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Sermon

The Roman Pilgrimage (Part 5)



Part 5/20
The Roman Pilgrimage
By Derek Prince

We're beginning now, stage 5, in this pilgrimage that we're making of which the destination is Romans 8. We've covered a lot of ground but we have a lot of rather difficult country still to cover before we get into our destination. In the previous session we looked at God's provisions for man's problems. That was at the end of chapter 3. Up to that point Paul had simply been unfolding the problems and the problems had been intensified. But in the latter part of Romans 3, beginning with verse 20 and onwards, he unfolds God's final, total, all sufficient sacrifice which is through faith in the atoning death and the shed blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, in this session and the next, we'll be dealing with Romans 4. In essence, in Romans 4 Paul looks to two of the great fathers of Israel, Abraham and David, and he proves from scripture that each of them was not justified by works but by faith. He focuses mainly on Abraham who is the father of all who believe but he also quotes from a psalm of David. So we'll look now and start reading in chapter 4. We'll read verses 1–5.

> "What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, according to the flesh, has found?"

Now this is a very important question for all of us. For Jews and Gentiles. How did Abraham achieve righteousness with God?

> "For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about; but not before God. For what does the scripture say? 'AND ABRAHAM BELIEVED GOD, AND IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.' Now to the one who works, his wage is not reckoned as a favor, [or as grace] but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in him who justified the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness."

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Here's one of the most important passages from the Old Testament. Genesis 15:6. Because of its importance, we need to turn there and look briefly at it. Abraham has been having a conversation with the Lord about the fact that the Lord has made great promises to him, all dependent upon his having an heir and he has no heir. There follows this conversation between the Lord and Abraham in Genesis 15:5–6.

> "He [the Lord] took him [Abraham] outside and said, Now look toward the heaven and count the stars..."

Obviously it must have been at night.

> "...If you are able to count them. And he said to him, [that's God said to Abraham] So shall your descendants be."

That was the promise and then the comment is:

> "Then he [Abraham] believed in the Lord and he [the Lord] reckoned it to him [Abraham] as righteous."

Abraham at that point did absolutely nothing but believe. And Paul, and also James in his epistle, points out that was how Abraham achieved righteousness. He didn't earn it, it was not on the basis of what he had done but it was credited to his faith.

Paul says, going back to Romans 4:5:

> "But to the one who does not work, but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is reckoned as righteousness."

That's a very powerful verse because it points out if you want to receive righteousness by faith from God in the same way as Abraham, and there's no other way, what's the first thing you have to do? Look for a moment at verse 5. What's the first thing you have to do. Stop doing anything, that's right. "To him who does not work." You've got to come to the end of all that you can do to earn God's favor and you have to do nothing but believe. This is the pattern and example of Abraham.

At this point Abraham's faith was counted to him for righteousness. Does that mean that Abraham never made any mistakes after that? I'm glad it doesn't because that would put us in a difficult position. We find if we go on in the ensuing chapters that Abraham made some serious mistakes. In chapter 16 we read how he and Sarah took the initiative out of God's hands and decided they'd better get a child by Hagar. I want to point out to you in the life of faith we never take the initiative. This is a basic principle. The initiative must always come from God. This is the pattern of Jesus. He said, "The Son doesn't do anything except what he sees the Father doing." The only safe basis for living the life of faith is invariably letting God take the initiative. Each time we do what Abraham did and take the initiative out of God's hands, we end up in trouble.

And then in chapter 20, further on, Abraham told a lie about Sarah and permitted her to be taken into a Gentile king's harem, which was not good behavior. How many of you wives would agree? That isn't the way a husband ought to behave. We are told that Sarah was a model wife, she didn't demur, she submitted. That's remarkable. She submitted in faith and God intervened.

What I want to point out is God did not approve those two aspects of Abraham's conduct but his faith was still reckoned to him as righteousness. This is tremendously important for you and me because the moment we truly put our faith in the atoning death of Jesus on our behalf and believe that on that basis righteousness is reckoned to us, we are reckoned righteous. That does not mean that we'll never make mistakes. How many of you would agree with that? That's right. Thank God that isn't what the scripture says, that we'll be perfect from then on. But what it says is our faith will still be reckoned to us as righteousness as long as we go on believing. The real danger is that we give up our faith.

