

ROMANS: THE FOUNDATION OF CHRISTIAN TEACHING

WEEK 4 – THE BOAST OF THE GOSPEL

QUESTION 1) What is your history of “applause” in worship settings? When did you do it? Why did you do it? What do you think are good guidelines for appropriateness?

(Answers will vary here. Most who have predominantly traditional backgrounds will likely have had little to no applause. Some from non-denominational, Baptist, or Pentecostal church backgrounds might have lots of it. It's a good exercise for a church to think through. Applause might very well be the only way to let little children know their praises to Jesus were appreciated. Applause might very well be a necessary expression of emotion that was stirred up through music or proclamation. On the other hand, applause might also occasionally become consumeristic, hurtful, or divisive.

The Bible doesn't give us directive here, except love, encouragement, and propriety in worship. So, Christians should be thoughtful. This discussion primarily is an ice-breaker to get the group talking. It also serves as a platform into thinking about what we, as Christians, believe is ultimately *applause-worthy*. Our spiritual identity, or what we applaud, may very well be related to what the Apostle Paul describes in our text as our “boast.”)

BACKGROUND: In this section of Romans, chapter 4, Paul doesn't address applause, but he does address a *cause for applause*. He refers to this as a spiritual “boast.” A boast is the reason someone gives for why they believe they have a positive identity, value, and meaning, as well as why they should receive a favorable outcome in the end. For the Jews, their spiritual “boast” was in their pedigree (ancestors of Abraham) and their performance (their obedience to the Mosaic Law). Paul spends the chapter teaching them why that is a wrong boast.

ABRAHAM JUSTIFIED BY FAITH (ROM. 4:1-8)

What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, discovered in this matter? ²If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God. ³What does Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.”

⁴Now to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation.⁵However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness. ⁶David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the one to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:

⁷“Blessed are those
whose transgressions are forgiven,
whose sins are covered.
⁸Blessed is the one
whose sin the Lord will never count against them.”

QUESTION 3) Refer back to the definition of “boasting” in the Summary section if you need to. Share with the group what gift God has given you personally that tends to be your greatest temptation for a false life “boast”? This is the thing to which you instinctively point to justify why you're a valuable person.

(Answers will vary. Again, WHO YOU ARE – e.g. profession, relationship status, mom/dad, personal appearance, intelligence, social status, ethnicity, nationality, church member, specific denomination, etc. could all fall into this category. Also ripe for boasting is WHAT YOU'VE DONE – e.g. personal accomplishments, relative morality, ways you serve others, overcoming certain odds, lack of major mistakes could all fall into this category.)

QUESTION 4) Paul refers in this section to 2 individuals that the Jews were inclined to boast in. Who were they? Why do you think the Jews wanted to boast particularly in them? And how does Paul prove these individuals shouldn't be put on idolatrous pedestals.

(The 2 individuals are Father Abraham and King David. The Jews boasted in Abraham because he was the one they believe God chose and blessed due to his great faith – even though it was really simply due to grace. Jewish teachers of the 1st century could never really let go of the fact that Abraham must have been inherently good. The Jews also boasted in David because he was the one who expanded the Kingdom of Israel to its greatest prominence. The Jews couldn't let go of the idea that blessings in this life *MUST* be the result of God's approval. Paul points out the fact that Abraham was righteous before God *through* his faith, not *because* he had great faith. And he also points out David's quote (Psalm 31:1-2) where he claims that he's blessed specifically because he has had his many transgressions forgiven. Neither one of these guys, by their own admission, was inherently good or perfectly faithful.)

QUESTION 5) Reread vss. 4-5. Paul is making a fascinating point about “the one who works.” It almost sounds like he's saying that only those who *don't* do good works will be saved. As a group, discuss what point you think he's trying to make.

(There are many moralists who are attempting to earn their salvation through obedience to Law. All world religions, excluding Christianity, are based on this premise. And for that matter, when those who call themselves “Christian” believe that anything they do contributes to their rightness before God (i.e. their righteousness), they're putting themselves in this camp as well.

Paul is NOT saying that believers won't have good works in their lives. The opposite is true. What he's addressing is your *attitude* about your works.

Paul is saying that anyone who willfully puts themselves into the camp of salvation through obedience – “*the one who works*” – is outside of God's grace. On the other hand, “*to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly,*” that individual gets righteousness credited through their faith in God's goodness.

Put differently, no matter how good you are, if you trust in your goodness, you *cannot* be saved. On the other hand, no matter how bad you are, if you trust in Jesus' goodness, you *will* be saved.)

