

# Worship 10\_17\_2021

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abraham, god, promise, faith, paul, works, nations, descendants, hear, point, circumcised, jesus, counted, people, verse, righteousness, credited, sins, blessing, chapter

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00:01

It's time for us to get a little more deeply into God's word together. So as I invite you to do each week, I hope that you will open up a copy of Scripture and have that out and open with you as we go. If you have a personal Bible or a Bible app that you like to use, I invite you to get one of those out if you need something, there are read Bibles available in any of the pews. And we will again this morning be in the New Testament, in a letter that's called Romans. So right after the Gospels in the book of Acts, you find Romans will be in chapter four, this morning and invite you to turn there with me. It was in 2010, at a national education initiative called Common Core was first rolled out. And by now it's become infamous among parents and teachers, at least, especially in its math approach, because it goes about solving problems in just a very different way than they had been done before. And you probably heard some of the jokes and some of the complaints about that. So I'm not going to rehash those things. But if you know, you know, and the thing is that I didn't major in mathematics, I did take calculus up through college, but I've never been as frustrated as the times I've tried to help my elementary school sons with some of their math homework, the solution was the same, we'd end up the same thing, but we just point about entirely different ways of getting to that. Is that also true about the ways we relate to God? As the way that we relate to God? Has it changed over time? Or has the approach been constant? That's the question that the Apostle Paul takes up in this section of his letter. And the one that we call Romans, we've been studying this recently here together this fall. This is one of the most famous sections of Scripture, it's a letter that Paul wrote to the Christians living in the city of Rome. It's fascinating letter, very incredible section of Scripture. We've been working our way through it. We're going to get back into chapter four here today. And that's the question that Paul has, as the approach to which as the way that we approach God, has it changed over time? Or is it the same? We'll see how he answers that we'll get into that here. But before we do, let's take a moment and pray. Great and gracious God, we thank you for the time that we have to be here together this morning, Lord, quiet, our distracted minds, calm are distraught hearts. Let us hear what it is that you have said. And then enable us to respond in ways that demonstrate our love for you and our love for others. And Father, I pray that the words of my own mouth and the meditation of all of our hearts would be acceptable in your sight for we pray this in the name of Jesus. Amen. We're in a chapter four now. So we've been in this letter for a little bit, but just to remind you to make sure we understand what's going on here. This this is a letter that Paul wrote to the Christians in the city of Rome. It's why we call it Romans, he'd not ever met this group of people though. Some of the letters he wrote were to close friends of his or churches he had spent years with he hadn't met this group of people. And it was an interesting mix of people, there were a number of the believers of the Christians who had come from a Jewish background, and a number of them who had come from a Gentile that is a non Jewish background. And because of that, then they were raising some of these questions like, do we approach God? In the same way? Has it changed over time? What are we supposed to do with God's lawn? What about these times when we don't see eye to eye? We disagree on some things, as a community here? How are we supposed to navigate our way through times that we disagree? So those are all very important questions, we can recognize that, as Paul writes to them, then we've seen him open up and say, right off the bat, I'm going to talk to you about the gospel. This is

the good news of Jesus. In fact, it's the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes Jew, Gentile to everyone. And you all need that. Because, well, here's the bad news. And then he goes on to say, in some pretty hard and heavy ways that every single person is accountable to the Lord. None of us have any excuse before him, everyone has sinned and fallen short of God's glory. The problem, in fact, is even worse than we may have realized at the onset. And then Paul shifts gears and says, but there is good news. We started to look at that last week. He said, The good news is that while the good news is that you can't do anything to earn this on your own, and the reason that's good news is because it means God has to give it to you. This comes to you as a gift, you receive it by fate. That's good news. It's better news than you realized. And now what he does is he holds up an example of that he wants to show them that this is really always been the way that it has worked, nothing actually has changed. So he holds up this example of one of the most revered figures in religious history. It's the example of Abraham only I want you to listen to this then and we'll see what he's getting out when this why he mentioned this in this section. This is Romans chapter four verses one through 12. I invite you once more to listen to the word of the Lord.

