

# Becoming Righteous

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[ 0 : 00 ] The scripture reading is taken from Genesis chapter 15 verses 1 through 6 and 2 Corinthians chapter 4 verses 1 through 25.

! After these things, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision. Fear not, Abram, I am your shield, your reward shall be very great.

But Abram said, O Lord God, what will you give me? For I continue childless and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus.

And Abram 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're able to number them, then he said, So shall your offspring be.

[ 1 : 07 ] And he believed the Lord and he conquered it to him as righteousness. The second reading will be taken from Romans chapter 4 verses 1 through 25.

What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.

For what does the scripture say? Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness. 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, he 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.

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. In this blessing, then, is this blessing then only for the circumcised or also for the uncircumcised?

[ 2 : 32 ] 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?

It was not after, but before he was circumcised. He received the sign of the circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had faith while he was still uncircumcised.

The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that the righteousness would be counted to them as well.

And to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised, but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

For the promise to Abraham and his offspring would be the heir of the world.

[ 3 : 31 ] And this did not come through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. For it is the adherents of the law who are the heirs.

Faith is null and the promise is void. 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, as it is written.

I have made you the father of many nations in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who 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 100 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.

[ 5 : 01 ] That is why his faith was counted to him as righteousness. But the words it 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.

Good morning, church. Let us pray. Oh, Lord, every hour we need you, and especially now we need you, Lord.

to make clear your word to your people, to cause it to come alive. And so we ask, oh Lord, that you would grant us wisdom, the gift of articulation.

You would also, oh Lord, cause our ears to be opened, cause us to be alert and sensitive to your word this day.

[ 6 : 07 ] In Jesus' name we pray. Amen. I am told, in fact, even by some present, that a good speaker builds up to his or her conclusion.

To make his or her conclusion, as if to create suspense for those who are hearing what he or she has to say.

And also I am told, as I'm certain most, if not all of you, have heard, that every good message, every good speech has a clear introduction.

But we're going to deviate from both of those this morning. So, listen to the concluding words in our text.

Concluding words in our text. Genesis chapter 15 verse 16. Moses writes, these words are to be projected.

[ 7 : 31 ] Moses writes, And he believed the Lord and he counted it to him as righteousness.

And he believed the Lord and he counted it to him as righteousness. And now let's consider what Paul writes in Romans chapter 4 verse 23.

Paul writes, As Paul elaborates on these words in Genesis, Paul writes, The words it was counted to him were not written for his sake alone but for ours also.

So, Moses writes, And he believed the Lord and he counted it to him as righteousness. And Paul writes, The words it was counted to him were not written for his sake alone but for ours also.

So, what are these two passages? Genesis, a few verses in Genesis chapter 15 verses 1 through 6 and Romans chapter 24.

[ 8 : 54 ] What do these texts tell us? They tell us simply that righteousness is a gift from God.

That's it in a nutshell. Righteousness is a gift from God. And we see this truth exemplified in two ways.

one, Abram's righteousness and secondly, our righteousness.

We continue our series in Genesis and we come to this very short text that is foundational to our understanding of our relationship with God.

The kernel of our relationship or perhaps you prefer to say that it provides the base upon which foundational theological truth is built.

[ 10 : 06 ] Those words that we just read about Abram and he believed the Lord and he counted it to him as righteousness.

those words are foundational. That's the springboard if you will. As such we find that Paul quotes these words in his letters and despite the import, the significance and the simplicity of these words, many fail to pay attention to them and some refuse to embrace them as biblical.

Some wish to add to them and some wish to take away from them but these words are fundamental. Up to this point in Genesis we've seen a number of very intriguing characters in our series.

People like Adam and Eve and Cain and Noor and of course Abram. And you know this man Abram, he doesn't trail any of them in importance within the context of Bible history.

There is no description given of Abram. We don't know what he looked like at all. But if we were to allow ourselves a little bit of latitude and to say what do you think this man Abram, what did he look like?

[ 11 : 55 ] If one were to allow stereotypes to suggest what have been his main features man might say that Abram had a commanding presence.

Perhaps he was a tall man. Maybe excessively sober. Sober demeanor. Not too warm at first.

Not an inviting personality perhaps. Perhaps. We might actually read these accounts and begin to admire this man.

And why do we say these things about him? This man was a man with a great deal. He had a lot. He commanded a lot of men.

