

(Through the Bible) Romans 3-4

by Chuck Smith

The sermon explores the themes of justification by faith and the limitations of the law in achieving righteousness before God.

Duration: 1:22:09

Scripture: Psalm 51:1-4, Matthew 5:20-22, Romans 3:4-5, Romans 3:23, Galatians 6:14

Topics: "Through The Bible"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by describing the beauty of the floats in a parade, using it as an analogy for the passing of time. He then transitions to discussing the importance of the cross and how the New Testament points us to what God has done for us, rather than what we can do for God. He emphasizes that boasting in our own righteousness is futile and that true righteousness comes from exceeding the righteousness of the Pharisees. The speaker concludes by mentioning Jesus' illustrations that challenge the physical interpretation of the law and highlight the importance of understanding it in a spiritual sense.

Transcript

Shall we turn in our Bibles now to Romans chapter 3. Paul has just told the Jew that having the law does not justify a person. It is the keeping of the law that justifies one. That uncircumcision really has no value in just the ritual itself.

Circumcision has no value. It is the circumcision of the heart, spiritual circumcision, that God really counts. Therefore, if a person is really walking after the Spirit, though he may not have had the physical right of circumcision, still God counts what is in his heart.

So, if circumcision doesn't really do anything for me, if having the law doesn't do anything for me as far as giving me a righteous standing before God, then the question would naturally arise, and Paul brings it up in chapter 3 verse 1, what advantage then doth the Jew have? Being a Jew, what advantage is it? If circumcision doesn't make me righteous, if the law doesn't make me righteous, then what advantage is there in being a Jew? Paul said, much and in every way. Now, though he said much and in every way, he only gives us one advantage here in the text. And this one advantage that Paul names, firstly, or the most important advantage, the word first is there used as often in the New Testament to express the first or most important way that a Jew has an advantage is, unto them were committed the oracles of God, or the Word of God was committed unto them.

Now, that is a tremendous advantage. The advantage of having the Word of God. And never underestimate the value and the advantage of having the Word of God.

God committed unto them His Word. And in so doing, they kept the Word of God with great care and with great accuracy. Thus, we owe a tremendous debt to them for the way they have preserved so carefully the Word of God and brought it to us as God gave it to them.

As pure from error as is any human document. Or as any human document could be. When a person was hired as a scribe to copy the Scriptures, this, of course, was considered a great honor.

It was a sacred trust. They held the Word of God very sacred. And rather than copying the text by words or by sentences, they would copy letter by letter.

And one would copy and another would check his copy. In the copying of the Scriptures, they would not allow any erasures, any strikeovers, any changes. If a mistake was made, they had to begin all over again.

Now, that is not talking about a page. That's talking about a scroll. The entire book of Isaiah was written on a scroll.

And if on the end, the last chapter of Isaiah, if on the last word they made a mistake, rip up the scroll. Months of labor tossed out. For they would not allow for any mistake at all.

That is why when the Dead Sea Scrolls were discovered, it was such an exciting thing to Bible scholars because among the scrolls that were found there in the Qumran cave was the scroll of Isaiah, which was 600 years older than any complete copy of Isaiah we had. And thus, there was an intense interest in comparing those copies of Isaiah with the Dead Sea Scroll because now you're making a quantum leap of 600 years earlier, closer to the time of Isaiah. And of course, the fascinating thing was that there was not one significant change in the text.

Unto them were committed the oracles of God and they kept those oracles faithfully, recorded them faithfully, and passed them on to us. They had such a high reverence for the name of God that whenever they wrote the word God, the Elohim or the El, they would wash their pens, wash their hands, and then dip the pen in fresh ink to write the word Elohim. So did they reverence the title of God.

But when they wrote the consonants that represented the name of God, in writing the consonants, before they would write them, they would go in, take a bath, change their clothes, and then take a pen, dip it in fresh ink, and write the consonants Y-H-V-H, those consonants that represented the name of God. There were no vowels written on these consonants because they did not feel that a man, even in his mind, was worthy of pronouncing the holy name of God. So they took the copying of the Scriptures as a sacred trust.

And they realized the advantage that was theirs in having the word of God given to them. Unto them was given the oracles of God. They were committed to them.

Now, what if some of them did not believe? For they did not all believe. They were apostate, many of them. Shall their unbelief make the faithfulness of God without effect? If man is unfaithful, does that mean that God is then unfaithful or the faithfulness of God without effect? God forbid.

Though some of them did not believe, God will still be faithful to them as a people. Let God be true and every man a liar, as it is written, that you might be justified when you speak and might overcome when you

are judged. Now, he's quoting here from the 51st Psalm where David is confessing his sin with Bathsheba before the Lord.

And he is crying out for mercy. Have mercy upon me, O God, according to the multitude of Thy tender mercies. Blot out my transgressions.

For against Thee and Thee only have I sinned and done this great iniquity in Thy sight that Thou might be justified when You speak and righteous when You judge. So, he is quoting here that 51st Psalm of David declaring that God when He speaks is right. He's justified in speaking.

