AM Romans 4 Father of all Believers

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[0:00] To Paul's letter in the New Testament to the Romans. Paul's letter to the Romans and we'll be reading the whole of chapter 4.

But I will read just a few verses from chapter 3 that will give you advance notice of the theme that Paul is about to develop around the figure of Abraham in chapter 4.
So what I'll do, I'll read a few verses from verse 21 of chapter 3 first and then we'll move to chapter 4.
Paul says at this point in verse 21 of chapter 3, But now the righteousness of God has been manifested apart from the law, though the law and the prophets bear witness to it.
That is the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction for all, he means Jews and Gentiles, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.
[1:39] Then he moves to chapter 4 because one of the great figures at that time in the religious world of Israel and in their religion of Judaism was Abraham.

And they looked to Abraham as the very father of the nation. And they looked to Abraham as the very father of the nation, of the people of God.
So he naturally starts chapter 4 by saying, What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather, according to the flesh?
Because if you look at the family tree of Abraham, Jesus Christ comes from the root of Abraham.
For if Abraham was justified or declared righteous by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.
For what does the scripture actually say? Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness.
[2:58] Now, to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift, but as his due. And to the one who does not work, but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.

Just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works, which is Psalm 32 that we've just been singing.
Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin. Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, he means the Jewish people, believers, or also for the uncircumcised, all the other Gentile nations?
We say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness. How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised, if you like?
Circumcision recognises him as one of the people of God, of Israel. And Paul is about to say he was declared righteous ever before he was part of one of God's people in the sense of circumcision.
[4:29] Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith, while he was still uncircumcised.

That's why he's the father of everyone. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, circumcised so that righteousness would be counted to them as well.
And to make him the father of the circumcised, who are not merely circumcised, but also who walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.
For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be heirs, faith is null and the promise is void.

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For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law, there is no transgression. That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace, and be guaranteed to all his offspring, not only to the adherent of the law, but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.
[5:52] As it is written, As it is written, I have made you the father of many nations, in the presence of the God of whom he believed he gives life to the dead, and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

In hope he believed against hope that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, so shall your offspring be. He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead, since he was about a hundred years old, or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb.
No distrust made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith, as he gave glory to God. Fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised, that is why his faith was counted to him as righteousness.
But the words that was counted to him were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him, who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses, and raised for our justification.
Amen. And may our Lord add his own blessing to the reading of his words. Let's unite our hearts once again. If you can turn with me then back to Genesis, and this time chapter 15.
[7:22] Genesis chapter 15. Genesis chapter 15. Let's read then some verses from Genesis 15.

After these things, the word of the Lord came to Abraham in a vision. Fear not, Abraham. I am your shield.
Your reward will be very great. But Abraham said, O Lord God, what will you give me?
For I continue childless. And the heir of my house is this Eliezer of Damascus. And Abraham said, Behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir.
And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, This man shall not be your heir. Your very own son shall be your heir. And he brought him outside and said, Look toward heaven and number the stars, if you are able to number them.
[9:00] Then he said to him, So shall your offspring be. And Abraham believed the Lord, and the Lord counted it to him as righteousness.

Abraham is one of the great figures of the Bible, and in particular, the Old Testament.
Indeed, Abraham is a great figure in the three great monotheistic religions of Islam, of Judaism, and Christianity.
He's found, obviously, in Judaism, and he's certainly found in Christianity, in their scriptures, and he's also found in the scriptures of Quran.
He's a massive figure, and what makes him a massive figure, is, he's known as the father of all believers, who have the kind of faith that brings them into a right relationship with God.
[10:35] Abraham and his children, Isaac and Jacob, Jacob ended up with his twelve children, and they became the tribes of Israel, and they after, they had been slaves before that in Egypt, and then God took them out of that slavery, and they then later on became became a nation, but the father figure of both the physical nation, and the father figure of the people of Jewish faith, is Abraham.

He is the one that God, as I was saying to the children, called to come away from his country, and away from his family, to a land that he would show him, and he said to Abraham, that, you know, you'll become a great nation, this is back there in twelve, you'll become a great nation, I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing, and I will bless those that bless you, and so on, and he said in chapter 15, that we've just read, if you could count the stars, that's how much will be your offspring, now, before I go any further,
I want to ask myself, and you hear, how is your faith today, in whom, or in what, is your faith, does your faith lead you, to live your life for God, does your faith lead you, like it led Abraham, to even leave his family, and his country, these are some of the questions that we will encounter, as we look at those verses of chapter 15, Abraham is, what's known as the prototype, of a true believer, in other words, he's the model, he's the paradigm, he's the original pioneering, believer, whose faith was counted by God, as righteousness, and therefore, we're going to look at three things, from this chapter, we're going to look at faith, and fear, and then we're going to look at faith, and questions, and finally, faith, and righteousness, firstly then, faith, and fear, now, chapter 15 begins with the

