

Believing God

Romans 4: 1-12

Romans 4:1-12: “What shall we say then that Abraham our father according to flesh has found? For if Abraham has been justified on the principle of works, he has whereof to boast: but not before God; for what does the scripture say? And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness. Now to him that works the reward is not reckoned as of grace, but of debt: but to him who does not work, but believes on him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness. Even as David also declares the blessedness of the man to whom God reckons righteousness without works: Blessed they whose lawlessnesses have been forgiven, and whose sins have been covered: blessed the man to whom the Lord shall not at all reckon sin.

Does this blessedness then rest on the circumcision, or also on the uncircumcision? For we say that faith has been reckoned to Abraham as righteousness. How then has it been reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision. And he received the sign of circumcision as the seal of the righteousness of faith which he had being in uncircumcision, that he might be the father of all them that believe being in uncircumcision, that righteousness might be reckoned to them also; and the father of circumcision, not only to those who are of the circumcision, but to those also who walk in the steps of the faith, during uncircumcision, of our father Abraham.”

Let's pray:

Lord, once again we come to You. As we open Your Word, read Your Word, we request that You breathe on Your Word, that You bring to our understanding those words that are spirit and life, that there would be a quickening in this room, a quickening for the speaker, a quickening for the hearers, a quickening for those who will listen afterwards, that something of Your Word that is eternal will be spoken, and we will see the Lord in a new and fresh way. We will be captured by Your beauty as we sang together today. We will be so caught up with You, we will understand things that we have not previously understood. So, we commit this time to you. May Your will be done, may You bless the opening of Your Word and the sharing of Your Word, and above everything else, may You be exalted. Amen.

We are only looking at these first twelve verses in Romans 4. We are making a turn here in Romans 4. We have already looked before at this justification of righteousness. You remember in chapters 3:21-31 that was the subject. Now we are looking at the living illustration of justification by faith. It is very important we understand what this chapter is about. When I read this chapter, the title that came to me and sticks with me is this single phrase: “Believing God.” I hope you see when you go through this, that was really the point the Apostle Paul was trying to make in regard to justification by faith. It is where it starts. It is where it ends. It is where it is made alive. It is where it is made real. Believing God is essentially what this story of Abraham is about.

I mentioned before when we were looking at chapter 3 that there cannot be a more important subject for Christians than justification of faith. You cannot begin the Christian life without understanding and experiencing this matter of justification by faith. You cannot live the Christian

life if you do not enter the reality of this. It is the gate that we go through. And our whole fellowship in relationship with God begins at this one thing.

We looked in the early chapters of Romans at man's absolutely ruined condition. Now I mentioned this to you before, but I do not know if you thought that was overdone by Paul. I do not know if you think he went too far, spending almost three chapters dealing with man's totally corrupt condition. But it is absolutely important that he did that. This is the Word of God, and we are left without any excuse, and we are closed up to God for His divine solution for our corrupt condition. That is the lead-in to these chapters on justification by faith.

After we see this condition, we discover God's total, absolute, complete and thorough resolution for man's defections. Everything is addressed. And brothers and sisters, I hope you will discover as we go through these twelve verses that it is all of grace. It is nothing of ourselves. How wonderful God's solution is. It has caused every one of us to fall on our face and worship Him.

By the way, If you want to go into more in this study of Romans, I would recommend two books. One, which I like very much, is W. H. Griffith Thomas' book. Or if you want to go into a little more detail, Newell's book on Romans is an excellent resource, and there are others I could mention. But above everything read the Word, study the Word, meditate on the Word, think about the Word until it becomes a living part of your experience. That is the issue I want to leave you. Griffith Thomas said something about this section we just passed: "The present section constitutes the very center of the apostles' teaching". That is how big, that is how enormous this matter of justification by faith is. It is the center of the apostles' teaching when it comes to the book of Romans.

So now we come to chapter 4 and these first twelve verses. Now here is a fair question, and it was my question. You may not think it is fair, and it may not be your question, but at least it was my question: "Why did the Apostle Paul devote a whole chapter to Abraham? When you read this chapter, it is all about Abraham. Why did he devote a whole chapter to Abraham? It is important that we see that. It is also important that we can answer that question because when you can answer it, you see the key to justification by faith. So, it is not a small thing. Paul did not sort of go off on a rabbit trail here and exit off the freeway for a moment and just spend the chapter talking about Abraham. It is most important to understanding this matter of justification by faith. Why is it?