He is righteous in His judgment. But if our unrighteousness commend the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unrighteous who takes vengeance? And he said, I'm speaking as a man. Now, he's using some of the supercilious type of arguments that men sometimes take a truth of God and then they begin to postulate on that truth.

They begin to give hypothetical cases or they begin to try to reason out with the human intellect. And this is the particular argument that Paul is seeing. Here I am.

God declares that all men are sinners. And that the grace of God abounds to sinners. And God loves to show His grace in the forgiveness of sinful man.

Therefore, by my going out and sinning, I'm giving God an opportunity to show His righteousness through faith and His glorious grace. So, my unrighteousness really is magnifying the righteousness of God. Therefore, why would God judge me for being unrighteous? I'm just showing how good He is when He forgives.

And Paul says, oh, come on now. You know, God forbid. How then can God judge the world? And then another person says, well, you see, the truth of God has really abounded more through my lie.

Now, there are people who have some very exciting and remarkable testimonies. They're complete lies. But oh, they're exciting.

And a lot of people get all excited over these glorious testimonies. And many people have accepted the Lord after hearing some of these marvelous testimonies of what God did. Now, there are just some pathological liars out there that are going around in pulpits and giving marvelous interesting stories of how God saved them.

Several years ago, there was some fellow who came here to Santa Ana, declared that he was a scientist working in the space programs and all of this kind of stuff. And he was talking about some new types of machines that had been developed and how in connecting these machines on people, you know, there was the needle that would go positive or negative, you know. And so, they connected it upon some fellow who was dying and he was a rank sinner.

And the thing went off the peg on the negative side. But they connected it to some dear little saint, you know, who was dying. And it measures the communication outwards and the thing went off the peg on the positive side.

And he was getting people all excited, you know, and God appeared to him in a ball of fire sat next to him in a car and all this kind of stuff. And he was around the Orange County area here for a while and spoke in

many churches, gave his remarkable testimony of conversion once he saw that thing peg off to the right, you know, and realized that the communication was going way out beyond, you know, man's ability to get, oh man, many people got excited and he talked about how that caused him to get on his knees and realize God was true and all this kind of stuff. And so, now, if the truth of God abounded by his lie, then why would God condemn him for lying? Look how many people got saved with his glorious testimony, you know.

And there are some people that have that kind of a rationale that the end justifies the means. Hey, even more recently in Orange County, there was a fellow who claimed to be a rabbi and was a teacher at one of the large churches in Orange County for a long time claiming to be a rabbi. His wife has recently written a book exposing the truth about this fellow.

But again, declaring to be a converted rabbi and all, a lot of people were really moved by his testimony and by his teaching of the Scriptures, because now we have a rabbi teaching from a Christian perspective, you know. If the truth of God hath more abounded through my lie unto his glory, why does God judge me as a sinner? I was lying, but it was for God's glory that I was lying. So, again, Paul then gives the one... Some people were saying about Paul, they said, Paul is saying, I was slanderously reported as saying, let us do evil that good might come out of it.

God's, Paul said, whose damnation is just. You know, that's the way I feel about some people. Their damnation is just.

If I were God, I would have put him away a long time ago. He's so patient. He's so patient.

To my consternation. Oh, how the world can be thankful I'm not God. Man, a person cuts in front of me on the freeway, zap, you know.

I appreciate God's patience towards me. I appreciate that he's long suffering towards me. I don't necessarily appreciate his patience towards you.

I need it. I want it. Oh, God help me.

God help me. But, this rationale that people can get caught up in. Like, we're sort of a special class.

God has special toleration for us. Because look what we are doing for God. And look at all of this glorious fruit for the Kingdom of God.

Therefore, God has special tolerations for me. Wrong. God will judge.

Now, Paul then asks the question, are we then better than they? That is, the Jew better than the Gentile? No. In no wise. For we have already proved that both the Jews and Gentiles are all under sin.

So, it doesn't make any difference. We're all under sin, so you're no better off being a Jew or a Gentile as far as this is concerned. We're all sinners.

As it is written, there is none righteous, no, not one. There are none that understand. There is none that seeks after God.

Now, this is an amazing statement. Paul is quoting from the Psalms. But this is an amazing statement that God has declared.

He said, there are none who are seeking after God. So, often we hear people say, well, all religions lead to God. And after all, if a person is sincere, if a person is sincere, won't God accept his sincerity? Look at the way these people are seeking after God.

You know, they cut themselves. They afflict themselves. They spend these hours in meditation.

Surely, God will accept them because they are seeking after God. The Scripture said they are not seeking after God. If they're not seeking after God, then what are they seeking after? The motivation behind much of this is, as they will tell you, they're seeking after a peace of mind.

And those who get into that meditation bit, they testify of that peace of mind, that tranquility that they come to. And that's what they're seeking, is a tranquility of mind. They're not really seeking God, but seeking their own tranquility, seeking their own peace.

They are all of them gone out of the way that is the way of God. They are together become unprofitable. There is none that is doing good.

