

Anglican Church Noosa
Romans 4 Example of Faith
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Imagine you're sitting down doing your Internet Banking or maybe you get a Bank Statement in the mail, and you see an amount for \$5,000 credited to your account.

What would be more exciting?

-If beside the \$5000 entry, you saw the word 'salary'.

-Or beside the \$5000 entry, you saw the word 'gift'.

-If it was 'salary', you would probably just go ho-hum and move onto the next line.

-If it was a 'gift' you would probably go Wow! How amazing! Who sent that?

And what if you found out it was your rich uncle who credited it to your account.

I would hope you might be inclined to give him a ring, or send him a card, thanking him.

In today's reading from Romans 4 Paul uses a Banking metaphor to explain our relationship with God. Paul says in v3, "*Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.*" And he is quoting Genesis 15:6. What does it mean to be credited with righteousness?

The metaphor Paul is using here is a spiritual Bank Account. It is like our account with God is in debt. You could say we have an enormous overdraft. This is the story of Romans chapters 1 to 3. Paul has set out how both Jews with God's law and Gentiles without the law are universally guilty before a holy God. In Romans 3 last week Paul came to those well known v's 22 and 23, "*There is no difference between Jew and Gentle, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*"

In other words, we are all in debt to God.

However, the good news of the Gospel is that God credits righteousness to our Account. Through Jesus' death and resurrection, he removes our debt and then credits to us the righteousness of God. It is the most amazing transaction, the most amazing good news.

It's a transaction we call justification by faith. The word justification and the word righteousness come from exactly the same Greek word. You may recall Dave said that in his sermon last week. Justification and righteousness have the same root meaning in Greek. To be justified is to be credited as righteous before God. The simple way we sometimes define it is "justification is to be put right with God". But the fuller understanding is the phrase Paul uses here, "to be credited as righteous". So please try and keep that in your thinking as we work through Romans – Justification is being credited with the righteousness of God as a gift.

However, we can push this illustration a little further given the context of Romans 4. It's not just that he takes our Bank Account and scrubs out the figure in red (the debt) and inserts a figure in black. Rather it is like he opens a whole new account for us. He takes the debt-ridden account and tears it up. And then opens a new account with a new identity for us, in a new family. Now through Christ we are in the family of Abraham. Paul goes even so far as to say

Abraham is now our father in v11 & v 16, 17. Verse 17 specifically says, *“He is our father in the sight of God.”* You could say he is our spiritual father.

When we believe in Jesus, we actually join a new family, a family that began with Abraham, continued through the nation of Israel, and now is available to people of all ethnic backgrounds. Also in v17 Paul quotes Genesis 12:3, where God promises Abraham, *“I have made you a father of many nations.”*

Through Jesus, Gentiles (the nations) are now grafted into the family of Abraham. It is like having a completely new bank account in a new family.

Isn't it interesting that Paul uses the example of Abraham straight after talking about justification by faith in chapter 3 ? We might have expected him to simply say, put your faith in Jesus and you will be justified and saved. But he skips to Abraham of all people.

What he is doing is continuing the Jewish/Gentile theme established in Chapters 1 to 3.

What he is saying to the Jews is justification by faith is not a novelty, it has been proclaimed before-hand in the Jewish Scriptures going right back to the beginning of Israel with Abraham. Justification by faith operates in the Old Testament just as it does in the New. So he wants to show the Jews his doctrine of justification is not a novelty, it just has a new focus in Jesus.

To the Gentiles he wants to show them that they are now being grafted into a rich spiritual heritage. As he says in verse 11b, *“So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them.”*

The people of God were exclusively the Israelite nation, but now through the justification that comes at the cross, Gentiles can be part of the people of God and part of Abraham's family as well. It is like joining a new family and getting a whole new Bank account with a whopping credit balance. And that balance is nothing other than God's righteousness revealed at the cross.

Now it is one thing to be offered a very generous gift. But you have to accept the gift. You have to say, I want this gift of righteousness and I want to join this new family.

The step of acceptance is what the Bible calls Faith. And Paul is saying that to understand this faith, you have to look at Abraham.

With Abraham faith is about trusting the promise of God. The promise to Abraham was that he would become a great nation. Specifically that he and his wife Sarah would have many descendants. The promise was a child. Yet Abraham was getting old, very old. It seemed like the promise of God had failed.

Paul points out here how impossible it seemed for the promise to be fulfilled. Look at v19, *“Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead – since he was about 100 years old – and that Sarah's womb was also dead. V20 Yet he did not waiver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, (and I want to come back to this) being fully persuaded that God had the power to do what he had promised. V21 This is why it was credited to him as righteousness.”*

What a power packed passage! You can probably relate to this passage at the level of an older couple wanting to have a child. And if you have wanted to have children and haven't been able to, I hope you might be able to take some solace from the situation of Abraham.