Abraham is the scriptural proof of justification by faith. Remember that. You might want to argue this, but all the things that Abraham did were the scriptural proof of justification by faith. Not only was he the scriptural proof, but he was also the living proof of justification by faith. Not only that, but he is also the testcase of justification by faith.

I told you the whole context of this book of Romans is the divine courtroom. The just Judge who is sitting in court and looking at man, seeing his condition, and bringing him to a resolution for all his remedies, of all of his problems. That is the sense. And when you come to law and court, testcase is everything. They base it on testcase. They base law, they base present rulings, current rulings, current judgment on precedent. That is the word. So, when God deals with justification

by faith, He is looking back at Abraham, and He is seeing the testcase or the precedent for justification by faith. Do you understand that?

Think of many of the famous cases. You may not be a lawyer; I am certainly not a lawyer, and I do not play one on television. But when you look into justification by faith, you can think about the famous Brown vs. the Board of Education. It was a famous ruling of the Supreme Court. It was one of the greatest civil rights rulings that ever happened. And in that ruling they declared that separate, equal facilities is not true freedom. They declared that it is not constitutional to be segregation by races and offer to them separate (that was the famous phrase they coined) because the supreme court ruled, they were not equal. They might have been separate, but they were not equal. That case alone set the precedent upon which all cases dealing with civil rights and education are forever spoken about.

So Abraham is the testcase, and that is important for us to understand. He is the proof; he is the precedent; he is the guide; he is the living illustration. And he is, in fact, the scriptural proof of what justification by faith means. And when you look at the Word of God, it shall never be deviated from, and we need to be clear about that. That is why when Paul, the apostle, spoke about the fact of justification by faith, and he introduced this marvelous miracle of justification by faith, he said, "Let me show you how it all began and what it hangs upon, or hinges upon."

Today we are going to look at Believing God; that is the most important thing. We are going to look at The Basis of Justification. You see it in verses 1-3. We are going to look at The Exclusion of Works because if you do not understand this, you will never understand justification by faith. It is never according to our works. That is the bottom line. The third thing we will look at is the word that is very important in these twelve verses, the word "blessedness" or "blessed." And in that we will see The Universal Application of Blessedness. That is what we see just in these twelve verses.

The Basis of Justification

The first one is the basis of justification. Verse 1 sets the whole tone of this chapter by asking a very important question.

Romans 4:1: "What shall we say then that Abraham our father according to flesh has found?"

It is a good question. In court they are often asking questions, and the answer, the right answer is absolutely essential. The wrong answer in court can send you away for a very long time. So, he is saying, "What is it that Abraham, our father found?" We must see that. This is Paul's whole point. He discovered something. He discovered the secret. He discovered something about justification by faith, and with God it changed the whole understanding of the Bible and what lies ahead in our future. That is what it means. What do we think our father in the flesh has found? Also, you need to understand it was not for Abraham alone.

Verses 23-25: "Now it was not written on his account alone that it was reckoned to him, but on ours also, to whom, believing on him who has raised from among the dead Jesus our Lord, who has been delivered for our offences and has been raised for our justification, it will be reckoned."

So this is telling us that it was not just for Abraham; this was for you and me. What happened to Abraham was something that needs to happen to everyone that believes in God because only God will work with man with all his issues, with all of his shortcomings, with all of his sins, with all of his problems through this very same way. That is what he is saying. It is for your benefit, it is for your experience, it is for you to enter into. It is not just sort of a historic study of Abraham. Go back and see what happened at the different stages of his life. It was so that we might experience the exact same thing that Abraham experienced.

There is the word in verse 23, “Now” that is the emphasis of the Apostle Paul. “Now it was not written on his account alone that it was reckoned to him, but on ours also.” How important it is for us to understand. This single word of emphasis, *now* this is what Abraham found, and *now* what he has found is for you to find, and *now* what he discovered is for you to discover. That is the key to these twelve verses, and this is the good news of the gospel.