#### 04:43

What then, shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefathers 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 do, and to the one who does not work but believes in Him to justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness. Just as David also speaks of the blessings of the one to whom God counts righteousness, apart from works, blessings are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven and whose sins are covered. Blessing is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin. Is this blessing that only for the circumcised are also for the uncircumcised, we say that faith was counted 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 circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith. While he was still uncircumcised, the purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that his 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. Paul's offering a case study here, and we may not get all of those references. Again, I'll take some time to explain some of those in case you're not familiar to you. But he's offering a case study of maybe the most famous figure in religious history up to that point, and that was Abraham. And he's making a very simple point, although it's one on which everything turns, everything hangs on the point that he's making here. Because if we miss this, like some of the people in Rome, we're missing this. If we miss this, then we go astray on everything else. Here's what we'll consider today, as we look at this example, first, what took place between God and Abraham. But what happened in that relationship? Why does Paul use him as an example what happened with God and Abraham, and then second, there's a direct point of application that he's making. So we'll consider what that direct point of application is. Also, though, this offers up a broader model for us abroad on a broader model, particularly when times are difficult. And when life is hard. So we consider that Finally, let's look a little more at this story of Abraham, though, why Paul uses this example. You look, you know, there are a lot of debates happening right now about which historical figures we should or should not hold in high regard. There were some who were may be revered for years, who are now being seen in new or less favorable light, and there are others who were mostly ignored. But now we have understanding that they should have a lot more recognition than they're getting what's going on with this particular one and Paul's time, because then, and now, Christianity, Judaism, Islam, all of them hold Abraham in very high regard. Who was he? If you look in the book of Genesis, it's beginning of chapter 11. Then you see the story of Abraham. And there's a genealogy first in chapter 11. And you see that he is one of the descendants of Shem, one of the sons of Noah. So you see this, this lineage coming where Abraham is one of the descendants of Noah, he was originally if you look in that part named Abraham, there was one little bit less into the name there was shorter Abraham. And in Hebrew, that means the father means exalted father, Exalted father, high or exalted father. And then beginning of chapter 12, there is a series of

encounters that Abraham has with God, and they take place over a period of many years, these aren't just one right after another one day after the next, these take place over a period of years. The first is in Genesis 12. And you heard a little bit of that read a moment ago, that's where the God makes a promise to Abraham. He says, I'm going to make you into a great nation, and in you, all the families of the earth shall be blessed.

