

Raised for Our Justification: Romans 4:22-25

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We come this morning to the end of Romans 4. We've been studying for several weeks now this chapter of Romans where Paul explains the significance of Abraham's faith. Paul goes way back to the beginning of the Old Testament, the first book of the Bible, Genesis. And he shows that salvation has always been by faith alone—not by works, not by circumcision, not by keeping the law, but by trusting in the promises of God.

In these last few verses of Romans 4 Paul concludes this discussion with a concise and glorious summary of the Gospel message. I want to look at three things this morning. First, the fact that these statements from the Old Testament were written for our sake. And then we'll look at these two very important statements about Jesus: 1) that He was delivered up for our trespasses, and 2) that He was raised for our justification.

Written for Our Sake

Paul has been describing Abraham's faith, and how Abraham grew strong in his faith. Even though he was old, and his wife was barren, even though God's promise was humanly impossible, Abraham believed. He believed against all odds. He had faith in spite of the frailty of his own body. And now Paul concludes his comments about Abraham by quoting from Genesis 15:6 yet again, "That is why his faith was 'counted to him as righteousness.'" He points again to this amazing truth that Abraham was counted righteous by faith. He was not counted righteous because of his own righteous deeds. Indeed, as we read the Genesis account, we see plenty of faults in Abraham's life. But Abraham looked to the Lord in faith. He believed God's promises. And because of that, God reckoned Abraham to be righteous. God imputed righteousness to him. God considered him to be righteous, declared him to be righteous—which is justification. These are the things we've been learning in Romans 4.

And then in verse 23 Paul takes all of this—all that he has been recounting from the Old Testament—and he shows that these things are relevant for us today (which includes the Roman church in the first century, and the congregation of Three Rivers Grace Church in Pittsburgh in 2012). Verse 23, "But the words 'it was counted to him' [that's Paul's shorthand way of citing Genesis

15:6 again] were not written for his sake alone [it wasn't just for Abraham], but for ours also."

That is an amazing thing, and it has tremendous implications for how we view the Old Testament. Of course, we know that not all of the Old Testament is directly applicable to us. The Old Testament laws do not apply directly to us. These things were fulfilled in Christ. But the Old Testament is still crucially important for us. It is there to instruct us, to edify us, to warn us, and to point us to God's faithfulness to His promises.

Paul makes a brief statement about this again in Romans 15:4, after quoting from the Psalms, "For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope."

And also in 1 Corinthians 10 Paul reflects on the Exodus event, and the time the Israelites spent in the wilderness. Paul writes, "Now these things took place as an example for us, that we might not desire evil as they did" (v. 6). A few verses later he says again, "Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come" (v. 11). The Old Testament is for us, brothers and sisters, in these very important ways. We need to read it and learn from these examples and heed the warnings and exult in God's amazing promises.

Here in Romans 4, we're seeing that the doctrine of justification by faith alone is not something Paul made up. It's not just a New Testament doctrine. It's something that we see in the very first book of the Bible. And here's the amazing thing: when God justified Abraham, and that event was recorded in Genesis 15, it was written for us! It wasn't just for his sake. It was for our sake also. So long ago, God had us in mind. He was thinking of the church down through the ages, and He wanted Abraham's justification to be an example for all of us, to be a blessing to all of us.

Like Abraham, we must not look to ourselves. Even as we consider the deadness of our own efforts and the barrenness of our own abilities, we look away from ourselves and trust that God can do what He has promised to do. We can trust that, guilty as we are, God counts us righteous in His sight. That seems like an impossible promise. But it's true! Is anything too hard for the Lord? This is our ancient faith—a faith like Abraham's.

Do not trust in yourself. Do not even trust in your faith. Don't become so introspective that you are always wondering if your faith is strong enough to deserve salvation. That's turning faith into a work. But instead, look outside of yourself. That's what faith is. Look away from your inability, and look to God's power. Look away from your faults and failings, and look to God's mercy and grace.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones said, "It is in spite of what we know about ourselves, of what the Law knows about us, of what hell knows about us. So stop talking about your past sin, stop talking about your present sinfulness. In this matter of justification you must not mention them. You just stand as you are in the righteousness of Jesus Christ, and in Him believe the staggering Word of God about yourself."¹

Do not give in to the doubts or discouraging messages that sin or Satan bring against you. Listen to the great promises of Romans 8, "*Who shall bring any charge against God's elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, "For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered." No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.*" (Romans 8:33–39, ESV)

Brothers and sisters, I know some of you are struggling in various ways. There are family difficulties, relationships that are strained, loved ones who have strayed from the Lord, problems at work, discouragement over your own sin—whatever it may be in your life right now, please be encouraged by these promises from God's word. Be encouraged by this truth. Look away from your own sin and the effects of sin we see all around us. Look to the great hope we have in Christ Jesus our Lord. Meditate on this great doctrine of justification by faith alone, which God proclaims to us even from the life of Abraham.