His possessions were enormous. A lot of people looked to him for their welfare. He had a beautiful wife.

[13:03] You might actually read these words and begin to admire the man that Abram was. There's good reason to do that. Yet as we shall see and have seen the main character in this account as is true throughout the Bible is God himself.

there is this temptation for us to place emphasis on us and not God and on the characters and not God.

And while it is true that we are not mere props in God's design, we must see that we get our value, our bane, our significance, our state from God himself.

Moses in these brief words show plainly that the pages of scripture are about God who assigns, who appoints, who designs, who justifies whom he wills.

So for a short while, those are precisely the lenses through which we will examine the text. words, let's now consider our first point, which will consume most of our relatively short time together, Abram's righteousness.

[14:39] Firstly, what is righteousness? What is righteousness? righteousness? R.C. Sproul gives us an interesting definition.

Righteousness, he says, is doing what is right in the sight of God. This is a simple definition that is far more complex under the surface.

To be righteous is to do everything that God calls us to do. The demands of true righteousness are so great and so many that none of us in this world achieves it perfectly.

It involves following the whole counsel of God. That's what R.C. Sproul writes. R.C. Sproul says that righteousness encompasses a great deal.

It requires us to meet all of God's requirements. He says that there are so great, so many, that none of us ever in this world achieves it perfectly.

[16:06] Righteousness is the state of being in right standing with God. That's what it is in essence.

Righteousness is being in right standing with God. It is being justified by God. And just to tell you how hard that is, how impossible it is for us to achieve that, the Bible tells us that he is holy and without sin.

So right there and then, you can see where that puts us. But in this account we see of Abram, the Bible helps us to see in these few verses that Abram falls asleep doubtful and he rose a righteous man.

Having just defeated several armies, Abram falls asleep during which time he had a vision. verse 1 of chapter 15 says, After these things, the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision.

Fear not, Abram. Fear not, Abram. I am your shield, the Lord says to him. And the Lord makes two promises to Abram.

[17:45] He assures him firstly, he says, I am your shield. Meaning, I will protect you. And no doubt, Abram, having gone to war with these kings and having defeated them, was concerned that maybe one or all of them would come back to seek revenge.

But the Lord wanted to assure Abram that he is his shield. isn't it comforting to know that the Lord's design, his purpose, his intent is to be our shield.

This promise was not only to Abram, but also to those of us who believe. consider what Psalm 33 says. A soul waits for the Lord.

He is our help and our shield, for our heart is glad in him, because we trust in his holy name. Let your steadfast love, O Lord, be upon us.

even as we hope in you, just as the Lord was Abram's shield, he is our shield.

[19:10] The Lord's second promise to Abram, he says, your reward will be great. Now, you remember Abram had defeated these kings and and Abram left the spoils alone.

Abram didn't take any of it. But the Lord tells Abram, he says, your reward, Abram, though you didn't take anything, your reward will be great. One commentator, our Ken Hughes, writes, all Abram got for his labors was God.

That's all he got. That's all. God was teaching Abram to be satisfied with him alone. This demonstrates, of course, what God desires to give to us as we submit to the disciplines of life, of a

life of faith.

He teaches us to be satisfied with him as enough, our all in all. There, Abram, the Lord says to Abram, be content with what you have.

Be content with what you have because, yes, you don't have the spoils of the conquest, but you've got me. You've got the Lord, and today the Lord says to you and to me the same thing.

[ 20 : 42 ] Your reward will be great because I am your God. Is there someone who needs to hear that today?

Someone who needs to know that despite the way things seem, despite the fact that you might have fallen prey to deception that resulted in loss, despite your current circumstances, God is still enough.

He was enough for Abram, and He's enough for us. He is enough in every circumstance. That's the word of the Lord to Abram, and that's the word of the Lord to us.

And He's enough not just in our financial circumstances. He is enough in our relational crises as well. He is enough in every circumstance that we have.

Yet despite those promises, and despite God's prior promises to Abram, we need to see this, brothers and sisters, despite God's closeness to Abram, despite what God says to Abram, Abram still, he still expresses doubt and concern even at this point.

[ 22 : 09 ] Abram says to the Lord in verse 2, O Lord God, what shall you give me? For I continue childless.

I continue childless, Abram says. Abram said, I got all of these things. You've made all of these promises to me, but I continue childless.