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phrase, after these things, and it begs the question, obviously, after what things, well, in Abraham's meanderings, and wanderings, seeking to determine exactly where God wanted him to be, and what was, if you like, the land of the promise, and the offspring, and so on,
Abraham is now been wandering around that land of Canaan for ten years, ten years, and still he doesn't own a square inch of the land, and still he is childless, and in chapter 14, he's actually got embroiled in a kind of war, and interestingly enough, he had over 300 trained people, this chapter 14 tells us, that were involved in that war, the people he was involved in the war with were dubbed kings, they're no doubt petty kings of clans, and he has been a victorious
Abraham, and putting some of those kings to the sword, if you like, I don't mean he literally had a sword, and God also knows that he's afraid, doesn't he?
[16:06] this great man of faith, this prototype of the believer, this father of all those who subsequently will have the true faith in Jesus Christ, the true faith in God, either faith in Jesus Christ to come from the Old Testament, or faith in the Jesus Christ who has come and died and rose again, but is afraid, because after these things the word of the Lord came to Abraham in a vision, and what are the first words?

Fear not. God doesn't waste words, so clearly he's afraid, he's got fears, he may be the prototype of all those that have faith, he may have an astonishing faith that he's left his country and his family, and he's been wandering for ten years and he's got nothing to show for it, but he's certainly got fears, it could be fears of, was I imagining this?
Because after all, after all, the promise is fantastical, it almost seems as a, listen, this tells you my age, about forty odd years ago, I was at the barras in Glasgow, where there was an open-air meeting, and I got in conversation with what I felt was an older man at that point, and he says to me, it's a wonderful story, your gospel, but it's a fantasy.
Maybe Abraham was wondering, I've been treading about for ten years, so he was afraid, or maybe he was thinking, somebody will come after me now, and I'm out here, and I don't know what my destiny is, or my future, I only have the word of God, and so far has not come to pass.
Remember Hebrews 11, where it tells us that all of these people who had faith, and were commended for having faith, none of them received the promises, just like us.
[18:32] Our promises of a new heavens and a new earth, our promises the coming of Jesus Christ, our promises that now are we the children of God, but it does not yet appear what we shall be.

As we look out at the world that is becoming more uncertain and more dangerous, we might wonder, where is this sovereignty of God? You and I might have loads of fears, we might wonder, what is the future?
God knew he had those fears, and he came to him with the phrase that God normally comes to his people, fear not, I am your shield.
God. Notice what God is saying here. He's not saying, I've provided a shield for you. He's saying, I, God, the everlasting God, the God who spoke to you, back there in chapter 12, the God who has made promises to you, I am your shield.
Your reward, he says, shall be very great. And we're the same. we're hoping and looking and yearning for this great reward as believers.
[20:12] How did Abraham respond, this father of those who have faith? How did he respond? But Abraham said, O Lord God, what will you give me?

For I continue childless and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus. Now, when you look out the window into the world and you see the chaos and you see everything else that's going on, and perhaps as you look into your own mind and your own soul and your own heart, and perhaps you see some consternation or fears or even chaos there, that's exactly what Abraham saw.
Abraham said, O Lord God, you're saying my reward shall be very great, but what will you give me, for I continue childless?
Here is Abraham questioning God, remember, he's the father of those who have real faith, and the heir of my house is Eliezer, that's a slave servant, and God had indicated that the offspring that he was promising would come from Abraham's flesh, if you like, and then it's almost if you can pick this up, I think anyway, perhaps you don't agree with me, but I would say it's nearly accusatory,
Abraham says in verse 3, behold, you have given me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir, for all your promises

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Lord, for all their fantastical themes, you have given me nothing, how does God respond, how does God respond to this person's fears, and this person's questions, does he say, I'm having nothing more to do with you, I can see that you're questioning my promises, I can see that you're riddled and shot through with all sorts of fears, what does God do, verse 4, and behold the word of the Lord came to him, this man shall not be your heir, your very own son shall be your heir, he comes [23:54] God that is with reassurance, he comes with a fresh, if you like, encounter with Abraham, to sustain him, and to uphold him, and to give him hope, and confidence, confidence, so, there's some things that we should, I think, note here, that being afraid doesn't negate, negate, or delete, the genuineness of our faith, having faith in God that doesn't erase our normal human emotions, or responses, to challenging circumstances, that we may find ourselves faced with, but God does call us, to fan, as it were, that genuine seed of faith that is still lying there in our bosom, if I could put it like that, and he tells us to fear not, and he gives us words of assurance,