In the opening this morning we heard the good news that death has been abolished, but what the good news that we now can come into full justification, just as Abraham came into full justification. It was not just his experience; it is to be ours.

Now a lot of people think, “Well, the gospel does not appear in the Old Testament.” But that is not exactly true. The gospel appeared to Abraham; that was the gospel. When God spoke to him, when God appeared to him, when God revealed Himself to him, and when God justified him, that was the gospel in the Old Testament. Paul realized the importance of that one single event when God appeared to him in Genesis 15:1 and said, “I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward.” He realized it, and I think we need to realize it. It did not appear just with Paul’s writing of Romans. It appeared in Abraham’s life.

Now back to the question: What did Abraham find? That is the question. What did he discover in his flesh? He discovered one thing, and one thing alone. He discovered that believing God is the most important thing in life. That’s it! If you look at the record of Abraham in chapter 15:6 of Genesis it says, “He believed God.” That is the statement. And brothers and sisters, that is what we are to discover. We are to believe God; that is the solution for the whole Christian life. That is the beginning of the whole Christian life. That is the way to get through the whole Christian life. If we believe in anything else, we will never make it through. But Abraham, the test case, the precedent-setting case, the true Supreme Court Case, the divine Supreme Court showed that the answer is believing God. This is the basis of justification by faith. How we need to understand the importance of these three words, “He believed God.” It was his secret, and it must be our secret.

You will remember after the feeding of the 5,000, which was a great miracle, the Lord left with His disciples and went to Capernaum. The crowds found Him and asked Him a most important question in John 6:28: “They said, “Therefore, what should we do that we may work the works of God?” That was the thing. It is a good question. I like questions because they often resolve into the real answers. So, they came to the Lord and asked, “What must we do that we may work the works of God” Now these are Jews. Think about the opportunity. I think this is a golden opportunity.

You will remember the story of the Rich Young Ruler in Luke 18:18, who said to the Lord, "Good Teacher, (that was his first mistake which the Lord corrected.) what must I do to inherit eternal life?" Well, the Lord began to say, "Keep the commandments. Do not commit adultery, do not kill, do not steal, do not bear false witness, honor your father and mother;" that was His answer. What a golden opportunity here after the feeding of the 5,000. He could have said, "Keep the commandments. Do all these things. That is how you work the works of God", but He did not do that. If you read the next verse, John 6:29, He said, "This is the work of God, that you believe on Him whom He has sent." That was His answer. What an answer! Think about that. That is the best answer that could have been given. The answer to, "How do you work the works of God" is simply this: "Believe on Him whom He has sent," meaning the Lord Jesus, meaning God has sent the Lord Jesus, and when we believe on Him whom He has sent, that is the work of God.

That is what Abraham found. That is what Abraham discovered. When that revelation came, "He told him to count the stars of the heaven." And first of all Abraham almost interrupted God it appears to me. God said, "I am thy shield and thy exceeding great reward." And Abraham said, "What are You going to do for me?" He seems a little self-centered. "I do not have an heir, and this servant of mine, Eleazar will inherit everything I have." And God appeared to him in such a way and said, "He will not be your heir, but what comes out of your body will be your heir. Go out and count the stars of the heavens if you can, and there your seed will be like them innumerable." And then it says, "And he believed God." Isn't that tremendous!

I do not know if you have thought very much about those three words, but to me they are the key to Abraham's life. They are the key to our life; they are the key to Christianity; they are the key to everything we will face. Just think about it; we have a choice. We can believe our feelings, I do not want to get too deep into this, but I could spend an enormous amount of time talking about people who have believed in their feelings against facts. We could talk about our circumstances; we could talk about all kinds of things. But we are not called to believe in those things. We are called like Abraham, and it is the same experience to believe God. Isn't that wonderful! I love people who always say, "Oh, the Bible is so complicated. They will tell you I do not read the Bible because it is way too complicated." Well, you should read the Bible, first of all, it is not that complicated. With Abraham it was a simple and profound answer that is of utmost importance: "Believe God." That is the first thing, and that is what the Lord Jesus was telling these ones after the feeding of the 5,000. This is Abraham's story, and this is to be your secret.