Abram's doubt, can we be honest? Abram's doubt was humanly understanding, understandable.

Here's a man who was barely 100 years old, and his wife was more than 70 years old.

How many of you women over 70 want to have children today? What a task. What a miracle. And so Abram looked at his body, and he looked at his wife, and he said, this can't happen.

He said, this can't happen. I can't imagine having a child at this age, at this young age. But Abram, Abram said, it can't happen.

[ 23 : 19 ] And he doubted God because, remember, God had said to him before that he would have an heir. He looked around, and he saw the prevailing circumstances, and they suggested that he would not have an heir as God had promised.

And oftentimes, we are just like Abram. the weight of our circumstances seem to overwhelm us. What we see around us suggests that the things that the Lord has promised to us in his word will not happen.

The Lord has said in his word that he, that David said, and we quote him, David said, I have never saved the righteous forsaken, nor his seed begging for bread.

And we look around and we say, Lord, that's what David says, and that should be my lot too. But the circumstances dictate otherwise. My body is in pain.

Circumstances dictate otherwise. lies. But isn't it something? Isn't it something that despite this man, this admirable man, this powering personality, this man of wealth, this man of influence, this man with a beautiful wife, more, that his heart was not content man, this man who had heard from the Lord before, this man who had defeated many kings all by himself before, this man who speaks to the Lord, doubts.

[ 25 : 19 ] That is another reminder that no matter who we are, no matter who you are, no matter what things look like on the outside, no matter what facade we show, no matter how many good days you and I have, there will be bad days, and for many bad weeks, and for even many bad months, bad years, the Lord knows that there are some bad years.

But you get the point. This man, Abram, who could command an army, he could destroy kings, but at night when he was all alone, all alone, when there was no one whom he needed to impress or to put on a show, he showed vulnerability, pain, and disappointment, and you're not as influential as Abram was.

So imagine, but there is more. He was at that place even though he had spoken with God. Is there someone here who needs to be reminded that sometimes even as a believer, even when you know that the path you are on is where God would have you.

Sometimes doubt raises its ugly head. Sometimes doubt happens, but take heart. Just as God is tender and just as God was tender and merciful to Abram, he is tender and merciful to us.

The Lord does not abandon us the way we abandoned him. That's my point. Could you imagine where we would be if the Lord, every time we abandoned the Lord, the Lord would say, I'm going to leave you alone.

[ 27 : 28 ] But that's not what the Lord does. The Lord tells Abraham that his promises will come to pass.

He will have an heir. scripture tells us in verse four, and behold, the word of the Lord came to him, came to Abram, this man shall not be your heir.

Your very own son shall be your heir. And he brought him outside and said, and the Lord brought Abram outside. And the Lord said, look toward heaven and number the stars if you are able to number them.

Then he said to him, so shall your offspring be. Now listen, this is the same 100 year old fellow, the same man with this wife, this beautiful wife who was barren.

And the Lord said to him, look up in the sky and number the stars if you can. And he said to him, that just as many stars as you can see, that's the number of your offspring.

[ 28 : 51 ] Can you imagine that? Can you imagine that? Now how does one wrap one's hand around that? How does one believe that in Abram's situation?

But here is what the Bible tells us about Abram. this is why Abram is the father of us all. The Bible says in verse 6 of chapter 15, and he believed the Lord.

And he, that is, the Lord, counted it to him as righteousness. And that's it. Abram didn't do any work. Abram didn't go out and demonstrate to anyone how strong he was, or how tall he was, how influential he was, how powerful he was. The Bible tells us that he simply believed God, and God did what counted it to him as righteousness.

grace. Grace. Grace. A free gift, God said to him. God said, I am going to declare, I am going to make you righteous.

[ 30 : 12 ] I am going to declare that you are in right standing with me, not because of anything that you did, but simply because you believe what I said.

Do you see that? And he believed the Lord. That's all the scripture says. You see, this is not wordy, this is real simple, just one sentence, two clauses.

And he believed the Lord, and the Lord counted it to him as righteousness. Paul joins these words, and he connects these words to us.

you're going to see and understand that in a moment, but I want you to grab a hold of this. But the Lord declared Abram as righteous.

The Lord said that this man who could not achieve righteousness on his own, I'm going to declare that he is righteous.

[ 31 : 15 ] Yeah, does that mean he's not going to sin anymore? No, that's not what it means. Does that mean he's going to be perfect? No, that's not what it means, but he is righteous.