No, not one. Now, he goes on to quote many more Scriptures from the Psalms. Their throat is an open sepulcher.

With their tongues they have used deceit. The poison of asph is under their lips. Their mouths are full of cursing and bitterness.

Their feet are swift to shed blood. Destruction and misery are in their ways. And the way of peace they have not known.

There is no fear of God before their eyes. Now, this is God's indictment. God is speaking through the psalmist and declaring the condition of man apart from God.

Now, we know that what things the law says, it says to those that are under the law that every mouth may be stopped and the whole world may become guilty before God. Therefore, by the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified in his sight for by the law is the knowledge of sin. Now, here is one basic mistake that man has made concerning the law of God.

God never gave the law to make a person righteous by obeying the law. That was never the intention of the law. For the law cannot make a person righteous even if you kept the law, which you haven't.

By the law is the knowledge of sin. That was the purpose of the law. To make the whole world guilty before God or make the whole world cognizant of their guilt before God.

That's why God gave the law. There are so many who seek to sort of promote and exalt their own righteous works, their own goodness. And there are many people who are daring to come before God on the basis of I am a good person or I am a moral person.

And it is interesting to me today that the Jewish people for the most part are seeking acceptance by God on the basis of their good works. Last Friday night was Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. It used to be, under the covenant that God made with them on the Day of Atonement, the priest would go into the Holy of Holies with the blood of the goat to offer before God for the sins of the nation.

But now the Day of Atonement is not the day of the great sacrifice, but the Day of Atonement is the day of reflection, where you sit and you reflect over the past year over the work that you have done. And you seek to balance out your life so that your good works overbalance your bad works. And so Yom Kippur is now the day of reflection over the good works and the evil works that you've done.

And there is, of course, that endeavor the week before to do enough good work so that when you reflect that day, you can tip the scales in the right side, you know. My good works have outnumbered my evil. The law was not given to make one righteous.

For if righteousness could come by the law, any law, if God could give us rules tonight to make us righteous, then Christ did not need to die. In fact, His death was in vain. So, the law spoke to those who were under the law to stop every mouth.

That is, to stop every mouth from boasting in their own righteousness. And by the deeds of the law, no flesh can be justified in God's sight. For by the law is only the knowledge of sin.

It just shows me where I have failed. Now, this is to have a proper understanding of the law, which the Pharisees did not have in the days of Jesus. And they were so misinterpreting the law that they were using it for the wrong purpose entirely.

They were using the law to sort of fortify their feeling of self-righteousness. And Paul talks about his experience as a Pharisee and that righteousness that he had through the law. And he said, concerning the law, I was blameless.

I had it made as a Pharisee as far as the righteousness that they sought to achieve through the keeping of the law. But he said, those things which were gain for me, I counted loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Jesus Christ for whom I suffered the loss of all things. That I may know Him and be found in Him, not having my own righteousness, which is of the law, but the righteousness now which is of Christ through faith.

Jesus said, unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you're not going to enter the kingdom of heaven. Now, for any of you who want to be righteous on your own works and by your own efforts, that ought to discourage you once and forever. Because no one was more diligent in their endeavor to keep the law than were the scribes and Pharisees.

And unless your righteousness exceeds them, you're not going to make it in. And then Jesus gave five illustrations that showed the fallacy of their understanding of the law. For in each of the illustrations, He was showing that they were interpreting the law in a physical sense, but the law was intended in a spiritual sense.

And so, you've heard that it was said. In the law, that thou shalt not kill, and whosoever kills is in danger of the judgment. But I say unto you, whosoever hates his brother, hatred from which the murder comes.

You've heard that it has been said, thou shalt not commit adultery. But I say unto you, whosoever looks on a woman in lust after her in his heart has violated that command. So, realizing that the law is spiritual, then I realize, though I may have kept the law outwardly, I have violated the law spiritually.

And thus, I am guilty before God. And that's the purpose of the law, to make you know that you're guilty before God, so that you will seek now a new righteousness. For the law was a schoolmaster to teach us

and to drive us to Jesus Christ.

To make us despair of our own selves. To make us quit trying in our own flesh to achieve a righteous standing before God. That was the purpose of the law, is to make you just despair of your own flesh once and forever, so that you would seek the righteousness that God has provided through faith in Jesus Christ.

Now, if you twist the law and you use it as an instrument to make you feel very righteous, and you have this sense, well, I've kept the law of God. I live an honest life. I do my best and I try to be good and all.

And I don't live like those heathen out there. Then, you've misunderstood the intent of the law completely. And you're missing the righteousness of God.

As Paul was pointing out, that the Jew, because he didn't follow God's righteousness, did not attain righteousness. However, the poor Gentile, who just knew how desperately lost he was, discovered the righteousness of God. So, by the law, no flesh is going to be justified.

By the law is the knowledge of sin. But, because the law has brought me the knowledge of sin, now the righteousness of God without the law is made manifest. It is witness to, both in the law and in the prophets, this righteousness which is by faith.