Verse 2 makes it clear. This justification of faith begins with what is not the key. In other words, the key was that he believed God. What is not the key to justification by faith is in verse 2: "For if Abraham had been justified on the principle of works, he has whereof to boast, but not before God."

You have two choices. You can believe God or you can trust in your works. Now what choice will you make this day before God? Do you think your works are sufficient that somehow God will look at you when you cross that veil, as people like to say, "Well, he was a pretty good fellow. She was a pretty good lady." You have a pass. It all comes down to this matter of believing God, and that was Abraham's secret, and that is to be our secret.

What Does the Scriptures Say?

In verse 3 he begins to reveal the great secret of justification with the second question.

“For what does the Scripture say?” This is the second secret. The first secret is believing God; that is the gospel. The second part of the secret is, what does the Scripture say? Brothers and sisters, how marvelous that is! How important the Scriptures are! How vital the Scriptures are! Often, we say, “You know, I just do not feel justified. I just do not feel like I can approach the throne of God. I am so confused; I do not know what to do.” But when you look at Abraham’s life, the key that is offered was, “What does the Scriptures say?” Isn’t that wonderful? I think that is absolutely wonderful. Look at,

II Timothy 2:15: Paul was writing to his son in the faith, Timothy. “Strive diligently to present thyself approved to God, a workman that has not to be ashamed, cutting in a straight line the word of truth.”

Divide the word of God appropriately, rightly. This is how important this is when He spoke to his son, and we understand the context of II Timothy. The context of II Timothy is the very last instruction that the Apostle Paul ever wrote. And he said, “This is what you need to do. You need to understand the Word of God. You need to search the Scriptures. You need to rightly divide the Word of God. Your hope needs to rest in the fact of what does the Scriptures say.” That was the revelation in Romans chapter 4.

II Timothy 3:16-17: “Every scripture is divinely inspired, and profitable for teaching, for conviction, for correction, for instruction in righteousness; that the man of God may be complete, fully fitted to every good work.”

How marvelous this is! The thought that came to Abraham, the word that came about Abraham from the Apostle Paul for us was, “What does the Scripture say?” Do not let that go.

You remember what the Lord Jesus said in Matthew 24:35 something astounding. “The heaven and the earth shall pass away, but my words shall in no wise pass away.”

Have you thought about the importance of that single verse? You may be investing in many things, you may be spending your energy in many things, but brothers and sisters, if you do not spend your energy in the Word of God you can lose everything. Heaven and earth will pass away. Can there be any worse destruction than that? But My Word shall never pass away. This is what it means, “what does the Scriptures say?” It is of extreme importance.

Now the Bible gives his secret when it talks of Abraham in verse 3: “And Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness.” Abraham did no work. At that moment, that significant moment, that most significant moment in Genesis 15, he had not done a single work there. He only believed God. Then, after he believed God, the Word of God records “And God reckoned it to him for righteousness.” Isn’t that marvelous! When you believe God, something miraculous happens; God accounts it to you. That is what the word reckon means. Reckoning occurs in Romans eighteen times; it is a Pauline word. It occurs only three other times in the Bible, but eighteen times here in the book of Romans.

When God revealed Himself to Abraham, he believed Him, wholly and fully, and he realized that this was his shield and his exceeding great reward. Then something else marvelous happened; God accounted that believing to him as righteousness. It means that God saw him as just. God saw him as justified because he believed in who God is. That to me is a marvelous thing! That is the basis of justification, and unless we understand it, we will never be justified.

Let me say, sometimes we put too much faith in the word in Abraham's faith. I want to turn that around a little bit for you to understand what Paul was getting at. It is God's revelation that is the beginning. Had God not appeared to Abraham, there would be no faith. As a matter of fact, what I want you to look at the faith in Abraham as the response to the appearing of God.

Acts 7:2b: "And the God of glory appeared to Abraham after he left Mesopotamia before he went to Haran."