He is righteous in my eyes. A gift from God. Abram had hope against hope, Paul writes.

His body was broken, but he believed. Abram achieved righteousness, not through his military powers, not through his wealth, not through his family connections, not through his generosity, not through his obedience, not through his works.

None of those things. He became righteous because of his faith. He became righteous because of his faith. He believed God.

That's it. That's all it says. It says nothing else. He believed God. He could not earn his righteousness. He couldn't earn it.

[ 32 : 24 ] No, God bestowed it upon him. It was God's choice. It was God's grace. It was God's gift. Paul makes this clear in Romans chapter 4 verses 2 and 3.

Paul writes, for if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God.

No, no, no. for what does the scripture say? Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness. Now, to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift, but as his due.

But to the one who does not work, but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as, 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. Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven and whose sins are covered.

[ 33 : 57 ] Blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sins. Paul makes clear that it was not works that justified Abram.

Abram got his righteousness through faith. He believed. Let's consider now our righteousness. Our righteousness.

remember what Genesis 15 6 says. We read it at the very beginning. Genesis 15 6 says, and he believed, that is, Abram believed the Lord and he counted it to him as righteousness.

Paul writes Romans chapter 4 verse 23. The words, it was counted to him were not written for his sake alone, but for ours.

Also, Paul connects what happens to Abram to what happens to us. And Paul says of Abram, and it was counted to him as righteousness was not written for Abram alone, but it was written for us.

[ 35 : 22 ] You see that? Paul says it was not written for him alone, but it was written for us. We better understand the scripture, especially salvation by understanding the Old Testament.

Abram believed that what God had promised to do, he would do. What about us? What about us? What is it that we are to believe to be declared righteous?

Abram believed that the Lord would give him an heir, and he did not waver, and the Lord declared that he was righteous because he believed, because of his faith.

But what about us? What is it that you and I are to believe that we are going to have an heir to? Is that the same thing? Is that what the Bible is telling us? Before we examine and consider that question a little bit closer, let's consider what the Bible says about our righteousness.

Because we got to make this a little clearer, I think. God says of our best efforts, of our righteousness, the Bible says of it, that it is as filthy rags.

[ 36 : 49 ] that's what Isaiah 64 verse 10 says. Moreover, Paul writes about our righteousness. In describing man's righteousness, Paul gives us a list.

Paul says none is righteous. None is righteous, he says. righteous, no one is righteous, no one understands, no one seeks for God.

All have turned aside. Together, they have become worthless, he writes. No one does good, not even one.

their throat is an open grave. They use their tongues to deceive. Now listen, I'm just quoting Paul. I'm just quoting Paul. Their mouth is full of, well I missed one, the venom of ass is under their lips.

[ 38 : 09 ] Their mouth is full of curses and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood. In their paths are ruin and misery and the way of peace they have not known.

There is no fear of God before their eyes. And guess what? Paul is talking about us. Paul is talking about us.

What a picture. What a picture. And that's why you and I have to walk with our heads bowed down in humility because of what Jesus Christ did for us.

That's why we got to be careful what we say to people and how we treat people. Paul writes these things about every man who walked the face of this earth.

Now don't gain any comfort in knowing that the rest of us are like that. No, you ought to just hang your head in shame and say, oh, woe is me. But having established that we are all unrighteous, the natural question is what is it that we are to do to achieve righteousness.

[ 39 : 37 ] What are we to do to be justified? What are we to do to be in right standing with the Lord? Paul makes clear that just like Abram, we can do nothing in and of ourselves.

But we see that righteousness was imputed to or credited to Abram because of his faith.

Specifically, Abram believed God would do what he promised. Faith then was the ingredient. But ultimately, it was grace.

It was God's gift. It was God's unmerited gift to Abram that made the difference. Is that how we achieve righteousness?

by believing a unique promise that God makes to us? Not at all. The connection between us and Abram is not the uniqueness of a promise, but it is faith.

[ 40 : 47 ] It is God's grace. However, there is more. Before providing the answer to our question, it is important to consider a couple simple more things, Paul writes about Abram's faith and his righteousness.

Paul explained in verses 16-17 of Romans 4 that righteousness depends on faith so that it is grace-enabled.

When God said to Abram that he would become the father of many nations, he had in view those who would receive righteousness thank you, by faith in the same manner that Abram did.