I want to turn to a passage in Luke 22 which to me is very, very significant. This is a scene at the last supper and the Lord Jesus has been warning his disciples that they're going to betray him, flee from him and desert him. Simon Peter in particular, but all of them say this could never happen. In verses 31 and 32 Jesus says this to Peter.

> "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan has demanded permission to sift you like wheat..."

That's a remarkable statement. Apparently Satan went to God and said, "Let me get at those apostles." The "you" there is plural. You can't tell that in the English but it's clear in the Greek. "Sift you apostles like wheat."

Then he says specifically to Peter:

> "...but I have prayed for you [and it's singular] that your faith may not fail; and you, when once you have turned again, strengthen your brothers."

Now what impresses me about that is Jesus did not pray that Peter would not deny him. In the circumstances it was inevitable that Peter would deny him. Given Peter's character at that point and the tremendous onslaught of the forces of darkness that was to come against him very shortly, it was inevitable that Peter would deny Jesus. Jesus was a realist, he always is. I'm so glad. He didn't pray some pious prayer that Peter would not deny him. What did he pray? He said, "I've prayed that your faith will not fail. Peter, you're going to make a terrible mistake, you're going to feel ashamed, you're going to feel the bottom has dropped out of life but don't give up believing. If you can hold on to your faith, I'll see you through." The subsequent course of events proved it true.

I want to say to each of you, you may be facing tremendous tests and temptations, some of you which you didn't expect. And at a certain point in that you may feel you've failed God and the bottom has dropped out of life and what can I do? I'll tell you what you can do. Go on believing, don't give up your faith because God will see you through if you don't abandon your faith.

That's the one critical mistake you must not make. So as long as we continue sincerely believing in Jesus and accept the righteousness which God offers on the basis of that faith, brothers and sisters, there's no guarantee we won't make mistakes. There's no guarantee that we won't get into problems. There's no guarantee that we won't fail. I don't have any guarantee from God on that. I can preach here and walk away tomorrow and I can fall into some snare of Satan if I'm not careful. But God will get me out provided I do what? I go on believing. That's so important. It's lifted so many problems from my mind because I've seen myself and I've seen other Christians do things that were regrettable and even bad. But God says, "As long as you keep on believing, your faith will be reckoned to you as righteousness. And on that basis I'll bring you through. You may not know how, it may seem impossible but don't give up your faith."

I wonder if there are those here tonight, you're on the point of giving up. You've almost come to the end. Please don't. I'd like to pray for you, I feel urged to do this. Just quietly raise your hand if you're saying, "I'm at the point of desperation." God bless you sir, God bless you sir. God bless you. Let's unite in prayer for these brothers and sisters.

> "Lord Jesus, we believe you treat us like you treated Peter. You're prepared to deal with us just the same. You may be disappointed in us, we may fail you, we may feel we've come to the end, the bottom has dropped out. But Lord, I want to pray for those that raised their hands, that their faith will not fail. Jesus, I believe I'm in your place tonight praying for them, that their faith may not fail. Amen. Amen. Amen."

Now we're going to continue with verses 6–8. Here is where Paul brings in David. He says:

> "Just as David also speaks of the blessing upon the man to whom God reckons righteousness apart from works..."

This is from Psalm 32, the opening verses.

> "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven, and whose sins have been covered, blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account."

Notice David says there are three things included in this blessing. Our lawless deeds have been forgiven. Our sins have been covered. And God no longer takes our sin into account. That's the negative side of reckoning righteousness to us. He reckons righteousness to us, he doesn't any longer keep a reckoning of our sins.

Paul returns again to Abraham after that little digression about David and he deals with this very important question relating to circumcision which was, Did Abraham have to be circumcised before his faith was reckoned as righteousness? This is a vital question for all who come from a Jewish background but it goes beyond that because there are other external ordinances of the faith. Many people compare baptism to circumcision. I think there are limits to that comparison. It can be that we would say is my faith reckoned to me as righteousness until I'm baptized and my answer is yes. If you sincerely believe and you intend to obey, your faith is reckoned to you as righteousness from the moment you believe. Afterwards, I

believe baptism, in a certain sense, is a seal of the righteousness which you already have by faith.

