

A preacher... who had strayed from the truth of the gospel... told the following story to summarize the deviant faith that he taught. ... One day a frog fell into a pail of milk... and though he tried every conceivable way to jump out... he always failed. The sides were too high... and because he was floating in the milk... he could not get enough leverage for the needed leap. ... So he did the only thing he could do. ... He paddled... and paddled... and paddled some more. ... The suddenly... *oila!* — his paddling had churned the milk into butter... from which he was able to launch himself to freedom. ... The preacher's message was: "*Just keep paddling, keep on working, keep on doing your best, and you will make it.*"

Nice story... but **terrible** theology! It goes against everything Paul has been writing in the Book of Romans. ... But doesn't that preacher's story typify what the common "man-on-the-street" here in America thinks... in terms of making it into Heaven...? (Just keep on doing good... wherever you can... keep doing your best... then suddenly you will make it somehow...)

Either God's Word is true... or this common hope... which our friends and neighbors have... is true. Both cannot be true. ... And make no mistake. Holding the conviction that God's Word is true... will not make you popular... especially if you use your conviction to challenge America's most popular "frog-paddling" belief... about how to be saved.

They want to hold onto their belief that by doing enough good works... they can make God owe them something... That they can make God as obligated to pay them... as an employer is obligated to pay his workers.

BUT IF ANY PERSON CAN MAKE GOD OBLIGATED TO THEM – GOD WOULD NO LONGER BE GOD! An all-powerful and completely self-sufficient God cannot be obligated. He needs nothing... and owes nothing.

For God to be God... there has to be a different way of obtaining salvation... than making Him obligated (or owing us.) ... And there is another problem with working (or earning) our salvation.

We have been seeing in the first three chapters of Romans that despite man's best efforts – all of our efforts fall short. No one can be good enough to earn God's favor... and therefor obtain salvation.

Trying to earn our way to Heaven is just as affective as jumping off the docks at Newport beach and trying to leap all the way to Hawaii. Some may go further than others... but everyone will far short by thousands of miles. ... This analogy is just as ridiculous as trying to work our way to Heaven. It is not even remotely possible!

That is the bad news. But the good news is that God has provided another way – the only way that will successfully open the doors of Heaven for us. It is by stopping all of our “frog paddling” (trying to earn God's favor)... and simply accepting God's provision through Jesus Christ... by reaching out to accept His free gift of salvation... with our arms of faith.

Now... as wonderful as this truth is... has anyone ever wondered why it has only been made known for the last two thousand years...? ... God had developed a people for Himself. The Jews had been God's people long before Jesus ever came. Abraham... Moses... and all the prophets had been leading God's people down a different path for centuries... Clearly it

was a system of works. They were trying to earn God's favor. "*You must do what the Law requires!*" ... .. Then (suddenly) the game changed.

And if God changed the rules on His people ONCE... can we be certain that He will not do it again...? For those of us... who have placed a great amount of certainty in the belief that salvation is by faith alone (sola-fida)... will we one day learn "*Nope... faith alone does not save. ( This ) is now the way that you are saved... Com'on Man! God already did it once... didn't He?*"

When the Apostle Paul wrote his letter to the Romans... he anticipated that the Jews would be thinking along similar lines. They would question why they should have their way of believing disrupted (put away) and believe Paul's Gospel (this new way.) Why should they be so be willing to reject the way that Abraham set forth for them. The Jewish Christians in Rome would immediately have asked, "*How does this doctrine of justification by faith relate to our history?*" ... Paul accepted the challenge and explained how Abraham was saved.

The Apostle Paul... in our passage today... showed that he was not presenting some strange new doctrine... which cancels out the Old Testament... and leaves the Jew "*afloat on the sea of life*"... "*holding onto an anchor*"... rather than "*being in a lifeboat.*" ... Paul will show that Abraham and David were in this very "*lifeboat*" themselves... (They were saved by the same Gospel that Paul was teaching – "sola fida"... faith alone.)

He begins with Abraham. No one would dispute that God found Abraham worthy enough to be saved. ... But WHY was Abraham worthy...?