God said to the prophet Hosea, the just shall live by faith. God said to Abraham, and he believed God and it was accounted unto him for righteousness. So, this righteousness that God has now given to us, apart from the law, is revealed.

Even the righteousness of God which is by the faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all of them that believe, for there is no difference, for all of us have sinned and come short of the glory of God. But, all of us can be justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus. Tonight, if you're aware of your inability to live a righteous life, you've struggled, you've cried out, you've done everything to live the righteous life, but you realize you can't, you're in good shape.

You're a good candidate now for that righteousness that God has revealed through the faith of Jesus Christ. Having come to a despairing in myself and of myself, I am brought to Jesus Christ and now this relationship with God through Him. Through the redemption that God has provided in Christ Jesus, where God has set Him forth to be a propitiation through the faith in His blood to declare God's righteousness for the remission of sins that are passed through the forbearance of God.

To declare, I say at this time, His righteousness that He might be just when He justifies Him who believes in Jesus Christ. God is faced with a problem. God created man that He might fellowship with man.

That was God's intent. Creating a creature with God-like capacities, a creature in His image that would be a self-governing creature as God is self-governing. Capacity to love as God loves.

The capacity to know that infinity exists. That He might come in to fellowship a loving relationship with that infinite God. One thing was necessary and that was that this creation use that choice to express His love for God through obedience, through faith.

Therefore, there had to be an alternate choice, which in this case was the tree in the midst of the garden, acknowledging good and evil so that man could exercise choice. Then God declared of all of the trees that are in the garden, you may freely eat except the tree in the middle. For in the day that you eat of that tree,

you will die a spiritual death.

You'll lose your relationship with God. For the effect of sin in a person's life is always broken relationship with God. God's hand is not short that He cannot save.

His ear is not heavy that He cannot hear. Your sins have separated you from God. So when man sinned, he put himself out of fellowship with God.

That relationship with God was broken. Thus, the purposes of God were thwarted. Now, God still desired fellowship with man.

But as long as sin was there, man could not fellowship with God. Something had to be done with man's sin, else there is no fellowship. Therefore, in order that God might renew fellowship with man, during the old covenant with the Jewish nation, He established a method by which you could take the guilt of your sin and transfer it onto an animal by faith.

Bring your ox to the priest. Lay your hands on its head and confess on the head of that ox all of your sins. And then the priest would kill the ox and offer it unto God as a sin offering, whereby your sins could be covered by faith because the ox had died in your place.

The death that you deserve because of your sins, because the soul that sinneth, it shall surely die. So that was the righteous basis by which God could restore fellowship with man in the Old Testament. As a man would bring the substitute, let it die in his place.

And then fellowship with God could be restored until man sinned again. Of course, if that were still true today and we had sacrifices here and you had to come and bring your animal for a sacrifice and your sins could be forgiven and you could sit here for a little while just fellowshiping with God and enjoying the blessing of God's presence and all in your life, it probably wouldn't last too long just driving from here to the freeway, even getting out of the parking lot, you might blow it and thus you'd have to, before you could fellowship with God again, bring another sacrifice and get things all cleaned up once more. These sacrifices were all done in faith because they were looking forward to the sacrifice that God was going to provide for man's sins.

And so there is that beautiful story of Abraham. When God said unto him, take now thy son, thine only son, Isaac, and offer him as a sacrifice on a mountain that I will show you. Put that alongside of John 3.16. For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son.

Take now thy son, thine only son, Isaac, offer him as a sacrifice on a mountain which I will show you. And so Abraham took his servants and his son Isaac and they began to journey towards this mount from Hebron. And after three days they came to the mount and Abraham said to his servants, you stay here and I and the lad will go and worship and will come again.

And as Isaac and his father were walking towards Mount Moriah, Isaac said, dad, here's the wood for the sacrifice and the fire, but where's the sacrifice? And Abraham said, son, the Lord will provide himself a sacrifice. And so they came to the mount and Abraham began to, he put Isaac upon the altar, raised the knife and God said, okay, Abraham, that's far enough. We've got the picture.

Behold, the ram is caught by its horns there in the thicket, taken off for it as a sacrifice. And Abraham called the name of the place Jehovah-Jireh, the Lord will provide or the Lord sees. And then he said, for in

the mount of the Lord, it shall be seen.

Mount Moriah, where Abraham said, God will provide himself a sacrifice so that all of those sacrifices that later were instituted in the law of Moses, all looked forward to the fulfillment of the prophecy of Abraham. When God would provide himself a sacrifice. And 2000 years later on Mount Moriah, God provided himself a sacrifice for it was on the top of Mount Moriah that Jesus was crucified.

So God declared his righteousness towards us. And God is righteous when he justifies us for Jesus took our sins upon himself. And thus the judgment of God, righteous judgment of God for sin death, spiritual death has been fulfilled.

So that God is now righteous when he justifies me. There's a righteous basis for it. Someone else has stepped in and died in my place.

And that's the whole gospel that deals with God's being just when he justifies the ungodly. God has justified me. He has declared me righteous before him.