But Paul's main point here is actually the salvation of the world, the salvation of the nations. God promised Abraham it would be through him that God would bring salvation to the nations. This promise was on the line.

-It spelt calamity for the nations if it wasn't fulfilled.

-It spelt calamity for the integrity of God if it wasn't fulfilled.

But despite his great age we are told that Abraham didn't waiver in unbelief, rather he had faith and gave glory to God.

So that is Abraham's situation;
what about us?

What is the promise God gives us today, that we are to believe?

Paul summarises it in versus 24 and 25.

-The second part of v24 says it is about Jesus being raised from the dead.

-v25 says it is about Jesus being delivered over to death for our sins.

-And the rest of v25 says that it is about Jesus being raised to life for our justification.

So one mention of Jesus dying on the cross for our sins and two mentions of his resurrection.

The promise to us is simply Jesus, and the heart of his coming is his death and resurrection. And through Jesus all nations will now be invited to share in the promise.

Paul's argument is that just as Abraham had to receive his promise by faith, so we today have to receive God's promise of Jesus, by faith as well.

So what is this faith?

The word faith is used in a multitude of ways in our society and it can so easily be misunderstood when we start talking about Christian Faith.

-It can be a word on a poster you put on the wall.

-It can be belief in the goodness of humanity.

-It can simply be hoping something comes true.

For Paul, it is none of those things. Paul's understanding of faith in Romans is to focus on this little phrase the righteousness of God. Popular understanding is to work out a righteousness for yourself in your own way. I hope you might recall in my sermon on Romans Ch 1, I contrasted the righteousness of God with working out one's righteousness for oneself.

Working it out for yourself is the natural human condition, you decide what is good and bad, right and wrong.

This approach doesn't necessarily produce immoral people, bad people. Yes it can, but it also can produce what appear to be very moral people. Remember the older son in the parable of the prodigal son. He was very moral yet deeply flawed.

Self-determined righteousness can produce very bad people or very moral people, but you know what it can't produce?

- People who stand in awe of almighty God and give him glory.
- People who have a heightened sense of their own unworthiness.
- People who have incredible gratitude that someone has sacrificed their life to give them a righteousness that is not their own.
- People who offer praise.
- In short, people who give glory to God.

Did you notice that with Abraham?

Even when the promise seemed far off, because of his faith he still gave glory to God v20. His faith was, in the words of v21, *“fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.”* Faith is believing in God’s promise.

If Abraham was able to give glory to God because of God’s promise to him; how much more should we give glory to God because of God’s promise to us in Jesus?

Our theme this year is: Deeply transformed serving together. It is the gospel which transforms us. Paul sets out this gospel so clearly in the book of Romans. In chapters 1 to 3 he is at pains to point out how sin has cut people off from God. I hope you might have picked that up over the last few weeks. In chapter 1v18 he is very clear, *“The wrath of God has been revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of people, who suppress the truth by their wickedness.”*

They suppress the truth by the denial of God, locking God out of their lives, and it leads to the multitude of sins set out in Chapters 1 to 3. This is all under God’s judgement.

But Paul says the gospel, the good news is that, there is now a righteousness that has been revealed apart from human effort. It is the righteousness of God.

The good news is the stupendous truth that we are justified by the righteousness of God being credited to our account. We not only have the slate wiped clean, we have the righteousness of Christ credited to us. And that should deeply transform us.

Do you remember at the beginning I asked you, would it be more exciting to find \$5,000 credited to your account as your salary or as a gift? And the answer was that the excitement is when it’s a gift. The excitement is that God takes an unworthy person like me, who’s sin had cut me off from God, and offers me his righteousness as a gift. This is the excitement that leads to deep transformation.

Do you remember I also said, if you had a rich uncle who gave this to you, what would you do? You’d go wow, thank you rich uncle and you would send him a letter or card and praise him and thank him. You see that is the excitement we need to be deeply transformed. Your behaviour doesn’t change unless you get excited about something does it?

For transformation to happen

- it needs excitement,
 - it needs motivation,
 - it needs a new heart.
 - It needs a whole new beginning,
- and receiving God’s righteousness as a gift is the start.

Maybe this passage is especially speaking to you this morning. You've been trying to be righteous using your own wit and wisdom, but now through reading Romans and considering Abraham, you've come to realise that is not the way.

You realise you need to trust the promise of God and receive righteousness as a gift.

Well I want to say a short prayer that might help you to do that.
If this prayer makes sense to you, please make it your own.

Dear heavenly Father,

I thought I was making progress trying to be righteous in my own way.

I am so sorry that I have been ignoring you and sinning against you.

Lord Jesus thank you that you died on the cross for my sin and that you were raised to life for my justification.

I want to stop living my life for myself and acknowledge that Jesus is Lord.

I want to accept the gift of your righteousness credited to my account and then live in your righteousness. Thank you Lord Jesus. Amen