You see, there's a difference between John's baptism and Jesus' baptism. I don't know whether you've ever realized it. The people whom John baptized were baptized because they were sinners who'd confessed their sin. Christian baptism, we are united with Jesus in burial and resurrection. We're baptized because we've been made righteous. It's the fulfillment of our righteousness. Jesus was baptized that he might fulfill all righteousness. When you and I are made righteous by faith in him, then we fulfill our righteousness, we complete it by the external act of baptism.

Now let's look at what Paul says in this context beginning at verse 9.

> "Is this blessing then upon the circumcised, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say, 'FAITH WAS RECKONED TO ABRAHAM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.' How was it reckoned? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised..."

This is an extremely important point. Abraham didn't experience circumcision before Genesis 17 but his faith was reckoned to him as righteousness in Genesis 15. There was a considerable period of time between those two.

> "He received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had while uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all who believe without being circumcised, that righteousness might be reckoned to them [that's the father of all people from a non Jewish background], and the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised."

So the point is there that God had promised Abraham that he would be a father of a multitude of nations. Not just of one nation Israel but of all nations and that in due course people from every nation on earth would become spiritual descendants of Abraham through faith in Abraham's seed, the Lord Jesus. This was the promise of God to Abraham. And he didn't have to be circumcised for the promise to be given him, it was given to him while he was uncircumcised. The point being that God intended to make it clear to those who follow, to you and me—and I'm not Jewish—that we don't have to be circumcised to become descendants of Abraham. We are descendants of Abraham by faith alone. Just as Abraham's faith was reckoned to him as righteousness, so our faith also is reckoned to us as righteousness.

And so, Abraham becomes the father of two different kinds of people. First of all, those who are circumcised on the basis of faith. And bear in mind that without faith, circumcision is of no benefit. The vital deciding factor is faith.

And then be becomes the father of those who exercise faith as Abraham did, without being circumcised. That's all believers from a non Jewish background. So in this way the promise of God to Abraham was fulfilled before circumcision was introduced.

Then Paul goes on to say concerning Abraham that he's the father of circumcision not merely to those who are circumcised but to those who also follow in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham, which he had while uncircumcised. So you see, it's not enough for a Jewish person to be circumcised to become a descendant of Abraham according to this. No one is a true descendant of Abraham unless he walks in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham. The essential condition is faith.

And God reaches people in two different ways. He reaches the circumcision on the basis of the faith which caused them to be circumcised and he reaches the uncircumcision —that's the rest of the world basically—without demanding circumcision on the basis of their faith. Here is the pattern of Abraham established and since we are all descendants of Abraham according to the scripture, through faith in Jesus, the seed of Abraham, this is extremely important for us. It takes us also beyond simply the issue of circumcision, it makes it very clear to us that it's faith and faith alone that makes us sons of God and sons of Abraham, and that this faith does not depend on some external ordinance.

This is really a basic issue. We are saved by faith alone. Not faith plus something else. Always be on your guard against people who want you to add something to faith, who demand some other conditions besides faith. That's unscriptural. The only condition for being a descendant of

Abraham is faith. That God insists upon, he will not waive that condition. He'll be very tolerant in other areas, he'll allow for many differences. I don't believe God wants all his people to look alike, to behave alike, to conform to one single pattern. I really believe that God enjoys variety.

At least I want to say I do. I've had the privilege in the last many, many years of being in so many different countries, among so many different people, from so many different racial and cultural backgrounds, and I tell you, I find life boring if I was just with one kind of people who all dressed alike, had the same color, looked alike and talked alike. I would find it monotonous! Some of you know that I'm a kind of amateur follower of Abraham because I have nine adopted daughters. Many of you know that already. Our family is a kind of I would say, a United Nations. We've got six Jews, one Arab, one English, and one African. We are all descendants of Abraham by faith in Jesus Christ. That's the key issue.

