

**Romans 4:1-5, 13-17**

Give God Credit...Where Credit Is Due

- 1) He credits us with righteousness by His grace.
- 2) He justifies us with Jesus' righteousness through faith.

Lent 2A

338, 391, 486 (3), 376, 392

March 12, 2017

St. John Lutheran Church - Frankenmuth, Michigan

What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. What does the scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.” Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness. It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless, because law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression. Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. As it is written: “I have made you a father of many nations.” He is our father in the sight of God, in

whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.

**Introduction:** “I did it!” A family member shared how he “helped” his teenage daughter assemble her Christmas gift of a new computer desk. After unpacking the panels and fetching the needed tools, he started following the instructions. In the assembly process, however, it was no Home Depot moment: “You can do it, we can help,” of a Lowe’s “Let’s build something together.” His daughter watched him do all the work. But when he completed the desk, his daughter yelled out, “I did it!” Instead of giving her father the credit for the work, she took the credit.

Sadly, some see the Bible as our Triune God’s instruction manual for salvation teaching: “You can do it, we can help!” Unfortunately, some try to follow God’s 10 Commandments as 10 bullet points for constructing a stairway to heaven.

But the apostle Paul sets such false thinking straight. Our salvation, from beginning to end, is totally God’s work, His gracious gift to us. That’s why Paul urges us to always:

### **Give God Credit...Where Credit Is Due**

1. He credits us with righteousness because of His grace.

A. Righteousness, being right with God, may appear to be built by human effort.

1. Paul offers Abraham as an example to those reasoning, “He could do it and God could help.” After all, today’s OT lesson records how, humanly speaking, Abram had bragging rights. “*Abram*” left Haran at age 75 without knowing where he was going; he followed

the LORD's command in faith trusting the LORD's lead. But when it came to His justification, that is, being declared in a righteous relationship with God, Paul adds to such spiritual bragging rights: "*But not before God*" (v.2).

2. Why doesn't anyone have spiritual bragging rights before God? In Romans 1-3, the Holy Spirit directed Paul to lay down the truth of this theological foundation: "I did it!" What is it we all did? Paul writes, "*There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*" (Romans 3:22b-23a).

B. Justification is God's work of acquitting our sin for Jesus' sake.

1. But Paul writes on: "God did it!" Did what? "*and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus*" (Romans 3:23b).

2. That's why Paul begins **Romans 4** explaining how that happens using Abraham: "*What then, shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. What does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.'* Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness" (1-5).

**Appropriation:** Dearly beloved: We all know what it means to earn our daily bread by the “*sweat of our brow*” (**Genesis 3:19**). When we work for wages, the company rightfully “owes” us that pay as an obligation. Paul agrees, writing, “*Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation*” (v.4). But when it comes to our salvation, God doesn’t owe us anything other than, in Paul’s words, “*The wages of sin is death...*” Yet, Paul completes that thought: “*The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord*” (**Romans 6:23**). That’s why Paul says here: “*To the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness*” (v.5).

So, let’s take a survey of how we see our relationship with God. “On a scale of 1-10 (1 is real bad and 10 is perfect), how would we rate our relationship with God?” Some might say between a 4-8 reasoning:

- “Well, I know I can work at doing better so I’ll try harder!”
- “I’m doing the best I can!”
- “I’m not perfect, but I’m not as bad as....”

But Paul tears down such a “Do your best and God will do the rest” mindset. He smashes us with the hammer of the law with his smashing indictment: “*Sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all men, because all sinned*” (**Romans 5:12**). James teaches the “You can do it, we can help”: “*Whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it*” (**James 2:10**). We are like that broken computer desk that can’t

fix itself, but is good for nothing other than to be put at the curb for trash.

But Jesus purchased us: He lived the perfection we needed as we heard last Sunday, resisting all temptation, serving as our Substitute for God's demand, "*Be holy as I the LORD your God am holy*" (**Leviticus 19:2**); died on the cross to pay for our sins, as we will sing in our closing hymn: "*Jesus your blood and righteousness, my beauty are, my glorious dress*" (**CW: 376**)); rose from the dead assuring as Paul expressed it: "*He was delivered over to death because of our sins and was raised to life for our justification*" (**Romans 4:25**).

**Transition:** In fact, Paul rightly asked those thinking they could build a stairway to heaven: "*Where, then, is boasting. It is excluded. On what principle? On that of observing the law? No, but on that of faith*" (**Romans 3:27**). Paul teaches: "Give God credit...where credit is due!"

2. He justifies us with Jesus' righteousness through faith.

A. What gives faith its value?

1. Faith's value doesn't come from our act of believing, rather from the object of our belief: Jesus: **WHO** He is and **WHAT** He has done to save us!

2. Paul explains: "*It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless, because law brings wrath...Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's*

*offspring...to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all” (vv.13-17).*

B. Who gives faith to us? The Holy Spirit as Paul underscored in **1 Corinthians 12:3**: “*No one can say, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ except by the Holy Spirit.*”

1. Paul emphasized the truth of God’s grace saving through faith using Abraham again when he wrote: “*God...gives life to the dead and call things that are not as though they were*” (v.17)—a reflection of the LORD creating miraculous conception to aged Abram and Sarah a son. When? Not when Abraham was 75 years old but 25 years later when Abraham was 100 and Sarah was 90 (humanely impossible but divinely possible because of grace--recorded in Genesis 17:15-21; 21:1-3).

2. Then, the LORD tested Abraham’s faith by commanding him to sacrifice that son, Isaac. Of course, “*No man can redeem the life of another or give to God a ransom for sin*” (**Psalm 49:7**). So, the LORD provided a sacrificial ram foreshadowing sending His Son as the “*Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world*” (**John 1:29**).

**Appropriation:** Dear fellow redeemed: What if we polled God asking: “On a scale of 1-10, how does He view our relationship with Him?” “You are a 10, because my Son did it!” What does that truth mean about our faith in God? That sure promise is guaranteed: no “limited life time guarantee” (Actually...looked up what that meant. The product policy on such things as a computer desk read: “The lifetime of a product unfortunately does not mean your lifetime. The intensity under which the

product is used determines this factor.”) God’s guarantee in Jesus isn’t a “soap bubble” that pops due to the pokes and pressures of a sinful world. There’s no “catch” with God or a “gotcha.” No. The Father gives us an eternal, everlasting life guarantee because of Jesus.

**Conclusion:** Dearly loved by God: So, when it comes to salvation...“I did it???” No way. God signed, sealed and delivered our salvation through His Son, Jesus of Nazareth, the carpenter of our righteousness. “Jesus did it!” Constructing and completing our salvation, He didn’t accidentally whack his thumb with the hammer. Rather, He had spikes driven through His hands and feet on the cross, where He shed his blood to pay for our sins. That’s why we “Give God credit...where credit is due!” Amen.