Through my faith in the blood of Jesus Christ, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ. And thus I have received the remission of my sins, which are past. And so God has shown his righteousness as he is just when he justifies those who believe in Jesus Christ.

Where does that put boasting then? It's excluded. You see, I can't boast tonight of all of the good that I have done, of all of the sacrifices that I have made, of the great difficulty of getting those seven golden apples guarded by the multi-headed dragon that I bravely faced and killed with my sword. After a terrible struggle.

Boasting is excluded because I am declared righteous by my faith in Jesus Christ. And if there is any boasting to be done, it has to be done in Jesus. As Paul said, God forbid that I should boast save in the cross of Jesus Christ.

And all my boasting has to be in what Jesus has done for me. Not what I've done for him. Now, it is unfortunate that so often in church, the emphasis is on what man should be doing for God.

And God helped me. He has forgiven me. For years, I was placing the church under deep guilt trips.

As I was telling them their failure because they ought to be doing more for God. You ought to be sacrificing more. You ought to be giving more.

You ought to be doing more. You ought to be praying more. You ought to be anything more, you know.

And I was emphasizing the work that man should be doing for God. Even helping them, outlining works, giving them little charts to put their stars on. Do be a doobie and don't be a, you know, the doobies.

God help us. Because the New Testament points us not to what we have done or can do for God. But it points us to what God has done for us.

And it points us to the cross. And God forbid that I should boast except in the cross. Now, if I am diligent and I spend two hours a day in prayer.

And if I spend four hours a day in the Word of God. And three hours a day on the beach witnessing. Then I like to stand up and I like to say, I thank the Lord for his goodness to me.

And I am just so glad that I'm able to go out three hours a day and witness on the beach for Jesus. And all those four hours a day in the Word are just so precious to me. And all those two hours in prayer, my, I wouldn't give them up for anything, you know.

And I'm boasting in what I'm doing. Everybody says, oh wow, isn't he a righteous person? No. I am a sinner.

I am a hopeless sinner. If it were not for the grace of God, I deserve his judgment. But God loved me, even though I was a sinner.

And he sent his Son, who also loved me. And who took the guilt and the responsibility for my sin and died in my place. And now offers me forgiveness.

Forgiveness, righteousness, justification, fellowship with God, if I'll just believe in the sacrifice and in the work that he has wrought in my behalf. Therefore, I cannot boast in my works or in my goodness. And when you get to heaven, it isn't going to be a big bragging session as we all get around and tell of all the marvelous things we did for God on the earth.

But when we get to heaven, there'll just be that glorious, Jesus paid it all, all to him I owe. Sin had left its crimson stain, but he washed me white as snow. And through the ages to come, we'll be rejoicing in the grace of God through Jesus Christ, whereby I have access to the Father, fellowship with God.

Where is boasting then? It's excluded. By what law? By the law of works? No, no, no. If I could be righteous by works, then boasting would be in vogue.

But it's excluded because of the law of faith. How can I boast in the faith that God has given to me? Therefore, we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds or the works of the law. That's the conclusion.

For he is, is he the God of the Jews only? Is he not also the God of the heathen? Yes, of the heathen also. Now, seeing it is one God which will justify the circumcision by faith and the uncircumcision through faith. Do we then make void the law through faith? No, God forbid.

We're establishing the law. In other words, we are establishing the law for the purpose that the law was given. It forces me to take God's alternate.

The law shows me that I can't be having a standing before him through my own efforts. And so I've established the law for the purpose for which God gave the law by declaring that the law cannot justify me or make me righteous, but the law can only bring me to despair of myself so that I take God's alternate plan of faith in Jesus Christ. Now, what shall we say concerning Abraham, the father? As pertaining to the flesh, what did he find? For if Abraham were justified by his works, he had were up to glory, but not before God.

If it was Abraham's works that brought him justification, then Abraham could boast in his works. He could say, well, I left my home. I left my family over in the other side of, you know, the Euphrates River.

And I journeyed, not even knowing where I was going, just waiting for God to show me. And I was willing to offer my son and all. And he could have boasted if he was justified by his works, but he could not have boasted in God.

He would have had to be boasting in himself. But what does the scripture say about Abraham? It says, Abraham believed God and it was imputed or counted unto him for righteousness. What? His belief in God.

That's what God accounted for righteousness. Now, to him that worketh is the reward, not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But God will never be a debtor to you.

God will never owe you a thing. I'm always a debtor to God, but God will never be a debtor to me. Now, if righteousness could come by works, then once I did those works, God would owe me salvation.

If it were of works, then it would be of debt. God owing me the reward for my special effort and my works and my sacrifice and my commitment and all. But it's by faith.

And it's through grace, God's grace that he gives to me. But to him that worketh not, but believes on him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. I love it.

Because you see, it opens the door for me. It keeps the door open for me. I can come to God at any time and expect God to bless me.

Though I may be a total failure as far as my spiritual walk is concerned. Because God blesses me on the basis of his grace, not on the basis of my faithfulness to my devotions. Chuck, you've been good this week.