That is the whole secret. Brothers and sisters, our secret cannot be any different than Abraham's secret. Our secret has to be that somehow the God of glory would appear to us. Now I do not mean necessarily that you will be like the Apostle Paul and get knocked off your steed by the power of light in the noonday sun. Something may speak to you in a verse that will awaken you to the magnificence of who our God is. Something may speak to you in a message. Something may happen to you personally, and your whole life can be turned around in an instant only because the God of glory appeared to you. That is the story of Abraham.

I read just yesterday, now you may not accept this; I do not know if it true but I appreciated it. You remember this fellow that just passed away, Matthew Perry who a Canadian actor. I have never watched an episode of "Friends" so I cannot tell you anything about that. It said in this article that somebody wrote of him, that in the last several years he had an encounter with God. He was a drunken drug addict with a wasted life, who had too much money and way too much fame, and this encounter turned his life around. His own words, "I had an encounter with God." He believed God, and he became sober. Isn't that Abraham's story? Is that your story? Did the God of glory appear to you? Did something happen to you that you saw the Lord in such a new way, you were forever changed, and you were never the same? This is what Abraham found. This is the basis of faith. Praise the Lord! I think this is so wonderful. I think this is so precious.

Faith is the response to God revealing Himself. Faith is not the instigator; faith is responding. And when you respond, then God acts and accepts you as righteous. That is justification. You cannot reverse it; you never can reverse it.

I will tell you a little story; this upsets me to no end. People say, "I chose God." If you read Ephesians, it says that God chose you. You did not choose God; you may have responded to something that God did. He may have appeared to you in a word. He may have appeared to you through the testimony of another one or you heard something. You may have believed at that point, but it was all because of His appearing, and that is Genesis 15. How we need the response of faith.

Revelation 3:10: The Exclusion of Works

Romans 4:2, 4:4; “For if Abraham had been justified on the principle of works, he has whereof to boast: but not before God...Now to him that works the reward is not reckoned as of grace, but of debt:”

In other words, had it been based upon your works, it would have to be the exclusion of your works, because it would have been payment of a debt owed. It would not ever have been grace. You worked for it; you labored for it. It was by the sweat of your brow and what you labored for you receive.

I have been on both ends of this thing having been in business. For ten years I was in business as an employee, and I was thankful every other week when my bosses paid me a paycheck. But I will tell you that I never went to those bosses one time, as much as I loved them, and said, “Pete, thank you for giving me a paycheck.” He would have laughed at me. He would have wondered who he had hired. Who is this guy? I worked for it. It was my labor, and it was the reward for my labor, and it was his debt to me. We never work for this justification by faith. It is all of grace.

On the other end of that spectrum, since 1984 I had been a partner, and I had to pay those checks. And I always worried that if I paid all those checks, is anything left in the kitty for me? I took a draw; I could go negative and there were years I did go negative. But my employees always worked for it, and they always got a paycheck. At the end of the year, the situation turned around. I was giving out bonuses, and they were most kind to me at the end of the year. That was when I was every employee’s friend, buddy, pal. They all loved me, even the ladies would hug me. “Thank you, thank you for this bonus you gave me.” I was giving very gracious bonuses. They did not earn them. We could have stuck that money in our bank accounts, saying this is our profit; it is ours; it is not yours. You do not deserve it. You did not work for it. You got paid for every hour you worked. But we never did that. It was something that we felt compelled to do to show our appreciation and grace toward the employees. And I am proud to say that we gave rather large bonuses, and they were astounded. Then they would come to me and the other partners and say, “Thank you, thank you.”

So, I hope you understand that it is not a matter of works; works are excluded. It is all a matter of grace. Again, when you look into this section on the exclusion of works, you see the word “reckoning” occurring four times, verses 4, 5, 6, 8. How important it is that we are reckoned righteous without having done a single work. I had rather not use the word “work,” but rather use the word “response”. The only response is that you believe God. I hope you get that. I think that is absolutely important.

In Ephesians 2:8-9 Paul made it very clear. He said, “For ye are saved by grace, through faith; and this not of yourselves; it is God’s gift; not on the principle of works.”

This was the bedrock principle of the gospel, that no one can boast. This is the point that the Apostle Paul proves through Abraham’s life. How marvelous it is that it is not reckoned to us based on works; it is all the grace of God.