I feel that God would have me at this point emphasize once more the vital importance of faith. I want to say to you as Jesus said. I pray for you that your faith may not fail because that's the basic requirement of belonging to God, of being a child of Abraham.

I think we'll begin to look on a little further but we'll not be able to complete in this session. Paul says there in verse 12 that:

> "Abraham is the father of circumcision to those who not only are of the circumcision, but who also follow [or walk] in the steps of the faith of our father Abraham which he had while uncircumcised."

Abraham is more than just a figure, he's a pattern. He went ahead, he laid out the pathway, he took certain steps. And to be truly his descendants, we have to walk in that pathway, we have to follow in his steps. I will just briefly list the steps of the faith of Abraham and then in our next session we'll deal with it more fully. But you'll find them there listed in your outline if you've still got your outline with you. It says that Abraham did five things. He accepted God's promise by faith alone without evidence. Second, he recognized he was incapable of producing the promise results. He focused without wavering on the promise, and this was reckoned to him as righteousness. As a result, he and Sarah both received supernatural life in their bodies and thus, the promise was fulfilled and God was glorified.

So that's the steps of the faith of our father Abraham. Step number one, he accepted God's promise without wavering, without asking for any evidence. Step number two, he recognized he himself was incapable of producing what the Lord had promised. Step number three, he focused without wavering on the promise and this was reckoned to him as righteousness. Step number four, here's where God intervened. He and Sarah both received supernatural life in their bodies. Step number five, the promise was fulfilled and God was glorified. So there's what Abraham has left us as a pattern.

This is the pathway of faith which is set before every one of us. It's not some external ordinance but it's a lifetime walk of faith following in the footsteps of Abraham. We have to do as Abraham did. We have to accept God's promise just the way it is. We have to reckon that we are incapable of producing what God has promised in our lives. We have to focus on the promise and not on our own ability or inability. And then we will receive the supernatural grace and power of God released in our lives through our faith. In this way the promise of God will be fulfilled in our lives.

Now in the next session we're going to deal with the question of whether the law had to be introduced in order for Abraham to receive the promise. You'll see that this whole question of the law is a very major one in Romans. In due course we'll go on and in chapter 7 we'll come head on to this problem of the law and why it was given and how we can receive what was provided for us through the law. The next session we'll continue with the pattern of Abraham.

(end session one)

Session 2

We're continuing now with our study in Romans 4. In the previous session we looked at the first half of the chapter which establishes the fact that the two great fathers of Israel, Abraham and David, both received righteousness from God on the basis of faith and not of their works. Paul focuses mainly on Abraham in the rest of this chapter and he deals with the fact that righteousness was reckoned to Abraham simply because he believed God, he didn't have to do anything else but believe God. In due course, quite a number of years later, he received circumcision as a seal of the righteousness which he already had by faith. But the basis of his righteousness was faith and not circumcision. In that way it was possible for Abraham to become a father and a pattern to all subsequent believers. To those from a Jewish background whose circumcision is the expression of faith because circumcision without faith is of no avail, and to those who did not require to be circumcised as the

expression of their faith, that is, believers from a Gentile background. In this way, as I pointed out, Abraham became father to two different kinds of people but all of them have one thing in common which is faith, that's right. In the case of the Jews, the faith found its expression in circumcision. In the case of non Jews, circumcision was not a necessary expression of faith.

Then Paul said, as I pointed out last time but I want to return to it just once more, the faith that we need to become and be the sons and daughters of Abraham is expressed in walking in the steps of Abraham's faith. We have to follow the pattern of Abraham. I outlined for you, and I'm going to do it once more because it's very important, the steps of Abraham's faith. And as I do this I would like you to consider whether you're really following in those steps. This is not just an abstract study, this is a very practical pattern. So here we are, what were the steps of Abraham's faith. Number one, he accepted God's promise by faith alone without evidence. It's very important. Number two, he recognized he was incapable of producing the promised results. Number three, he focused without wavering on the promise. He didn't focus on his problems. Number four, as a result he and Sarah both received supernatural strength which they could not produce by their own efforts. Number five, as a result, the promise was fulfilled and God was glorified.