You've been faithful. You didn't yell at anybody on the freeway. Special reward this week, you know.

No, not so. Do you know that some... I hesitate to say this. But some of the times of God's greatest blessings upon my life have been right after my greatest failures.

Because I knew I just had to cast myself completely on the grace of God. I knew I couldn't come in my own merit. I knew that I was just bankrupt.

And I experienced many times the greatest blessings of God upon my life after my greatest failures. We need to rid ourselves of the Santa Claus concept of God who brings good little boys all kinds of nice toys out of his big bag. But if you're a bad little boy, you'll get sticks.

He's making out a list and he's checking it twice. He's going to find out who's naughty and nice. And the nice ones are going to be rewarded.

The naughty ones, nothing. And I carry that concept to God. And I think of God's going to reward me for my good efforts, for my faithfulness, for my diligence, for whatever my, my, my.

No, God's blessings are given to me on the basis of His grace. That way it's always available. The door is never shut.

I can always come to God through faith on the basis of God's grace towards me. To him that worketh not, but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, His faith, God counts for righteousness. So God looks at me

tonight as righteous because I am believing and do believe completely in the sacrifice that Jesus Christ made for me.

In taking my sin and in dying in my place, I believe that completely. And God accounts that belief for righteous. And God looks at me and says, ah, righteous, a righteous man.

I say, all right, I accept that. And I know, I know me. I know my weaknesses.

I know my failings. And that's why I have to cling to Jesus Christ. That's why I dare not stand in myself.

Now, David described this blessedness of the man unto whom God imputes righteousness without works. In the 32nd Psalm, David said, blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven and whose sins are covered. The word blessed is literally, oh, how blessed.

Happy are they whose iniquities are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Now, if you go back to that Psalm, you'll find it's very interesting. David talks about that period of time when he sought to hide his own sin.

And how the hand of God was so heavy upon him, he became so dried up inside that it was like a drought in summer. He was just, his bones were weary for day and night. The hand of God was heavy upon his life until he finally said, I'm going to confess my sins unto the Lord.

And God immediately forgave him all of his iniquity. Oh, how happy is the man whose iniquities are forgiven, whose sins are covered. And then he even went on more daring to say, oh, how happy is the man to whom God does not impute iniquity.

That is the man with whom God has no list. God doesn't impute iniquity unto that man who is believing and trusting in Jesus Christ. What a beautiful position to be in.

Where God is not imputing iniquity to me because of my faith. Now, I would not dare to say this unless it was said in the Scriptures. I mean, this seems to me to be so presumptuous.

I wouldn't dare to utter it, but the Scripture declares it, so I'm only declaring to you what the Scripture declares. But oh, how happy I am that God accounts me righteous and does not account my iniquities against me because of my faith in Jesus Christ. God accounts me righteous.

Now, comes this happiness or this blessedness then upon only those who are circumcised or upon those who are uncircumcised also. For we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness, but when was this reckoned? When he was circumcised or when he was uncircumcised? And when you go back in the record, you'll find that God said of Abraham, his faith is accounted for righteousness before he was circumcised. Therefore, this blessedness of having your sins forgiven, of not having God impute iniquity against you because of your faith in God and trust in God comes not from a physical right of circumcision, for it came to Abraham before he was ever circumcised.

And he received the sign of circumcision, which was the seal of that righteousness of the faith which he had even before he was circumcised, that he might be the father of all of those who believe, though they be not circumcised, that the righteousness might be imputed unto them also. So, God's righteousness is imputed to all men who believe. And the father of circumcision, he's the father of those who are not circumcised, who believe, and also the father of those who are circumcised, who believe, who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of faith of our father Abraham, which he had being

yet uncircumcised.

For the promise that he should be the heir of the world was not made to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. You see, God promised this to Abraham 400 years before he ever gave the law. So, it doesn't come by the law.

It doesn't come by the right of circumcision, which the Jew was trusting in these two things. But God gave it to Abraham before he ever gave the law, before he ever told Abraham to circumcise his sons, in order that it might be applicable to all men, regardless of race. For they which are of the law be heirs.

If they only which are of the law are the heirs, then faith is made void and the promise is nullified. Because the law works wrath. For where no law is, there is no transgression.

Now, you can only transgress a law if there is a law. If there is no law, then how can you transgress it? So, it is a faith that it might be by grace to the end that the promise might be sure or be certain. You see, it could never be certain if it was predicated upon me or upon my works or my efforts or my faithfulness or whatever.

If it were predicated upon that, it would never be certain from day to day. I'd never really know if I was saved. I may be saved today, but oh, tomorrow I may blow it bad.

You see, if it was predicated upon my works. In order that it might be certain, in order that it might be sure, God has established it then through grace and faith. Not to that only which is of the law, but to those which are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.

As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations, not just one, the Jews, before him whom he believed, even God who makes alive the dead and calls those things which be not as though they were. Now, this is an interesting aspect about God and I like this. God said to Abraham, before Isaac was ever conceived, through Sarah shall thy seed be called.

