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THE LOOKOUT

JANUARY 2022

Unit: ROMANS (Part 1)

Theme: RIGHTEOUS

Overview: Romans has been responsible for more church revivals than any other New Testament book. It is proper to spend three months studying it under three separate themes. The first theme has to do with being righteous. Students will learn that God is righteous, and therefore judgment should be left in his hands. Students will learn that Abraham was a good example of being righteous, as was the remnant of Israel. Finally, students will learn what righteous living looks like in daily life.

HOW TO USE

Each week has a **lesson aim**, **lesson text**, and **supplemental text**.

Tabs indicate the week of each lesson.

Each week features three sections: **Study**, **Application**, and **Discovery**.

Use the **Discovery** questions to study, discuss, and apply the Scripture passages in a group or class.

WEEK OF JANUARY 16, 2022

LESSON AIM: **Follow Abraham's example
in pursuing the righteousness
that is by faith.**

UNIT: Romans (Part 1)

THEME: Righteous

LESSON TEXT: Romans 4:1-5, 13-25

SUPPLEMENTAL TEXT: Romans 4:6-12; Hebrews 11:8-19

RIGHTEOUS ABRAHAM

BY MARK SCOTT

Be careful of idolizing Bible characters. They all have feet of clay, and they can marginalize God as the real hero of the biblical narratives. That being said, Abraham is an imitable model of righteousness. Sometimes biblical characters help us get our arms around the great qualities of God. Two lessons will do this in regard to God's righteousness, one on Abraham and the other on the remnant of Israel.

Paul's argument thus far was that Gentiles were deprived (Romans 1:18-32; 2:12-16), and Jews were guilty of unjustified criticism (Romans 2:1-11, 17-29). In Romans 3, Paul traced how the Jews had some advantages but failed to live up to them (vv. 1-18). So, Jew and Gentile are guilty before God and only through faith in Christ can they be righteous (Romans 3:19-31). Abraham was the primary example of someone who put his faith in God.

Faith and Righteousness

Romans 4:1-5

Paul's rhetorical question, "What then shall we say . . . ?" occurs six times in Romans (4:1; 6:1; 7:7; 8:31; 9:14, 30). The question helped Paul introduce Abraham as an example of faith and righteousness. What did his life teach? Abraham did a lot of great works (Genesis 12:1-25:10; James 2:21-23), but none of these works made him right with God. Therefore he had no cause to *boast* (a key theme as chapter 3 ended).

Against incredible odds, Abraham just *believed*. Paul quoted the famous Genesis 15:6. Without a child in Sarah's womb, Abraham was asked to believe that God would bless all the nations through his seed . . . and God did. That posture of faith gave Abraham his standing with God. One who works gets *wages*. In fact, wages are due to the worker. Abraham worked "for" God, but he did not work "to get right with" God. He just trusted God, who is in the habit of justifying *the ungodly*.

Faith and Promise

Romans 4:13-17

In verses 6-12, Paul briefly referenced King David, another great hero of faith. David also did not get right with God by works but with simple trust in grace (Psalm 32 is cited). Paul then returned to his first example, Abraham, and explained that the promise of God (Genesis 12) preceded the sign of circumcision (Genesis 17).

Just as the promise preceded circumcision, it also preceded the giving of the law (Exodus 20). Paul's argument was "first things first." Abraham and his *offspring* did not get right with God *through the law*. If that had been true then faith would mean *nothing* (empty or void) and God's promise would be *worthless* (worked down or destroyed). The law simply underlined how sinful Jews and Gentiles were (cf. Romans 7:7-8). There was a sense in which *transgression* is not even counted if there is no standard (i.e., the law) by which to judge it.

The promise of God to bless the nations through Abraham's seed *comes by faith* via the grace of God. Since both Jews and Gentiles have to be right with God by faith, Abraham became *the father of us all*. Abraham was not just the father of the Jews, he also was the father of "many nations" (Genesis 17:5). If God *gives life to the dead and calls into being things that are not*, then he does not need puny human works to make people right with him.

Faith and Hope

Romans 4:18-25

Faith and hope will someday give way to sight and reality (Revelation 21-22). But faith and hope are needed in this world and they are hard to separate. Biblical hope is not just wishful thinking. It is an eager expectation of what a living God will bring about. Abraham and Sarah could lead the geriatric parade. Abraham was as *good as dead*, and Sarah's *womb was also dead*. Dead + dead = dead. This godly but childless couple was asked to believe that their heirs would be as plentiful as the dust on the earth and as numerous as the stars in the sky (Genesis 13:16; 15:5). Guess what? They did believe it.