I love what it says in Zechariah. It talks about the temple, it talks about when the temple was finished, and it talks about when the capstone is put in place in the temple, and it says, "The shouts when that happens will be: Grace, grace unto it!"

Brothers and sisters, at the end of your life when you are raised again, and you appear before the Lord of glory, you will not say to him, "Look what I did." You will bow the knee and fall down, and you will say like these did at the temple, "It was all of grace." That is what Abraham found. That is the exclusion of work.

Paul reveals God's way, the divine alternative in verse 5: "But of him who does not work but believes on him (and notice this phrase) who justifies the ungodly." Isn't that incredible! Think about it. What God did is that He justified us when we were ungodly. It was not one of those moments when God appeared to us and he said, "Well, you spend a few months or a few years or go away to the desert for three years like the Apostle Paul, cleaning up your act, and come back to Me. Then maybe in the goodness of My heart after I do a divine inspection upon you and your works, I will say you are justified." This is a miracle. This is one of the biggest miracles that has ever happened. God justifies the ungodly. This is what Abraham found. To me this is the gospel to us. How we need to understand how wonderfully clear this is! I want you to remember this, If you do not remember much else, remember this. This is the only time that phrase, "God justifies the ungodly" ever occurs in the Bible, and it only occurs here.

You can look at a similar phrase in chapter 5:6 the famous phrase, "In due time Christ has died for the ungodly."

But here it says something more marvelous, more wonderful, above anything we could ask or think, He actually justifies the ungodly. This was what Abraham found to the exclusion of works.

You remember how it says in Psalm 103:12, "As far as the east is from the west, so far hath he removed our transgressions from us." He remembers them no more. How wonderful! Our sins are removed as far as the East is from the West.

In Romans 4:6 Paul uses David's experience: "Even as David also declares the blessedness of the man to whom God reckons righteousness without works. Blessed they whose lawlessnesses have been forgiven, and whose sins have been covered: blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not at all reckon sin."

Attribute sin, assigned sin—so great is His justification, so great is His mercy toward us, so marvelous, so deep is His grace that He does not even reckon sin to us anymore. When He looks at you, He sees you in Christ Jesus. And we looked at Abraham at that moment when He saw him as a new man because he believed in God, and he reckoned him as righteous. This is the story of Abraham; God justifies the ungodly. That is something you should be shouting about. That is something you should be delighted in because it does not depend on what you do; it depends on your response and believing in the One who says it. Then it is eternally true. That is what this has to do with.

In the old covenant when David wrote this beautiful Psalm 32:1-2, it talks about sins being covered. That is all it talks about because under the old covenant there was not a sacrifice

sufficient to take away our sins. As a matter of fact, annually, on the Day of Atonement the high priest went in with the blood of one of the goats and offered it, and then the other one, the scapegoat, was set free after they laid their hands on him, and he carried the sins away into the wilderness. This is what happens to us. This blessedness only happens to us under the better covenant, the new covenant. The best the old covenant could do was to cover our sins. All our sins would accumulate through the year and think about how many sins you can commit in a day. Just imagine when it is tallied for a year and that book was is written of all of your sins in a year and you say, "Well, here they are again." There was never a sacrifice that could take it away. But under the better covenant our Lord Jesus, literally once for all, never to be offered as a sacrifice again, bore away our sins forever.

First of all, they came upon Him. He literally bore our sins, and then He carried them away forever and we are justified. How marvelous this is! This is true blessedness.

The Universal Application of Blessedness

The last thing I want us to think about is The Universal Application of Blessedness. If you do not notice this word in the end of Romans 4, you will not understand what God has done for you. What God has done for you is beyond any blessing that we can even begin to imagine. He used the word purposely "blessedness." This is true blessedness. So many Christians are going around looking for a blessing: "Oh, I went there, and I went here, and I asked God for this blessing, and I asked God for that blessing, and I proclaimed to God that He had to give me this blessing."

Brothers and sisters, this is the height of blessedness, that He would justify the ungodly, that He would proclaim you as righteous, that He would bear away your sins and take them away forever. This is blessedness. This is true blessedness. Paul uses this word in this court of divine justice with surgical precision and says, "This is blessedness that exceeds everything you could ever imagine." Nothing like it. It is eternal blessedness.