And he spoke of Isaac existing before he was ever born. He spoke of him as already existing before he was ever born. Now, God can do that because God lives in the eternal and in the eternal, everything is now.

So, God living in the eternal can speak of things as already existing that don't yet exist in the time frame that we live in. Because God living in the eternal sees them as though they already existed because he knows they are going to exist, though we have not yet caught up to that time frame. And so, God can speak of things that are not as though they are because of living in the eternal.

Now, this is one of the difficulties that we, living in the time frame, have in understanding God. There's tremendous difficulty in understanding the resurrection of the dead. When does it happen and so forth? Well, you see, the minute my soul and spirit leaves this body, I also then enter into the eternal timeless zone where everything is now.

So, to help confuse the issue, Solomon in Ecclesiastes 3.16 said, and that which has been is now, and that which shall be has already been. Now, you're talking about the eternal. No time zone.

So, that which has been is now. That which shall be has already been. Today is tomorrow and yesterday is today.

Wait a minute. All right, let's go up to Pasadena. It's New Year's Day.

We're standing at the corner there on Colorado Boulevard and the Long Beach float is coming down the street. It's now in sight. And we see the band coming in front of it and marching and we see the float go by and we're awing and oohing.

Oh, isn't that beautiful? And the float moves on down a few blocks and here comes the Sierra Madre float. And we're now entranced by the beauty of the Sierra Madre float which a few minutes ago, the people on up the street were entranced by its beauty. But now it's past them and it's come to us.

But it also passes by and now four blocks down, they're oohing and awing over the Sierra Madre float and we're watching another float come into view. And I standing at this point watch the parade go by. Now, where I am standing, the Sierra Madre float went by four minutes ago.

It has now moved on down in the procession down Colorado Boulevard. I am now watching a new float come by where this float now is. In four minutes will be where the Sierra Madre float now is or let's make it Long Beach, it's easier.

And where this float will be, the Long Beach float now is. Where the Long Beach float was, this float now is. Because I'm standing at one time frame of reference and watching it all go by in a procession.

It's constantly moving in this procession as does time constantly moving in a procession and I stand and look at it as it passes by. Now, if I could get in the Goodyear blimp and fly above Pasadena and look down from that observation cabin, I could see the entire parade from the beginning to end all at one shot. And thus I could see the Long Beach float and I could see the Sierra Madre float and I could see the Mexico float and all at the same time because now I'm looking down and I see the entire procession at once.

I'm no longer limited to this one corner and watching it in time frames passing by. So God looking down on the procession of history can see the entire scene at one view. He can see Adam sitting in the garden and where Adam was 6,000 years ago and where I am tonight as I'm moving in the procession.

But God can still see the whole procession at once. And He can see the glorious coming again of Jesus Christ and He can see the millennial reign and He can see the whole thing because He's outside of time looking down and not limited to the time frames. And thus, God says, oh, that Long Beach float, what a beauty.

Oh, I haven't seen it. You know, it hasn't come by here yet. Oh, it's a beauty.

I have to wait for it to pass by. But God has already seen it and He speaks of it as existing though in my time reference, it hasn't existed yet. It hasn't come by me yet.

Time hasn't come this far to me yet. But God living in the eternal outside of time sees the entire picture with one view. Thus, God speaks of things as existing though in my time frame they have not yet existed.

But God sees them. He knows they're going to exist because He's outside of the time frame. And thus, He speaks.

And that's where prophecy comes in. God's just speaking of what He's looking at. What He can see.

He's not bound by time. Now, our puny little finite minds just can't grasp this. I cannot think apart from time.

I'm bound in my thinking processes to time. And I cannot think apart from time. God can.

God sees the whole. I see only the part. We see in part.

We know in part. We prophesy in part. But when that which is perfect, the complete has come, then these things which are in part will be done away.

For we will know then even as we are known. So, this interesting aspect about God is given to us here by Paul. God who makes alive the dead.

When God said to Abraham, take now your son, your only son Isaac, and offer him as a sacrifice, Abraham by faith took his son and journeyed to the mountain. Now, Abraham didn't know how God was going to do it. But Abraham knew that he was going to return to his servants with his son.

I and the lad will go and worship and will come again. We're going to go up and worship God and we're going to come again. But wait a minute, Abraham, you're going to offer him as a sacrifice.

I don't, I know that. But God said through Isaac, shall thy seed be called. Isaac doesn't have any children yet.

So, you see, God's got a problem. Isaac's got to come back with me because through Isaac, the seed is going to be called. Isaac's got to have children.

So God is going to have to raise him from the dead if necessary, because God's got to keep his word. Now that's God's problem, how he's going to keep his word. He told me to offer him as a sacrifice.

I'm going to do that. But he's got to keep his word to me. So he's going to raise him up from the dead if necessary.

So you see, he was believing in the resurrection. For three days, Isaac was dead in the mind of Abraham as they were journeying. But yet he believed in the resurrection.

