

Musing #48 – Romans 4:1-10

Paul has aggressively addressed the reality of...“A person is justified by faith apart from the works of the law.” The Jews he is talking to were asking, "What is all this faith business... you're bringing in a whole new religion."

He responds with the reality that it is by grace alone, through faith alone and... it's always been faith from the very start. Most Christians today think the Old Testament law, and obedience to it, pleased God... therefore the New Testament was the beginning of God's requirement of faith. But faith has been the centerpiece for God since day one. God has sought since Adam and Eve that man's relationship with Him be built on trust. A trust that works both ways. **Faith**, in practice, is Trust. **Trust**, in practice, is Faith.

Paul used history to make his point, just as we do today. If someone asks “what's an American?” we refer to our birthright. The Jews looked to their kings, judges, and men like Abraham and Moses. Man wants to work to achieve something. God has already done it, and we are to rest in His work. God worked, and then rested on the seventh day. We are called to rest on the 1st day, and then work. So, is it... Law leads to Rest, or Rest leads to Faith.

Faith was the issue long before Moses and the Law

An early example is Abraham—Part I

Genesis 12:1-3 The Lord had said to Abram, “Leave your native country, your relatives, and your father’s family, and go to the land that I will show you. I will make you into a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and you will be a blessing to others. I will bless those who bless you and curse those who treat you with contempt. All the families on earth will be blessed through you.”

The Lord wanted more than just obedience, He wanted a relationship with his creation and that required a trust, both ways. We also learn through Abraham that sin was the primary issue long before the law came through Moses.

Before Abraham, Noah's sons Shem and Ham were examples of God's purpose and judgement on sin. Noah blessed Shem whose line included Abraham, Judah, David, and ultimately Christ. But Ham sinned against his father (Genesis 9:20-25). And ultimately Canaan (Palestine) was cursed (Genesis 9:26). It was through Ham that the Canaanites, Arabs, Africans, and Egyptians came into being. Ham's people are shown in Genesis 10:6–20 as becoming a godless and worldly power. Nimrod was the grandson of Ham, Noah's great-grandson. The very name Nimrod means “Rebel”—the builder of Babylon, the tower to heaven, and from him came all of the great false religions in our world.

God called Abram out of Ur, one of the great empires. There were massive temples and they worshipped the moon. Abram too was a moon worshiper for 70 years, before God called Him out. He married Sarai, who couldn't have children so they adopted Lot, his nephew, who had escaped from Sodom. Abram gathered flocks of animals and had

about 400 men working for him. God made a covenant with him and Abram believed that God could be trusted. **James 2:23 “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.”**

The old moon worshipper had a zero in his bank of eternal life, yet he became the friend of God, and God declared him righteous. God gave him full retirement. What did he do to earn it? He simply believed God—Faith in action!

Of course, we know the story after that with Abram and Sarai. **Genesis 15:5 The Lord said to Abram, “Look up into the sky and count the stars if you can. That’s how many descendants you will have!”** Abram had to be wondering about God’s promise of descendants. How was God going to use him to start a great nation at 86 and his barren wife at 77? Descendants? We can’t even make a single child, he must have thought.

So Sarah reasoned and suggested Hagar, her Egyptian slave, which was not uncommon for those who could not bear a son for their husband. And Abram, in a season of doubt, probably thought, "Well, God didn't mention who would be the mother...." and “voila” Hagar gave birth to Ishmael, who ultimately became the father of the Arab nations. For 13 years Abram thought he would be "the son of promise." He forgot to remember! And, at 99 with Sarai at 90, God tells them He is changing their names to Abraham and Sarah, and incidentally, “my promise of a child is still good”—which brought a good laugh from both Abraham and Sarah. The couple was learning that with God, the less hope you have, the bigger your faith must grow. An angel’s response to this old couple’s laughter was... **Genesis 18:14 “Is anything too hard for the Lord? I will return about this time next year, and Sarah will have a son.”**

We will see in Romans chapter 5 that "faith" alone is the key. "Alone" is what continues to divide Catholics from today’s Evangelicals. It was the watchword of the great reformation. We pick up our study in Romans 4.

Romans 4:1 Abraham was, humanly speaking, the founder of the Jewish nation. What did he discover about being made right with God? If his good deeds had made him acceptable to God, he would have had something to boast about. But that was not God’s way. For the Scriptures tell us, “Abraham believed God, and God counted him as righteous because of his faith.”

When people work, their wages are not a gift, but something they have earned. For Abraham, trust was the only thing he could do without doing anything.

His faith was not an act....but an attitude. It’s the same for us. Works depend on the self-life—grace depends on our loving Father. Too many Christians feel that by doing good God owes them heaven. Then once saved, they owe God something.

John Piper—“The debtor’s ethic says, ‘Because you have done something for me, I feel indebted to do something for you.’ This impulse is not what gratitude was designed to produce. God meant gratitude to be a spontaneous expression of pleasure in the gift and the good will of another. He did not mean it to be an impulse to return favors. If gratitude is twisted into a sense of debt, it gives birth to the debtor’s ethic – and the effect is to nullify grace.”

David celebrated that truth. **Psalm 51:16-17 For You do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart—these, O God, You will not despise.**

5 But people are counted as righteous, not because of their work, but because of their faith in God who forgives sinners. Not the church member, or the "good" person, or the longest pray-er, or the music team member, the deacon, the pastor, or priest.

It's the person who knows that apart from Christ we are nothing. God loves humility.

6 David also spoke of this when he described the happiness of those who are declared righteous without working for it: "Oh, what joy for those whose disobedience is forgiven, whose sins are put out of sight. Yes, what joy for those whose record the Lord has cleared of sin."

Our justification and acceptance is complete! **Acts 13:39 ...by Him everyone who believes is justified from all things you could not be justified by the law of Moses.**

We are also reminded by Paul that Abraham was justified well before the act of circumcision, which is a symbol of God's act of setting us apart as His children.

9 Now, is this blessing only for the Jews, or is it also for uncircumcised Gentiles? Well, we have been saying that Abraham was counted as righteous by God because of his faith. But how did this happen? Was he counted as righteous only after he was circumcised, or was it before he was circumcised? Clearly, God accepted Abraham before he was circumcised! (Set apart)

Part II to follow...