08:50

The promise was that he would have countless descendants, I'm going to make you into a great nation, countless descendants, and that through one of them, the families of the entire world will be blessed. That's a promise God made. Genesis 15. Then we also read part of that passage, even though that's a little bit later, this is years later, years after this promise, Abraham still doesn't have any children. You can understand why he might think God, you said you were gonna make me into a great nation, I have countless descendants, I don't even have one, what's going on here. And he decided to take matters into his own hands. And he says, I'm going to appoint the user of the mascots. He's going to be my heir we don't, we don't actually know very much at all about him. Maybe it was somebody was a part of Abraham's household or family, friend, we don't know much, but he says he's going to be my heir, because I don't have any of my own, and go on comes back to them and says, Abraham, I'm going to make you into a great nation, that he's not going to be your heir, you're going to have your own. And God reaffirms this promise. And then, if you read through the rest of chapter 15, it's kind of an interesting scene after that. There's there's this ritual ceremony. It's God and Abraham, they're participating in what was a ritual, ancient Near Eastern covenant ceremony, and so it's an incredibly solemn ceremony. It's a binding of those promises and a binding of those parties, one to the other. So God is in a way ratifying that promise saying, I know, I know you weren't sure about this, this, I've said, I'm going to do this, I'm going to do this, I will make you a great nation and through you through one of your descendants, the nations of the world are going to be blessed. Well, years later, then Abrams still doesn't have any children. We read in Genesis chapter 17, that he and Sarah his wife still have no children. He does in fact, in the in the intermediary there in a time between he decides to take matters into his own hand again, and he has a child with his son Hagar. He says, Well, I've got to make something work here. And God says, You're going about this entirely wrong. You're not listening to what I'm telling you. So in Genesis 17, we hear this again, the Lord has come to Abraham yet again. In Genesis 17, verses four through eight, say this, God says, Behold, my covenant is with you said, I've made you that promise, I ratified it with binding promise, my covenant is with you, and you shall me the father of a multitude of nations, no longer sure named me called Abraham, but your names will be Abraham. And that slight difference that now means a father of multitudes are a father of many, four, I have made you the father of a multitude of nations, I will make you exceedingly fruitful, I'll make you into nations kings shall come from you. And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring, after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be gone to you and to your offspring after you and I will give to you, and your offspring after you the land of your soldier names, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be there God. And then after this, God says, I'm going to give you a sign, fact, I'm going to give you a sign that is meant to seal that promises sign that is meant to remind you of this remind you and all of your descendants of this promise forever Afterwards, he gives them the sign of circumcision. So in the past, as we read, when you hear Paul use that word, like a dozen times right in there, he's getting back to you saying, you've been given this sign his seal, it was all meant to point back to this promise that God had made. And then after that, God does make good on his word. And he said he was going to do something. And he did. It was after that, that Isaac was born. And Isaac later fathers Jacob, from whom the 12 tribes of Israel, common from the tribe of Judah, comes Jesus, Messiah, the promised blessing to the nations that God had long ago told Abraham would come from his lineage. So I'm going to sketch that out to you in case you're just not familiar with that story of Abraham and involves God making a promise to him. years later ratifying that same promise, years later, even sealing that same promise, and then making good on that promise, doing exactly what he said he would do. Over time, Abraham became an incredibly revered figure in the Jewish faith, though, but the focus began to shift a little bit. The reason that Abraham had become so revered was because of how obedient he was to God. And because he had been given this sign of circumcision assigned that was then passed down through the generations. So the focus shifted. And the reason they became very revered

because of how good his actions were, they said, Look how faithful Abraham acted, look how good his works were, and look at that sign that God had given him. So people have begun to shift their attention to those things. And that's why Paul is bringing this up at this particular point, because he's saying you, you have missed the point. And it's not a little error that you've made. In fact, if you get this wrong, you get everything wrong. It's not about works. It's not about signs. Let me tell you what it is about. So I want to look at that now. And this is the direct point of application that Paul is making the reason he brings up Abraham. And the reason we need to have that background there is there is a direct point of application that he is making. And that is quite simply this, he says we are justified, we are made right with God, through our faith, not through our works. The idea came up last week, simple idea right at the heart of this letter, right, the very heart of the gospel. Remember the train of thought that we've seen building up to this point. If you have your Bibles open still and you look back in verse 20 of chapter three, that's where he says, For by works of the law, being all your moral efforts, all your relentless striving to be perfect. He says, By works of the law, no human being will be justified in God's sight. It's not the way it works. You can't get there that way. To be justified is to be in the right to do without blame to have no charges leveled against you. He had already said everybody's going to be accountable to God and no one is going to hear God acquit them. No one is going to hear God and declare them innocent on the day of judgment because they behaved well enough to offset all of the bad things that they did. It's not the way it works. He said the good news is that we are justified were declared righteous God declares us to be righteous by grace through faith. Then listen again, we looked at this passage in depth last week, but this is such a stunning passage. Scripture, this is chapter three, verses 24 and 25.