I'm going to offer him as a sacrifice, but God's going to raise him from the dead. Through faith, Hebrews 11, God, through faith, Abraham offered Isaac, believing that God would, if necessary, raise him from the dead because God said through Isaac, shall thy seed be called. So that was where Abraham took this step of faith.

A lot of people don't understand. They say, oh, how could a man offer his own son? Oh, they get all shook over the story of Abraham because they don't know the entire scripture. They don't realize the faith of Abraham.

He knew that Isaac had to be alive to bear children. And so God, you've got a problem. It seems like it's an insolvable problem, but that's not my problem.

Lord, it's your problem. Isaac's got to come back with me. He's got to have children because you told me through Isaac shall the seed be called.

So God spoke of Isaac's seed before he ever had any children because God knew he was going to have children. Abraham knew the word of God had to come to pass. And so he was willing to go ahead and sacrifice his son if that's what God says, because God's got to keep His word and Isaac's got to come alive with me.

Belief in the resurrection. So against hope, he believed in hope or against any understanding of how God can do it, yet he believed in God that he might become the father of many nations according as it was spoken, so shall thy seed be. And not being weak in the faith, he didn't consider his own body, now dead when he was about a hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb.

The first key to Abraham's faith is not considering the human difficulties. And that's our first stumbling stone to faith is we're always considering the human difficulties. It's so interesting now that we're always measuring our problems into categories of simple, difficult, impossible.

But Abraham did not consider the human difficulty here. That he was going to have a son when he was a hundred years old, the deadness of his own body or he didn't consider his own body not dead. He's probably impotent by this time.

Nor yet the deadness of Sarah's womb. She had probably gone through the menopause. There's no problem.

God said she's going to have a son. It's God's problem, not mine. And he didn't consider these human aspects or difficulties.

Secondly, he staggered not at the promise of God. Well, I don't see how God can do that. Yeah, I know God said he would, but I don't know if he means me.

He staggered not at the promises of God. But being strong in the faith, he gave glory to God. Oh, thank you, Lord, for that son.

Oh, Lord, I appreciate it so much. You're doing this for Sarah. She's, you know, wanted a kid all of her life, Lord.

Can I give her a boy? That's just really neat, Father. Lord, I thank you. I praise you.

For you see, he was fully persuaded that what God had promised, he was able also to perform. Hey, I can't perform. I know that.

I can't do it. Tried many years and I failed. But God is able to do it.

And God has promised that through Sarah, I'm going to have a son. And so I know that God is able to perform His promise to me. Four keys to faith.

Considering not the human difficulties, staggering not at the promise, but just taking the promise and praising the Lord and thanking God for the promise, knowing, being fully persuaded that God is able to do whatever He's promised. Therefore, His faith was imputed unto Him for righteousness. God said, that's a righteous man.

He believes my word. He trusts my word. But for all us also to whom it shall be imputed if we believe on Him who raised up Jesus, our Lord from the dead, who was delivered for our offenses and was raised

again for our justification.

So even as Abraham faith was accounted for righteousness, so our faith in God who raised Jesus from the dead, who was crucified for our offenses, but was raised again for our justification. Our faith in Jesus. God accounts to us for righteous.

And God looks upon that faith and declares that we are righteous. Does that mean I can go out and do whatever I want? Live after my flesh? Indulge in just any kind of a thing I desire? Because after all, it's my faith that God counts for righteousness. Chapter 5. Paul gets into some of these foolish speculations that people often make and the tragic mistakes that they make when they take grace and try to run with it.

Into lasciviousness and use it as a cloak for their evil deeds. And so, as we move into chapter 5, Paul will deal with the subject, shall we sin freely that grace might abound? Shall we just go ahead and can we just go ahead and live however we want after our flesh because of God's grace? Does that mean that it doesn't matter how I live? You see, if you quit the study tonight, you can be in left field and left out. You better come back next Sunday and get the other side of the coin or you could be in deep, deep trouble.

Don't take this and run with it yet. You've got to realize that he is talking to a special category of people who have been crucified with Christ, who are reckoning the old man to be dead and are living now after the Spirit, the new life in the Spirit, in the resurrected Christ. So, you've got to get the rest of the story to get the balance.

So, see you next Sunday night as we balance things off. I am amazed at God's love for me. I'm amazed that Jesus Christ loves me so much that he was willing to take the penalty of my sin.

He was willing to die in my place. He was willing to suffer the consequences for my guilt. I love Him and I appreciate His love for me.

And because of my love for Him, I want to live for Him. I want to serve Him. Because of my love for Him, I want to do only those things that are pleasing to Him.

I don't want to do those things that would displease Him. I want to walk as He walked. I want to forgive as He forgave.

I want to love as He loved. For you see, the love of Christ constrains me. And thus, I live by a higher standard than any law could dictate.

For I am bound by the law of love. Love for God and love for Jesus Christ. It causes me to only desire to do those things that will bring glory to Him.

May you walk this week in such a way as to bring glory unto the Father. That He may look upon you and be pleased as you express to Him your love through the life that you live. God bless you and give you a beautiful week.

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