## Romans 4:1-5

God did not look down from heaven to see whether He could find someone with a little bit of human goodness (even a little bit of human faith)... on the basis (of which) it would be possible to save *that* person. And Lo! And Behold! He found Abraham. ... It is not as if God said, "*Oh, this is wonderful! In the midst of this corrupt and sinful race, a race which, I have observed thinks and does 'only evil all the time' I have discovered at least one individual who wants to serve me. I see Abraham and his goodness. I think I can make something of him.*" ... It was not like that at all.

But if Abraham had no natural good in him... how then was he saved? The answer... as we have seen several times already... is by God's gift of righteousness to him... which he received by faith.

## Romans 4:3

Paul quotes Genesis 15:6 here. But in order to catch the full impact of Abraham's amazing faith... we need to frame Genesis 15:6 in its context. Abraham had just come off a great military victory... in which he and 318 of his men had rescued his nephew Lot. They had defeated four (very powerful) kings in battle (described in Genesis 14.) But Abraham was suffering a post-victory letdown.

### Genesis 15:1 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup> *After these things the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: "Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great."*

Abraham was fearful... and God told him to "*stop it! I will be your shield, Abraham... (I will protect you from harm.)*"

It isn't very hard to know what Abraham was fearful of. He feared retaliation from the defeated kings. What if they come back – even stronger...?

So God says that He will be Abraham's shield and then God tells Abraham why. ... *"Because I have great plans for you... Abraham!"* Now... let me paraphrase Abraham's response:

*"Yea-ah... about **that**, Lord... I remember what You told me... when we first got here to Canaan. You said that **this** would all be mine and that I would father many nations of people. One of those nations would bless the entire world. But God... I don't even have a single child. My wife and I are too old now... and so I am planning on passing down all that I do own... to my somewhat-close relative (Eliezer of Damascus...)"*

It was at this point that the promise of the Lord came to him:

**Genesis 15:4-5 (ESV)**

*<sup>4</sup> "This man shall not be your heir; your very own son shall be your heir." <sup>5</sup> And he brought him outside and said, "Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be."*

Now comes the verse that Paul quoted...

**Genesis 15:6 (ESV)**

*And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness.*

Abraham trusted God's character. He believed that God was willing and able to fulfill His promises despite the obvious natural difficulties. And the Lord responded to Abram's trust by declaring him just. He "reckoned it to him as righteousness"

The content of the gospel that Abraham believed... was that "*all nations will be blessed through you.*" So Paul is saying that from the very beginning... Abraham's faith was concerned with **spiritual** truth... which included the blessing of salvation to come upon himself... his descendants... and even other nations. ... It was faith in God's gospel of redeeming mankind... the good news about salvation.

Abraham expressed faith in God's plan... And although Abraham did not know His name... Abraham had faith in Jesus. This faith – alone - (sola fida) is why God declared him righteous (or worthy of salvation.)

(LISTEN!) We place our faith in God's provision for us... knowing Jesus' name... and looking **back**. ... Abraham had faith in God's provision... looking **forward**... but not knowing Jesus' name. ... However... do you see that it is the exact same faith...?

#### **Romans 4:4**

Can you imagine an employer handing his worker a paycheck of agreed-on wages... and saying "*Here! This is a gift...*" ... An earned wage is **not** a gift. But Salvation **has to be** a gift. It has to be sola-fida (a gift by faith... and nothing else.) God cannot and will not owe us anything.

#### **Romans 4:5**

Faith is simply a convinced heart – reaching out to receive God's free... un-earned... un-merited... gift of eternal life. ... It is like the extended arm and hand of a drowning man... that makes it possible for the lifeguard to save him. ... (Listen!) such an extended arm and hand does not cause the lifeguard to say – "*Oh! He is worthy to be saved... What a great arm he*

*has!* ... The outstretched arm and hand is only the medium (or the means) by which he is saved. So it is with faith. Faith doesn't make us worthy. It is only the instrument we use to receive salvation.