Now let's look at how Paul fills this out, we'll go back to Romans 4 and go on reading at verse 13.

> "For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise is nullified..."

What Paul is saying is God made this initial promise solely on the basis of Abraham's faith. It would have been totally unfair and inconsistent later on to add as a further condition, "but you have to keep the Law." Paul points out that the law was actually given 430 years later. It was never a condition of entering into the promise that God had made for Abraham. In fact, what he points out is—and this is a very remarkable statement, but it's also very true—verse 15:

> "For the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, neither is there violation. [or there is no transgression]"

Now that's worth pondering on for a little while. I think in one of the earlier sessions I gave you the example of the little girl of five, when her parents were out she rumpled in her mother's drawers and pulled out the handkerchiefs and all that sort of thing. And this is actually not a make believe story, this is something that actually happened. I hope she won't be embarrassed, but it happened with our little African daughter when she was about that age. So, anyhow, the parents come back and they found these things in a state of disorder and they say, "You shouldn't have done that. That was not right." But they're not very angry. Next time they go out they say, "Now, don't you go inside those drawers." They come back and the drawers are turned upside down. Now what happens, tell me. They're angry. Because when there's a law, the breaking of it produces wrath. When there's no law, somebody's done the wrong thing but there isn't that reaction of wrath. But when a law is imposed and it's broken, the reaction of the one who made the law is wrath, anger. That's a reason parents, for not making too many laws for your children, let me say that. Because the more laws you make, the more angry you're likely to get at some time or another. I don't say don't make any laws but keep them few and keep them simple.

You see, we have a very incorrect picture of what the law does. We have somehow an idea that the law will get people closer to God. It won't. Bear in mind that when the law was given on Sinai, no one, neither man nor animal was allowed to touch the whole mountain. God set limits and said don't come any closer. Anybody that comes any closer will die. See what he was saying? The law doesn't bring you close to God. That's very important because a lot of people trying to get close to God start making all sorts of laws for themselves and actually what happens is they get further away from God. Let me say this and then I want you to repeat it. "Law does not bring us close to God." Would you say that. "Law does not bring us close to God." Okay.

See, what we're fighting is—if I can say it that way—centuries of religious tradition that somehow want to persuade us that the law was going to do us good. Or was designed to do us good. Okay? We've already gone into the reasons for which God gave the law, we can't go back on that. But if you are a little confused maybe you need to go back in your personal study on that particular subject.

Going on in verse 16 of Romans 4.

> "For this reason it is by faith [that's the promise of righteousness], that it might be in accordance with grace..."

You see, the only way we can receive grace is by faith. Ephesians 2:8 really says it all.

> "By grace you are saved through faith: and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not of works, lest anybody should boast."

What is God always guarding against? Pride, that's right. What does religious legalism invariably produce in the people who practice it? Pride. Does God like pride? He doesn't. What was the first sin in the history of the universe? Pride, that's right. You see, in our churches we tend to get angry with adultery and fornication and drunkenness, which is very right, I'm not suggesting we should tolerate those things. But we tolerate a whole lot of pride. That's a much more serious sin than the others.

We're in verse 16 again.

> "For this reason it is by faith, that it might be in accordance with grace, in order that the promise may be certain to all the descendants, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all."

God wanted to make sure that no one would be excluded from this promise and so it had to be by faith that it might be by grace. Do you understand? Let me say this, it's very simple but very important. None of us ever earned righteousness from God. We either receive it as a gift by faith or we don't get it, there is no alternative way to be reckoned righteous with God.

Then Paul goes on again quoting from—actually, this is Genesis 17 in verse 17 of Romans 4.

> "As it is written, 'A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS HAVE I MADE YOU' in the sight of him whom he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist."

I personally prefer a different translation at the end, "call things that which do not exist as though they did." You see, he called Abraham a father of many nations when he didn't have a child of his own body. And it's very important to understand when God calls something something, that's what it is. You may not see the evidence. When God calls you a saint, what are you? You may not feel like it but it's not feelings, it's faith. When God called Gideon a might man of valor, what did he feel like? He felt like a timid coward. But you see, God called him a mighty man of valor. What did he become? A might man of valor. God's calling comes before the reality because it's always on the basis of faith.