Our faith is in the same God who made promises to Abraham, the same God Abraham trusted, and the same God who, later in history, raised Jesus from the dead. That's what Paul

¹ Romans: Exposition of Chapters 3:20-4:25, page 249.

draws our attention to in the remainder of verse 24. And then verse 25 summarizes the Gospel message in these two statements.

Delivered Up for Our Trespasses

What is this referring to? It's referring to Jesus' death on the cross. Jesus was delivered up to death by crucifixion. This is a passive verb. It doesn't have a subject telling us explicitly who delivered Him up. So we might ask, "Who killed Jesus? Who delivered Him up to death on the cross?" There are many correct answers to that question. We could say that the Jews killed Jesus, because they demanded His crucifixion. Or we could say that Judas killed him, because of his betrayal. Or Pilate, because he consented to what the Jews were demanding. Or the soldiers, because they actually put Him on the cross. We would also be right in saying that WE killed Jesus, because He was suffering the penalty for our sin. All of us played a role in Jesus' death. And on one level, any of these statements is correct in answering the question, "Who delivered Jesus up to death on the cross?"

But those answers miss another very important aspect of Jesus' death, and God's design in it. Because it was God the Father, ultimately, who delivered up His own Son to die for our sins. Do you see the purpose in this statement—"delivered up for our trespasses." Nobody else had that design, as they participated in Jesus' crucifixion. Neither the Jews, nor Judas, nor Pilate, nor the soldiers were thinking of our transgressions. But God the Father was thinking of our transgressions when He purposed to sacrifice His Son.

We saw this in Romans 3:24-25 where it says that we "are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith." God put Jesus on the cross, to bear the wrath which our sin deserves. And we see this in Romans 8:32 as well, "He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up [same verb] for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?"

In Peter's sermon in Acts 2 he says to the men of Israel, "this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men" (vv. 23-24). So, yes, the Jews killed Jesus. The soldiers killed Jesus. But it was all according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, so that ultimately it must be said that God the Father put Jesus on the cross. It was His design. His plan. Also in Acts 4, they were praising God and said, "truly in this city there were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus,

whom you anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, to do whatever your hand and your plan had predestined to take place” (vv. 27-28). Again, we see that all of these various individuals were involved in putting Jesus to death, and they’re responsible for their sinful actions. But the big picture reality is that it all happened exactly according to God’s predestined plan. Ultimately, God the Father is the One who put Jesus to death on that cross.

Isaiah 53

In the language Paul uses in Romans 4:25 he is alluding back to the well-known Old Testament passage of Isaiah 53. And I want to turn to that text for a moment to make some observations about Jesus’ death. (page 614 in pew Bibles)

First of all, look at verse 10, since we’re thinking about the Father’s role in Jesus’ death. “Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him; he has put him to grief.” The Lord is God the Father, and the One put to grief is the Suffering Servant who is being talked about in this passage of Scripture, who is the Messiah, Jesus Christ. So this verse is saying very clearly that God the Father is the One who killed Jesus Christ. He crushed Him. He put Him to grief. Or as the NASB translates it, “But the Lord *was pleased* to crush Him, putting [Him] to grief.”

We might wonder how the Father could be pleased to crush His beloved Son, but it’s because of the great purpose in it. The purpose that the Father and the Son are united in is the redemption of sinners in such a way that magnifies God’s justice and righteousness and glory. So it was the Father who delivered Him up, and even delighted to do so, because of the glorious design in it.

Now, notice the substitutionary language in Isaiah 53:4-6. Notice the pronouns that demonstrate the substitution of him for us. Verse 4: “Surely *he* has borne *our* griefs and carried *our* sorrows.” Verse 5: “But *he* was wounded for *our* transgressions; *he* was crushed for *our* iniquities; upon *him* was the chastisement that brought *us* peace, and with *his* stripes *we* are healed.” And the end of verse 6: “the Lord has laid on *him* the iniquity of *us* all.” Verse 8 also points to this truth: “he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people.” This is what Paul is talking about in that short phrase, “delivered up for our trespasses.”