I personally am your shield, I myself am your reward, far from God scolding Abraham, he comes with comfort, and great reassurance, and renewed hope, to help allay Abraham's fears, and sometimes, when we have got questions, and fears, and well-meaning people, and preachers, quote, verses at us, it isn't enough, especially, in serious situations, because the world, as I've been saying, and our personal experience, and circumstances seem to flatly contradict the promise and word of God, what then can we do?
First of all, what we can do is be utterly honest with God, that's the first thing, put no clothing of unreality on, or idealism, but tell God exactly what you're thinking, and what you're feeling, you don't actually need to tell him, because he knows, but he's not going to strike you down, and bring your questions to God, the book of Psalms are full of what I've just said, bring your questions to God, pour out your heart before him, tell him what's going on, there is no point in denying the reality of our situation, he's big enough to cope with our battered and tested faith, but we have to also see the importance of God's emphatic word of reassurance, and how
God seeks to recharge that faith, and fan that faith, and delay our fears, and in a sense, it's not that he necessarily always answers our questions, or gives us an explanation, but what he asks us to do, is to not let our faith go, in his word, and his promises, promises, I remember speaking to a minister colleague myself, I don't know, say about 30 years ago, and I was going through a period of struggle, a period of doubt, and I had said to this person, that none of the things that might buttress one's faith, cut any muster with me, and I said to him, as I survey all the apologetics that can be brought to buttress
Christianity, I found that they didn't do it, and I said, I'm only left, I said this to my colleague, with God's word, he said, well you're left with the kernel of true faith, because it's not our faith in the end that matters, it's whom that faith is in that matters, and therefore it's important to remember that, our relationship with God is a relationship with his word, and his encountering us, just as he encountered Abraham.
[30:17] Now, I want to use the last bit of time to speak about Abraham's righteousness, because it tells us that with God coming to him again, and fanning that faith of his that was still there, as it were, submerged in his fears and his questions.

We read this again, which is astonishing, and he believed the Lord, and the Lord counted it to him as righteousness. That's amazing, isn't it?
Try and imagine the situation. situation. Here's this guy, Abraham. He's changed the whole course of his life on the basis of believing words of God.
And after ten years, it looks as though that word of God has no hope of materializing. nothing. And yet when God comes to him in his time of crisis, we read, and Abraham believed the Lord, and the Lord counted it to him for righteousness.
Now, the word righteousness or righteous is a massive word in the entire Old Testament. And one of the things that it means is a right relationship with God.
[32:12] And of course, we read from Romans earlier on, and we could see that Paul had said the problem about human beings is precisely this, that their natural state, they don't have a right relationship with God.

And that the only way that they can have a right relationship with God is if in God's eyes, they're in a righteous condition, if you like.
And the paradox and the problem is no one can attain that righteous status by trying to keep the Ten Commandments the law.

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Who here in this room today could stand up and say, I have kept the Ten Commandments since I became conscious and aware of myself perfectly every single day.
God knew that and God said, look, in terms of your status and standing before me, that's never going to achieve it, any human effort.
[33:38] But one day I will have my son come and he will take your shoes and he will stand in your place and he will get involved in something called the great exchange.

And that great exchange is this, that he will take all our sins and guilt on his shoulders and assume the responsibility for them and as Paul puts it in the New Testament and die for our sins.
Christ died for our sins and he will actually give us his righteousness that he and he alone has and it's believing in that that brings us into that right relationship with God.
But there's something I think that we need to be aware of as Christians. what I've just spoken of is standard theology in any reformed church.
But you see Abraham acted Abraham didn't merely have an intellectual faith if you like or a propositional faith.
[35:13] I mean by that he didn't say oh yeah right so God is God and this is how you get righteousness and I've believed it so I can go on with my life now.

No, no, no, no, no. Because that righteousness of living righteously before God is so closely related to the right relationship because you won't have a right relationship if you're not living a righteous life before God.
And even although the two things are logically distinct, they're not existentially distinct. As Jesus put it, a good tree bears fruit and a bad tree doesn't.
And the reason that they're not existentially distinct is that the moment someone puts their faith in God as Abraham did, they're instantly united to the Father and the Son.
Calvin tells us that in his institutes. Immediately united. So you cannot be united to Christ by the Holy Spirit of God and not be interested in living in accordance with God.
[36:43] Abraham believed God and he counted it to him for righteousness. But it wasn't a pseudo belief. It wasn't a belief that was only a propositional belief or an intellectual belief.

It was a life belief, a life changing belief, a belief that made Abraham trod all over for another ten or more years.
And a belief that even made Abraham take the son of promise Isaac when God asked him to do that and sacrifice him, which of course he didn't because he was testing that faith of Abraham.
So it's not merely intellectual faith, but it is existential faith, that is indeed genuine faith, and it's faith that walks with God as well as believes in his promises.
may the Lord bless these thoughts to each one of us for his glory and for our eternal good. Amen.

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