I remember in l944—I didn't intend to say this but I believe it's appropriate—God specifically called me. I was still a soldier in the British Army, relatively unskilled in the word of God and God called me a teacher of the scriptures in truth and faith and love which are in Christ Jesus for many. I will never forget those words as long as I live. Was I immediately a teacher? Believe me, I was not. Today I can say I am what God called me to be by his grace. Not by my works, not by my efforts but by his grace. You see, it's not of him who runs or of him who wills but of God who shows mercy. If anybody needed the mercy of God, believe me, I did. Furthermore, believe me, I still do. But I have one strong point. I know I need it.

Going on now in verse 18. I love this description of Abraham, I can always identify with Abraham. There are certain characters in the Bible, Abraham is one of them, David is another. When I read about them I just feel as if I'm right there on the spot with them. There's no gap of time or culture. Verse 18.

> "In hope against hope he believed..."

Who can comment on that expression? There's no way to say it better. He hoped and yet he had no hope. How many of you know that experience? You hope and yet there's no hope but you go on believing. Go on believing. I want to say that again to each of you. Go on believing. Whatever you do, don't stop believing.

> "In hope against hope he believed, in order that he might become a father of many nations, according to that which had been spoken, 'SO SHALL YOUR DESCENDANTS BE.' [verse 19] And without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb..."

Now you'll find in the Old King James, which most of us are familiar with, there's a "not" put in. "He did not contemplate..." The reason for that is simply that the Old

King James translators did not have access to some of the most reliable Greek texts. But on the basis of the researchers and examination of scholars, most people believe that the correct reading is without the "not." And I think, on the whole, it makes better sense. So let's take it without the "not." If you are absolutely set on the "not," just forgive me and we'll still be friends. Okay?

I want to read it then this way:

> "Without becoming weak in faith, he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb..."

I want to say that faith is realistic. Faith tells it like it is. All right. My body's dead. But that doesn't make any difference to God's promise. I don't try to somehow persuade myself that there's a little light still left in my body. That would be not faith. I say there's no hope. In the natural there's no way this could come about. I accept this fact. Not only is my own body dead but Sarah's womb is dead, too. There's no way in the natural we could ever have a child of our own. I accept it. I look it full in the face, I don't try to blink my eyes, I don't avert them, I don't say there's some other aspect of this situation. But I still believe what God said.

I've dealt with so many people who come and they want prayer but they try to kind of persuade themselves that the situation isn't all that desperate. Really, it's much better to face the fact the situation is desperate. There's only one person who can help you and that's God. That's faith.

Going on with this, verse 20:

> "Yet with the respect to the promise of God; he did not waver in unbelief, but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God..."

I personally prefer my own translation there which says "he was made strong by faith." I think that's what it means. He received strength in his physical body through faith. And Sarah received strength, her womb was quickened, she became alive again in that respect. I don't know whether you've ever meditated on this, it wasn't a temporary change in Abraham because after his wife Sarah died he married again and he had five more children. That was a pretty permanent miracle, wasn't it! Not bad going for a man who when a hundred years old said there's no hope. You see, there was hope because he believed in hope against hope.

Verse 20:

> "Yet with respect to the promise of God; he did not waver in unbelief..."

Do you remember what James says in his epistle about the people who waver? "Let not that man think that he will receive anything of the Lord. He's a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways."

> "...but was made strong by faith, giving glory to God..."

In Romans 3:23, many of you who are skilled in leading people to the Lord in personal dealings know Romans 3:23 says:

> "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God."

What's the real serious aspect of our sin? It's not what it does to us but the fact that it robs God of his glory. That's the real terrible fact about sin. We've robbed God of his glory. Is there any way we can every give him back the glory of which our sin has robbed him? The answer is yes. By what? By faith. How did Abraham give glory to God? Not by his efforts but by believing. So God has provided a way by which we can give back to him the glory that our sin deprived him of by believing. When you believe God and his promise is worked out in your life, that gives glory to God. That's the only way we'll ever be able to give glory to God, is by faith.