The abuse that Jesus Christ received was NOT because of anything He had done wrong. He was innocent. He was perfect.

But He suffered these things in our place. He became our substitute. The imagery of the lamb in verse 7 puts this in the context of the Old Testament sacrificial system. It reminds us of the Passover lamb, which was to be without blemish, and then killed and its blood put on the doorposts of the houses. And the Lord said, “when I see the blood I will pass over you, and no plague will befall you to destroy you, when I strike the land of Egypt” (Exodus 12:13). Thus the lamb died in place of the people. We see running through the Old Testament this theme of a sacrificial substitute. A lamb dying in the place of the people. A spotless lamb being sacrificed for the sins of the people. And then we come to the New Testament, and at the beginning of Jesus’ ministry John the Baptist declares about Jesus, “Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). All these Old Testament sacrifices point to Jesus Christ. He is our substitute. He is the spotless Lamb who died in our place to atone for our sins.

Raised for Our Justification

Let’s stay in Isaiah 53 for a few moments more as we turn to the third point of the sermon. Isaiah 53:10 goes on to say, “he shall prolong his days; the will of the Lord shall prosper in his hand.” This seems to allude to Jesus’ resurrection, because even though He was crushed and put to grief, the Lord prolongs His days. His mission did not end in death. His Father crushed Him, but then His Father brought Him back to life and prolongs His days. He lives! He lives again! And He will live forever!

Christ’s resurrection is so essential to the Gospel, because His sacrificial death would have been an utter failure if He had been conquered by the grave. If He remained in that tomb, then He saved no one. As Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15, “if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins” (v. 17). It was not enough that Jesus died. He had to die and then conquer death. He had to triumph over the grave. Our salvation depends upon it. And that’s why Romans 4:25 says He “was delivered up for our trespasses *and* raised for our justification.” This shows us the inseparable connection between Jesus’ death and His resurrection. He was delivered up (He died) for our trespasses. That’s what so much of Isaiah 53 emphasizes—His substitutionary death. And He was raised for our justification, meaning His resurrection proved that the substitutionary death was effective. The resurrection proves that Jesus’ death conquered death, and therefore purchased our justification.

We serve a Lord who has died, but did not remain dead. The grave could not hold Him. It was not possible for Him to be

held by death. He is not in a tomb. God raised Him from the dead! And as we share with others the wonderful news of our Lord, we must be sure to tell people that our Lord is a risen Lord. He is not in a grave like Buddha or Mohammed or Joseph Smith. He is alive! He was not just a moral teacher. He was not just a charismatic leader. He did not merely live an extraordinary life. He died, and He rose from the dead.

This is our hope, that Jesus not only died, but rose again, showing that His death served the purpose for which it was intended. He successfully bore our sins on the cross. He satisfied God's wrath against sin. And the fact that He rose again proves that. If we were gathered here today to honor and worship a Jesus who was merely an inspiring role model, we would be fools. He certainly is an inspiring role model. But we are here to praise and glorify the Jesus of Scripture, the true Son of God, a man attested by God, who died according to God's plan, and who was then raised up from the dead. He is a living Savior. He is our risen Lord.

Imputation

To close this sermon, and to conclude our study of Romans 4, I just want to remind you again of the foundational truth of imputation. I hope that when you think of this section of Romans you'll think of imputation, which is how we are justified before God. God imputes our sin to Jesus Christ on the cross. Jesus is not actually sinful, but He is counted sinful and punished as such, as our substitute. Romans 4:8, "blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin." Our sin is not counted as ours, but instead it is placed on Jesus. And then the other piece of this is the imputation of Christ's righteousness to us. We are not actually righteous, but God reckons us righteous by virtue of our union with Christ. Romans 4:5-6, "*And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works:*"

2 Corinthians 5:21 puts together these two aspects of imputation: the imputation of our sin to Christ, and the imputation of Christ's righteousness to those who believe, "*For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*"

These are the things I hope you'll remember from these weeks. Remember that Christ is your righteousness. Remember that Abraham was counted righteous by faith alone, and that was written for us! You, too, will be counted righteous in God's sight

if you believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord,
who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our
justification.