So when you look at those last verses beginning in verse 9 you see they are all about this blessedness. You see it in verse 6, blessedness, you see it in verse 7, you see it in verse 8 "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not reckon sin." The universal application of this blessedness is important. The reason we are dealing with Abraham, the reason Paul is dealing with Abraham is because he understood something. At that point, Abraham was uncircumcised; this is very important. When you read those remaining verses, this blessedness came to that man when he was uncircumcised, not when he was circumcised. Abraham was circumcised, and Paul sort of pushed the events together which were not together at all. Abraham was not circumcised until fourteen years later than this appearing happened in Genesis 15. God met him and blessed him as the uncircumcised. And then in response to what we read here; it was the seal. What he did fourteen years later was the seal of him believing. It was not the proof of him believing; it was the seal of it. It was not the requirement of him believing to be circumcised.

You remember in Acts 15 the council that occurred in Jerusalem. The Judaizers thought all these Gentile believers needed to be circumcised, and those apostles had such wisdom from God. They said, "No, we will not put that on them." Not only were they to be circumcised, but they were to keep the law; they could not do it. "Our forefathers had never done it. How can you

impose this on these people? It is impossible!" So here comes to us the blessedness of the uncircumcised, and here comes to us the blessedness of the circumcised. This is the universal acceptance of everybody in Christ. And here he makes a very strong point. He is not just the father of the circumcised which some believed because he was circumcised. But Paul makes the point that He is the father of the uncircumcised. How marvelous! That is the universal blessing.

Brothers and sisters, what God has done for us is so beyond what we could even imagine. This is the testimony of Abraham; this is the precedent of the Old Testament that happened before circumcision ever came on to the scene. This is to be our testimony. This is what the Lord said.

Romans 4:11: "And he received the sign of circumcision as the seal of the righteousness of faith which he had (notice Paul's words, they are surgically placed; he already had this justification by faith) being in uncircumcision, that he might be the father of all of them that believe being in uncircumcision, that righteousness might be reckoned to them also."

This is universal blessedness. Can you get hold of it, how much God has blessed you? Can you understand that this preceded the whole old covenant? It is impossible for us to live according to the old covenant. It is impossible for us to fulfill the law. It is impossible for us to do what that rich young ruler said, "I have done all of these since my youth." Impossible! But with God's mercy and His grace when He appears to you, a moment of divine light comes to you, and you believe in Him, that is blessedness. And when He looks at you as still ungodly, yet He justifies the ungodly, that is the ultimate blessedness. And when He looks at His people, Israel, and does not say, "These are My people; the nations are not My people." You remember the covenant was to nations to Abraham. Remember, it was not to nation, (singular) Israel. Dear brothers and sisters, because of what the Lord did in Abraham, this is the test case that reveals to us what blessedness we have received in Christ.

This is Romans 4:1-12. Do you understand it? Do you understand the power of it? What did Abraham find? We discover that what he found was ultimate blessedness. Then we understand he goes further than that. He blesses the ungodly, and He even justifies the ungodly. Then he goes further than that. All mankind is included in that blessedness who will accept Him and believe on Him. Now I do not for a moment believe in universal salvation. I know that there are those that we know who believe in universal salvation, meaning everybody will be saved regardless of what they ever did in their life. I think that is utter foolishness. I am not sure how you can read the Bible and conclude that regardless of how you live and what you did, because Christ's work was so marvelous (that is what they believe) you will ultimately be saved. I think that you have to believe to be saved. And when you believe, it is your response to grace, and when you respond to grace, you enter into the ultimate blessedness, and that is what these verses 1-12 have to deal with.

Father, we thank You for Your Word. We ask You to open it to us. We want to find what Abraham found. We want to believe God. Lord, would You show Yourself to us in such a way that we will respond by always believing You. Lord, would You show Yourself to us in such a way that we will respond by always believing what the Scripture says regardless of our moments and our fears and more of our failings, we will believe what the Word of God says. Lord, show us that we will believe that You justify us even when we are ungodly, and lead us into the blessedness, the full blessedness

of this good news in Christ Jesus. All these things, Lord, we ask for Your name, for Your sake and for Your glory. Amen.