Let me say a little bit about grace which you'll find there at the bottom of that page. Just three statements. I hope this won't offend anybody but I've preached in a number of churches which were Grace something church. And my comment is generally speaking, the people who talk most about grace know least about it. I think the people that emphasize being saved by grace really usually don't have a clear vision of what grace is at all. Their idea of grace is some kind of modified religious effort. So I want to say these things. To me, this is extremely important. If you happen to be the pastor of a Grace church, please accept my statement that this remark is not directed against your nor any specific church, it's just a fact that I've noticed.

I want to bring out these three facts about grace. Number one, it begins where human ability ends. As long as you can do it yourself, you don't need God's grace. When you've come to the point where you know you can't do it but God

wants you to do it, then you move out by faith into the realm of grace. Many Christians are afraid to do what God tells them because they say, "I can't do it." In a certain sense, God never tells us to do something we can do. Understand? God's always us out beyond our own ability into the realm of grace by faith. Every time your faith is challenged, you can react one of two ways. You can say, "Oh, God. Are you asking that of me?" Or "Thank you, God. I see you want my faith to be strengthened. You want me to receive more of your grace. I accept this challenge."

I want to tell you as I look back over my own life, every major step of progress that I can think of that I've made in Christian life I've made in response to a challenge when God challenged me to do something I felt I couldn't do. So I don't say I always welcome it but at the same time I've learned this is the way to grow. Every time you run away from a challenge you're diminishing your spiritual stature. But every time you accept a challenge you're growing in spiritual stature.

I think of that scripture in Hebrews 10:37–38, I believe, where the writer of Hebrews quotes Habakkuk 2:4 and he says:

> "The righteous man will live by his faith, but if he draws back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him."

That's God speaking. If he draws back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.

Now I have to say this very carefully. But in the course of many years of the Christian life I can think of brothers and sisters who came to a point where they were afraid to go forward in faith, where they felt God was facing them with a challenge that they weren't prepared to accept. I just have to observe from that time onwards they began to die spiritually. You see, the just will live by faith. The only way you can have life is by faith. The more God requires you to operate in faith the more life you'll have. If you want to play it safe and say, "God, I don't want to take any risks, I just want to do the safe thing that I know I can do", you're shutting yourself off from divine life. I don't mean that you'll be a lost soul but I mean that you will not know the fullness of divine life which God plans for you in this world. Don't be afraid of the challenge of faith.

Ruth and I can look back over the ten years we've been married, God has consistently stretched us beyond our limits. Sometimes we wonder whether he's stretched us too far. Right now at this present moment that's a really important question for us. But I have confidence in the faithfulness of God that if he sees our heart and our sincerity, sooner or later we'll get the return that comes.

I believe we're living in a world today which desperately needs God. Desperately needs the word of God. I want to tell you it's not going to get any easier to bring the word of God to the nations. In Matthew 24:14, my favorite scripture, Jesus said:

> "This gospel of the kingdom shall be proclaimed in all the world, to all the nations; and then the end will come."

When will the end come? When the church has done its job. But at the same time, in the preceding verses he warned us of persecution, false prophets, famines, wars, abounding lawlessness. He didn't say the world situation is going to get easier. In fact, he made it very clear that the world situation is going to get harder. But that's the opportunity to stretch your faith. That's the challenge.

I want to say by the grace of God for Ruth and myself—and I say this in the presence of God. I'm very careful what I say before God. "Lord, to the best of our ability, we've accepted the challenge." Every one of you has to make a personal decision. But remember, if you take the cowardly way, you'll wither. If you move forward in faith, you may stagger, you may feel you've failed, but sooner or later God will see you through. That's my promise because it's God's promise.

We come to the application to us and the gospel at the close of this 4th chapter. We're now in verse 22.

> "Therefore also IT WAS RECKONED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS. Now not for his sake only was it written, that it was reckoned to him, but for our sake also, to whom it will be reckoned..."

What is "it"? Righteousness.

> "...as those who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, he was delivered up because of our transgressions, and was raised for our justification."