15:05

Actually, I'll back up and read verse 23. That's where he says, For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by His grace as a gift through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, who God put forward as a propitiation by his blood to be received by faith. That's it right there. We do not we cannot earn some kind of righteous standing is something that has to be given to us. Our faith is counted as righteous. That's a really important concept. I want to spend a moment on that. Did you notice that? Did you catch that? Or did you see that as you're reading this section, how many times he says that something is counted. In verses four, one through chapter four verses one through 12, Abraham's faith was counted to him as righteousness, wages are not counted. Faith is counted as righteousness, God counts righteousness, apart from works, the Lord will not count. His sin faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness, it was counted to him so that righteousness will be counted to them as well. You see how many times that idea shows up in there right there. It's not that is not a reference to numerically itemizing something like 1234. That's not what he means by counting. Sometimes some translations may be one that you were looking at some of the times it's translated, to be reckoned, or to be credited with something. The theological term that we use for it is to be imputed. If you ever heard that what it means to be imputed means to be credited with something to have something reckoned to you something that is not yours is given to you. But then it is treated as if it is yours, it is recognized as being yours. And what he's saying is that this is what happens with righteousness. You don't have it on your own. None of you can earn it on your own. It is a gift, God gives it to you. And it's credited as yours, it's reckoned as yours, it now belongs to you. Because God has given it to you, and it's received by faith. righteousness is not something that we get in any other way doesn't rise up from within us, we don't have it hiding within. It's something that comes to us from outside of us. And yet, it's credited to us it's filed, it's filed into courtroom evidence on our behalf. And that only happens by grace through faith. And what I want to point out here now what Paul is doing, the reason he brings up Abraham is he's saying this is the way it's always worked. You guys have thought it's been different, or things have changed. Somehow somebody says this is the way it always worked. It's not even a new idea. Listen again to verses two through four. For if Abraham was justified by works, all of his striving, all of his morality, all of his trying to be perfect. He says, if that's the way it happened, then he would have 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 do, says, If you work for and you've earned it, it's not a gift. But just before this, he said, it is a gift. This is how it happens. In fact, Paul, Paul goes on

to say, you know who else understood this, David. And he quotes from the songs, he quotes from the Psalms, and David says, bless it is the one whose lawless deeds are forgiven, whose sins are covered, the man against whom the Lord will not count. His sin says that's the way it's always worked. And blessed are those who know that who experienced that who understand that. And that's why he makes those all those comparisons at the end, we're talking about those who are circumcised or not circumcised. He's saying that that was a sign that was a seal. That's not the thing that makes it happen. So he said, This promises for those who are circumcised people of Jewish descent, but also those who aren't the Gentiles, people of non Jewish this tenten said, that's just the sign that has nothing to do with making the reality happen. And he points that out by saying, Abraham got that afterwards. He got that afterwards. If that was the thing that made it happen, it would come first, he says, But Abraham believed God. He was credited as righteous. And then he was given a seal afterwards. So the specific point that Paul is making is this, here's the specific point I'm getting at him through here is that our faith, he says, is what credits us as righteous, or faith is what reckons that to our account. Here's a really important point I want to make, but it's kind of a subtle one. So if you're only halfway paying attention tune back in right now. Faith itself is not what justifies the moment explain what I mean by that. Faith, just itself is not what he's talking about here. He's not just talking about a concept of faith, not some abstract feeling.