Abraham *did not waver* (judge or separate) *through unbelief*. With the tenaciousness of a junkyard dog, Abraham held on to the *promise* God had made to him. Choosing this posture of faith *strengthened* him *in his faith* all the more. It all came back to Genesis 15:6. He chose to believe. The result was credit for himself and for his heirs (e.g., the Christians in Rome). The key to the whole passage might be in verse 25. Abraham's living faith, which preceded circumcision and the giving of the law, made him right with God. This same kind of faith was made possible by Jesus' *death for our sins* and his resurrection *for our justification*. ■

APPLICATION

HELP WANTED

BY DAVID FAUST

I enjoy working in my yard, but I dislike scraping and staining the old deck attached to the back of our house. Last year I skipped those unpleasant tasks and let nature take its course. And nature wasn't kind. My son-in-law gazed at the weathered boards and cracked concrete and said, "Dad, I'm surprised you would let your deck look like that."

Appropriately shamed, I began making plans. "I can do the work myself," I told my wife. She looked doubtful. "You're not 30 years old anymore," she reminded me, peppering me with questions. "Do you really know how to build a deck? Do you have the time? It could take you weeks to build it. And will your back hold up?"

I offered a few counterarguments, but common sense prevailed. We found a company that specializes in building decks, and four strong, young men quickly finished the job. At first, I refused outside assistance, but someone else's help was exactly what I needed.

Receiving Care

"May I help you?" asks the salesperson in a store. "No thanks," I usually respond. Back in the days before GPS, during road trips my family became irritated because I was too stubborn to stop and ask for directions.

A friend of mine has been caring for his wife, who struggles with complicated health problems. They are learning to accept help from others, but it hasn't been an easy lesson. "In the past, we were the ones who visited the sick, not the ones being visited," my friend observes. "It's humbling to be on the receiving end of care."

Something in the human spirit wants to push back, assert our independence, and prove we can handle things on our own. When Jesus washed his disciples'

feet, Peter refused at first and exclaimed, "No, you will never wash my feet!" On the surface his objection appeared humble, but in reality, pride was at work. Peter was acting like he knew better than Jesus did!

Remember Naaman, the Syrian military officer? He was accustomed to giving orders, but this situation was out of his control. Stricken with leprosy, he traveled to Israel, hoping the prophet Elisha could heal his ravaged body. For a while, though, pride got in the way. Elisha instructed him to dip seven times in the Jordan River. Offended and angry, Naaman sputtered something about "having better rivers back where I'm from." Only when he humbled himself and lowered himself into the muddy Jordan did he come up clean.

Our Ever-Present Helper

We don't like to admit it, but we all need help—and not just for temporal things like building a deck. We cannot fix this broken world or save our souls through our own human efforts. Spiritual do-it-yourselfers never succeed. Thankfully, "God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble" (Psalm 46:1).

Abraham was a wealthy and capable man, but he learned to rely on the Lord instead of his own abilities and cleverness. He "was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God" (Romans 4:20). Just as it would be foolish for a drowning swimmer to refuse a lifeguard's help, it makes no sense for us to reject the aid of our gracious God. Faith moves us to humble ourselves and tell the Lord, "I need—and I want—your help."

Personal Challenge: Are you trying to be a spiritual do-it-yourselfer? Do you seek God's help, or do you try to handle things on your own? Offer a prayer of confession, acknowledging your weaknesses. Affirm your reliance on the Lord and ask him to strengthen your faith. ■

DISCOVERY

BY MICHAEL C. MACK

1. When and how did you sense God's unconditional and saving love this week?
2. In what areas of your life do you find it easiest to obey God? What areas are most difficult?

Ask two people to read aloud **Romans 4:1-5, 13-25** one after the other, preferably from different Bible versions. Then ask a third person to restate the passage in their own words in a minute or less.

3. What "aha" moment did you have as you listened to this passage being read and summarized?
4. Let's dig deeper into the passage:
 - What is the spiritual difference between working for wages and receiving a gift?
 - What do you learn about Abraham in this passage?
 - How are we connected to Abraham?
 - We are justified (made right) with God through faith. In this passage, several other associated words and phrases are used: *righteousness, belief, trust, grace, hope, giving glory to God*. How is each one connected to justification by faith?
 - In what ways did Jesus receive what he didn't "deserve"?
 - How have we received what we don't "deserve"?
5. What do you learn about God from this passage?
6. What do you learn about people?
7. It's obvious from this passage (and the Bible as a whole) that we don't obey God to be saved. Why do Christ followers obey God?
8. "Jesus our Lord . . . was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification" (vv. 24-25). With whom will you share that clear statement of the gospel in the upcoming weeks?
9. Based on our study and discussion, complete this sentence: "This week, I will . . ."
10. In what area of your life do you need to trust God more?

For Next Week: Read and reflect on **Romans 9:22-33; 11:1-6**. You can also read next week's supplemental texts as well as the Study and Application sections as part of your personal study. 📖