Justification, our acquittal, our being reckoned righteous, our being made righteous, our being just as if we'd never sinned. What are we required to believe in order to receive

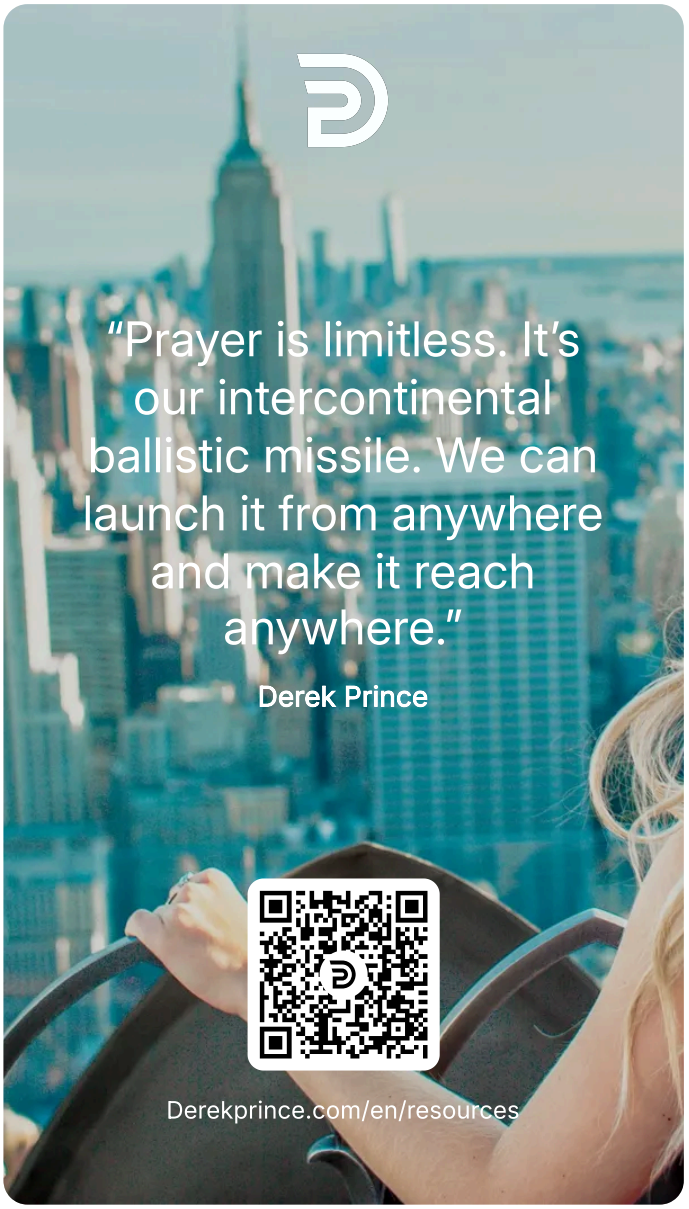
righteousness reckoned to us by God? We're required to believe that the Lord delivered up Jesus our Savior, our substitute, to the punishment of death because of our sins, but that on the third day he raised him up again that we might receive righteousness.

You see, the key to this—and it's in the scriptures in our outline but I don't have time to turn to them—the key to this is one word. Listen carefully. It's identification. When you grasp that, it's the key that unlocks what happened at the cross. On the cross there was a two way identification. First of all, Jesus identified with us. He took the sinner's place, he became the last Adam, he exhausted the whole evil inheritance that had come upon the whole Adamic race. And he was buried. When he was buried, that whole inheritance was terminated. Then he rose again the third day the head of a new race. We have to realize and reckon that he was our representative. So when God vindicated his righteousness by the resurrection on the third day, that was our righteousness that was vindicated, too. We were reckoned with him in death, reckoned with him in burial but bless God, reckoned with him in resurrection, righteousness also. That's what we have to believe. They key word: identification. When Jesus died, I died. When he was buried, I was buried. When he rose, I rose. Believing that, I receive righteousness by faith from God.

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Sermon

Transcript: MV-4229-100-ENG
Last Updated: 16 Sept 2026
Website: Derekprince.com/en/resources



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