### 19:51

We say that we have faith in all kinds of things. We have faith in our favorite sports teams. We have faith in the universe. People talk about having a blind faith. We're not saying Concept are some feeling of undefined faith. biblically, faith always has a direction. And it has a content is a specific faith that he's talking about a faith directed to God. And the content of that is what God has promised. See the difference I'm making here. He talks about faith. It's not just that you have faith in something, but that his faith is directed to God and the content of that faith is what God has promised. He says, Your Abraham believed God, not believed in God, not just a vague notion that God existed. But he's saying he believed God, he was lodging his full trust and reliance upon what God had promised. What God promised that one of his didn't, his descendants would be a blessing to the nations, that through one of his descendants, the families of the world will be blessed. Paul uses an example elsewhere. This is a very he uses Abraham and another place when he's writing to the Christians in Galatians. So in the book of Galatians, he brings up the same example you may know this passage, it's Galatians, chapter three, verses seven to nine. It's now similar to the point he's making there. He says, No, then that it is those of faith who are the sons of Abraham. And the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preach the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, in usual, all the nations be blessed. So then those who are of faith are blessed along with Abraham, the man of faith. Here's what I want you to notice. You catch it, you see what says the gospel beforehand, the gospel before and is that promise that through you, the nations of the world will be blessed. That's why we know it's pointing us to Jesus says that's the gospel in advance, that through you, the nations of the world, will be blessed. That's why Jesus said this. And John at this incredible passage, and John 8:50-60, Jesus in a conversation with the Pharisees at this point, he's discussing and debating things, and he says this, your father Abraham, rejoice that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad. Jesus even says, Abraham was looking ahead to me. That's where he was putting his faith. Abraham believed God, and it was credit to him His righteousness. What did Abraham believe Abraham believed the gospel beforehand, which was that one of his descendants will be a blessing to the nations. And Jesus said, he rejoice because he was looking to my day. He was looking ahead to me, he saw that he was gone. He may not have known all the specifics, we don't know we can't say I don't know how much God revealed to them how much insight God gave them into these things. But we know that Abraham's faith was not just some feeling some concept of faith, but it was directed to God. And it was lodged in that specific promise, that through him would be a savior that would bless the nations that's always been the heart of the promise. So again, not just some vague or undefined concept of fate, that's not what credits us is righteousness, but a faith that is directed to God and believes that God has said that through the descendants of Abraham through Jesus would be a blessing to the nation. That's why Second Corinthians one says that all of God's promises find their Yes. And their Amen. And Jesus, all of their promises, find their yes and their amen in him. So what kind of things is God promised to do? If we look at scripture? What kinds of things is God

promised to do in and through Jesus specifically? Why is he said to be the promised blessing to the nations because he brings salvation to everyone who believes, as we've seen, in his letter several times, to everyone who believes he brings salvation is through his life, his death, his resurrection, that our sins have been dealt with at the grave has been conquered. And with his ongoing ascension, and in throne meant he's rolling, he's raining now. And we're told that when he comes again, he will make all things new. So a faith that is directed to God, and has as its content, what God has promised to do in Jesus, that's a faith, that is counted as righteousness. That's a faith that justifies and that's the point that Paul was making here, saying, nothing has changed. Abraham was credited His righteousness because of that, because he believed God and what God had said he would do and just like Abraham, he says, We are counted as righteous, not through our works, not through external signs, but through believing God, that God will do what he has said he will do. So that's a specific application. That's a specific one here. I want to take a couple moments though, and just consider a broader model with you here. When he's using this example of Abraham, what's a broader model that we also need to have in view, there's something that's very helpful for us.