What is it? What is it? We are to believe. What is it that we are to believe so that we might be children, the children of Abram?

Paul answers that question. Paul says that Jesus was put forth as a propitiation for our sins.

[ 42 : 04 ] He paid the price for our sins. It will be counted to us who believe this, who believe that God raised him from the dead, our Lord Jesus from the dead, that he was delivered for our trespasses and that he was raised for our justification.

That is what we are to believe. We are to believe that God placed on Jesus the penalty for our sins, our justification, our declaration of righteousness derives from our faith in the Lord Jesus.

That's the answer. That's the answer to the question. That's the answer to the question, how do we achieve righteousness? Faith in Jesus Christ.

Faith that he died for our sins, that he paid the penalty. the instant we believe, we become righteous.

That is, we are declared justified before God. It is not works-based. We can't work for it, we can't earn it. It is faith in Jesus alone.

[ 43 : 35 ] Paul connects the faith of Abraham to our faith and declares that Abraham is the father of us all because Abraham believed, he believed God, and God said as a result, God declared him righteous, and the same is true for us.

God declares us righteous when we believe Jesus in Jesus Christ. We have imputed righteousness earned by another, clothed in the garment of righteousness by another.

Does righteousness matter? Of course it does. Those who are not righteous stand condemned before God and will face his wrath.

Righteousness matters. So Paul invites us to see and to embrace and to understand that we stand righteous before God because of our faith in Jesus Christ.

We're declared righteous by God. God gives us his righteousness. What an amazing gift you and I have.

[ 45 : 09 ] How amazing it is that God who is holy indeed declares that just by believing in his son that you and I are declared are righteous.

That you and I are righteous. Perhaps you're here today and you say, you know what, I feel like there has to be something that I must do something to earn my salvation.

Perhaps you're saying, I believe but that just does not feel like enough. Maybe that's what you're saying.

Maybe you think that there is more to it than what we just said. But can I tell you there isn't more to it. That's what we just read is plain and simple.

You can't add to it. Know that Jesus died and he paid the penalty for our sins. That's a big deal. You and I could work many eternities over and over and over again and never come close to paying the price that Jesus paid for your sin and for mine.

[ 46 : 41 ] Jesus paid it all. We know that Jesus died and paid the penalty for our sins because we could not achieve righteousness on our own.

Our humility, our love for Jesus and our understanding of his sacrifice compel us to see that faith in him is enough.

Faith in him is enough. Now we are called to bear the fruits of righteousness to pursue holiness. And finally, perhaps you hear and maybe you don't believe.

Perhaps you don't believe. Well, there is still grace for you to believe. You too can be one of Abram's children.

The Bible does not teach us that Abram became a perfect man before, during, or after he was declared righteous. He simply believed.

[ 48 : 04 ] God extends grace to us to hear and he gives us faith to believe.

It's his work. And it is a glorious and amazing work that he does for us. We couldn't do it on our own.

So we can spend eternity praising him. Oh, what amazing love he bestowed on us.

What grace. Oh, what grace. I'm going to invite the praise team to come as we pray. Oh, Lord.

Lord, you've made simple this precious gospel. father, you have condensed you've what is so enormous, what is so profound.

[ 49 : 23 ] You've made it so simple. Lord, you invite us to come. You invite us to have faith. You invite us to believe.

Oh, father, we pray in the name of Jesus. Lord, that you would open the eyes of those who do not believe. Lord, that you would give them the faith to believe.

As you've done for so many of us. Lord, I pray in the name of Jesus that we will grow in our gratitude and in our understanding of what you have done for us.

Lord, let there be lives that live purposefully in view of the grace that you poured out in our lives.

Lord, all of us are just like the people we read about moments ago. Full of sin, oh, Lord, but you looked on us and you gave us grace to believe and declared us righteous.

[ 50 : 49 ] We brought filthy rags to you, Lord, and we awoke righteous. oh, Lord, how amazing is that?

Lord, cause us to delight in this truth, cause this truth to be real to us, and cause us, oh, Lord, to desire it for others, cause us to move about with compassion as we see others who live in darkness, cause us, Lord, to bear fruit of righteousness, cause us, Lord, to grow in holiness. oh, Lord, let us be witnesses of your name in the earth.

In the name of Jesus, we pray, and all God's people say, Amen.