave that kind of life behind because our pride wants to think there is something we can do to earn our acceptance and control our destiny

d. But this life of obligation leads to a sense of duty, constantly trying to measure up, and a peace that changes with our changing performance

3. Are you living by faith in God’s grace (v. 5)?

a. You have to let go of your pride

b. You can experience a deep freedom, gratitude, joy, and a peace that never changes with your changing performance

4. Jesus’ invitation: Matthew 11: 28-30

**Discussion Questions**

1. Consider the example of Abraham from Genesis 12:1-3 and 15:1-6. What strikes you most about that story and why?

2. How would you reconcile Paul’s words in Romans 4:5 about “not working but simply trusting” with his words in Philippians 2:12 about “working out our salvation with fear and trembling?”

3. As you consider the two ways to live before God (working for a wage from God vs. simply trusting in God’s grace from v. 4-5), how are you living these days? Where do you see the principle of obligation still at work in your own life, if at all (see Section II, C, 2 above)?

4. In what area of your life would you like to experience more freedom, grace, or joy at this time?