#### 24:44

At the end of the passage, he speaks of those who walk in the footsteps of faith that our father Abraham had. See that expression down in verse 12. Those who walk in the footsteps of faith that our father Abraham had to walk in the footsteps of faith. Our father Abraham had is to place our trust fully in God's promises, even if we can't necessarily see how or when they will be fulfilled, is to put our faith and our trust fully in God's promises, even if we can't see exactly how, or when they're going to be fulfilled. Let's go back a little further as we think about this. In the garden, even before the promise of God made a room in the garden, right after Adam and Eve sinned, right after their fellowship with God was broken. God said, one of your descendants is going to crush the head of the serpent, forever. That's a reference to the work of Jesus. But When did it happen? Later that day, no, countless generations millennia later. Look at this promise that God made Abraham. And he said, you'll be the father of multitude one of your descendants will be a blessing to the nations now, all the evidence we have suggests that Abraham lived about 2000 years before Jesus. So that promise was not fulfilled in his lifetime in its entirety. He did have he did have a son he had Isaac, that part was fulfilled, but in its entirety was not fulfilled during his lifetime. And yet, Jesus said, Abraham looked ahead to my day, and rejoiced. Jesus said, Abraham looked ahead to my day, and rejoice does that does that mean that every single day of Abraham's life was full of rejoicing? I doubt it. mean just for one example, Genesis 23, verse two says this. And Sarah, his wife died at Kiriath Arba that is Hebron, in the land of Canaan. And Abraham went into mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her. mourn. He weeps when his wife died, was every single day full of joy and rejoicing for him? No, but he looked ahead and rejoiced in what God had promised to do, even as he was also experiencing all of life with his trials with his sorrows. With its struggles. Abraham wept and buried his wife Sarah, perhaps not fully comprehending that she was the matriarch of the family, whose greatest son would one day strip bear the power of the grave forever. And yet he knew that's what God had promised. So what's the point? The point is this, even though God's promises are sure, in certain and altogether true, we may not see them fulfilled as quickly as we would like, or maybe in the ways that we think it should happen. Life can be full of sorrow and suffering and struggling in the meantime. And yet the risen Jesus is the one who sits on the throne, and says, I am coming again. And when I do, I will make all things new. Every wrong will be righted, every wicked act will be punished, every injustice will be addressed, every tear, will be wiped from the eyes of God's people, because he will dwell in their midst, in the fullness of the new creation. And then we look around us, we can see a world that oftentimes seems to be just coming apart at the seams. And we may wonder if or when this promise might be fulfilled. So you think it's something like Hebrews chapter 11, verse one, which says this. Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for the conviction of things not seen. Faith is the assurance of things hoped for the conviction of things not seen. I think sometimes when you hear that verse, or you see that verse out there, that idea of things not seen is just meant to be like, spiritual, invisible realities. And it can refer to that, I think it can also just very practically mean things that don't happen in your lifetime, things that you may not yet live to see. Faith is the assurance of things hoped for the conviction of things not seen. So when Paul speaks to those who walk in the footsteps of faith that our father Abraham had, again,

clearly, clearly, the first and direct point of application that he is making is we need to put our faith in God's promises. Specifically, these promises that are fulfilled in Jesus Christ, want to take away the sins of his people, the one in whom we find forgiveness, when he makes us into a new people, those of every tribe and language of nation, the same Jesus who will come again to judge the living in the dead, and to bring about the fullness of God's new creation, that we have to remember that, though this has not happened yet. It will. And we believe that it will. And those who walk in the footsteps of Faith of our father Abraham are those who continue to trust that God is going to make good on his word. So we can go through the difficult times, even if we don't see this fulfill it as quickly or in the ways that we might want. That's a broader model that I think is a takeaway of this. Now when Paul brings up the example of Abraham and even as I'm using his example of Abraham this morning, I realized that there's a potential for misunderstanding. So I just want to close by hopefully addressing that. When I was growing up, Michael Jordan was by far the most famous athlete on the planet and maybe the most successful advertising campaign that he had was Gatorade's "Be Like Mike" one. I'm sure you've seen this or heard this or I've heard this in some particular way. It's widely considered one of the most famous commercials and marketing campaigns of all time. In fact, just last year they re-released some like updated versions of these commercials because of its remarkable staying power. Here's the misunderstanding I don't want you to have though this is not a "Be Like Abraham" sermon. There's no Paul is doing here at this particular point. He's doing a lot more than that. He's using him as an example, but not so much to say, hey, Abraham is an amazing example of faith. So go your best go off and do your best to imitate Abraham, because that does two things. One, it makes Abraham the center of attention, which is not the point. And two, it's just giving you something that you need to do to try to check off the boxes, which is exactly the opposite of the point he is making here today. But he does use Abraham as an example. And what he's trying to say is this, saying this is how it has always worked. You are made right with God, not through your efforts, but through what God has done. And when you accept that when you believe that when you rest and trust in that, then you are following in the footsteps of faith that our father Abraham had because Abraham believed God and it was counted to him His righteousness. Let's pray together. Eternal God before you every generation rises and passes away. We thank you for this time that you have given us here now time to be reminded of your promise in certain promises. That you would send a blessing to the nations that in Jesus Christ we see that for he is the one who gathers to himself people from every tribe and language and people and nation that everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved and so we put our faith we put our trust in that what Jesus has done for us, we give you thanks for what that means. We are now right with you because of him. To not name we pray. Amen.