ABRAHAM JUSTIFIED BY FAITH (CONT.) (ROM. 4:9-25)

9 Is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness.10 Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after

he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before! ¹¹ And he received circumcision as a sign, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them. ¹² And he is then also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also follow in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

¹³ It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. ¹⁴ For if those who depend on the law are heirs, faith means nothing and the promise is worthless, ¹⁵ because the law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression.

¹⁶ Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. ¹⁷ As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not.

¹⁸ Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be." ¹⁹ Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah's womb was also dead. ²⁰ Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, ²¹ being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. ²² This is why "it was credited to him as righteousness." ²³ The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, ²⁴ but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. ²⁵ He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

QUESTION 6) If God were to ask you: "Why should I let you into heaven?" what would you say?

(In the sermon that I preached on Romans 4, I referenced an evangelism book that I've been reading where the author stated that if you asked this question to your congregation, a good percentage of your members would answer something along the lines of

- "I try my hardest to be a good Christian" → this is salvation by works
- "I believe in God and try to do his will" → this is salvation by faith + works
- "I believe in God with all my heart" → this is salvation by faith as a work

None of these truly fall into the category Paul described back in verse 5 – "*the one who does not work but trusts in God.*" Abraham was a model for believers NOT because he was basically good – he wasn't; NOT because he kept God's Law perfectly – he didn't; NOT because he performed religious rituals like circumcision. He was a model simply because he ultimately trusted God's goodness, not his own.

The appropriate response to "Why should I let you into heaven?" is probably something along the lines of, "*Well, technically you shouldn't. Not due to me anyways. But Jesus Christ paid for all my sins and gifted me all his righteousness, so you MUST let me in.*")

QUESTION 7) How would you define faith? Has your definition changed through your study of Romans 4 (or Romans in general)?

(Think of the heroes of faith in the Bible. This lesson leans heavily on the illustration of Abraham. Yes, Abraham received the promise of a son in his old age, but he waited 25 years for this. Furthermore, he was also promised his family would turn into a nation and all peoples would be blessed through his offspring. He didn't get to see any of that latter stuff. Moses got to look at the Promised Land, but never got to live in it. John the Baptist got to prepare the way for the Savior, but he never actually

saw him die or rise. Clearly, something about faith entails not just believing without seeing, but believing despite circumstances that seem contrary.

And yet Christian faith is not blind faith. It's always based on concrete evidence. Abraham had appearances from God and did obviously at least receive the son in his lifetime. Moses didn't get to experience the Promised Land in this lifetime, but saw miracles that indicated what God was capable of. John the Baptist didn't see Jesus' resurrection, but he did experience the miracle of Jesus' baptism. Similarly, today, believers have the historical resurrection of Jesus and the compilation of inspired Scriptures – that is enough evidence for us to trust God's promises and sovereignty moving forward despite some circumstances that might cause doubts.

Faith, therefore, is a *knowledge of, agreement to, and trust in* God's undeserved love and unlimited power for us. We believe it despite whatever circumstances we may face in life. But we also believe it because of God's track record of goodness and power.)

QUESTION 8) Abraham was a 75-year-old man that was promised a child that didn't come till he was 100-years-old. He had his struggles with trust along the way, notably a child through Sarah's handmaid, but nonetheless, even through his imperfect faith, God credited righteousness. What is one thing God is asking you to demonstrate faith in at the moment?

(Answers will vary. This would be the most natural question for the group to share current fears and insecurities. It might be about singleness. It might be about professional or financial instability. It might be health questions. It might be concern about loved ones. It might be guilt over past mistakes. It might be performance anxiety over upcoming tasks. Make sure to pause and give enough room for everyone to fill the space with their concerns.

Then remind them that God does not let us get away with expressing a Spirit of timidity (2 Tim. 1:7). He commands that we cast our worries on him (1 Pet. 5:7) and not be anxious about anything (Phil. 4:6). This should lead perfectly into our prayer time, where we encourage participants to pray that God would help them to live by faith, not fear.)

SUMMARY: *Abraham is a hero of faith. He's not a hero because he was inherently better than anyone else. He's not a hero because he was uniquely gifted. He's not even a hero because he was so much more "faithful" than others. He was a hero of faith because he knew his life depended more on God's goodness than his own. There truly was nothing "special" about Abraham except his God. Yet the Bible says that particular belief can make someone a hero.*

CLOSING PRAYER (GATHER PRAYER REQUESTS)