When some people learn that they are saved by God through faith... they start to worry. "*Do I have enough faith?*" they wonder. "*Is my faith strong enough to save me?*" ... These people miss the point. It is Jesus Christ who saves us... not *our* feelings or actions... and He is strong enough to save us... no matter how weak our arm (our *faith*) is. ... Jesus offers us salvation as a gift because He loves us... not because we have earned it through our powerful faith. ... Faith is believing and trusting in Jesus Christ and using it to reach out to accept His wonderful gift of salvation.

This concept of sola-fida was how Abraham was saved... but not only Abraham. Paul now goes on to show how it was the means by which David was also saved.

King David of Israel is not simply the greatest of her kings; he is the man great in everything. He monopolizes all her institutions. He is her shepherd boy—the representative of her toiling classes. He is her worship leader — giving her their worship hymns. He is her soldier—the conqueror of the Goliaths that would steal her peace. He is her prophet—and he is her poet—most of her psalms are called by his name.

The next verses will quote King David – from Psalm 32 and Psalm 51. David wrote both of these psalms in light of his horrific sin with Bathsheba (a married woman.) He lusted after her... coveted her... committed adultery with her... and then murdered her husband.

The Old Testament Law made no provision for such pre-meditated sin as this. King David did not have a shred of hope from Judaism. ... But look at what David (amazingly) discovered.

### **Romans 4:6-8**

David discovered the way to true happiness and to true holiness—without works. What could David do to restore to Bathsheba her chastity and to Uriah his life? What could he do to restore his own lost innocence? Nothing! His case was hopeless. But then God stepped in and in sovereign grace freely cancelled David's sin and counted him righteous!

#### **2 Samuel 12:13 (ESV)**

*<sup>13</sup> David said to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD." And Nathan said to David, "The LORD also has put away your sin; you shall not die.*

God forgave David – apart from the Law! Forgiveness came without David having to do enough good works. David received God's free gift. ... And when God forgives... He blots out the record.

Some years ago a wealthy English businessman purchased a Rolls Royce and soon afterward took his new car to France. When in the south of France, it broke down and he phoned the Rolls Royce people in Britain. The manufacturer flew a mechanic to France and the man's car was repaired. He expected to receive a sizable bill for this unprecedented service, but as months passed and no invoice arrived the businessman wrote to the Rolls Royce company asking for his account to be rendered. By return mail he received a courteous note from the company assuring him that they had no record of anything having gone wrong with his car! In



other words, the Rolls Royce company refused to acknowledge any imperfection in their product.

That is exactly what happened to David in a spiritual sense.

### **Romans 4:8**

When God forgives... He blots out the record.

### **Romans 4:9-12**

Abraham became the Father of All Who Believe BEFORE he became the Father of the circumcised. 14 years before God told him to be circumcised... sola-fida had already saved Abraham. (And then it would be another 400 years... before Moses would even write the Jewish Laws.) Circumcision and the Law had nothing to do with Abraham's salvation.

But there is a valid question still to be asked at this point... and it is this: If Abraham was saved by faith apart from circumcision... why was this rite given? ... If Abraham was not saved by circumcision... didn't the giving of circumcision just muddy the waters? ... Or... to put the question in other terms... what is the purpose of circumcision anyway?

Paul answers by saying circumcision is a sign and a seal. Let's take the word *sign* first. Paul writes that Abraham "received the sign of circumcision" What does that mean? Well... in simple language... a sign is a visible object that points to something different from... and greater than itself.

Let's say that you are driving down a certain road... and you see a sign over a diner that says, "*Joe's Place*." ... This sign points to something

different and greater than the wooden object that we call a sign; it points to the eating establishment." But in this case... the sign does something more as well. It indicates ownership; it shows that this particular diner is Joe's.

The sign points to an eatery... and it points to ownership. That is what circumcision did for the Jews. It pointed to the covenant God established with Abraham... and it showed that they belonged to God (they were His people.)

The second word Paul uses to discuss the nature of circumcision is "seal." He writes that Abraham's circumcision was "a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised".

What is a seal? We do not use seals very often today... but we have enough examples to illustrate their meaning and importance. Suppose you want to go abroad. You have to secure a passport issued by the government of the United States. You apply for it... submitting two recent pictures of yourself. ... When it comes you find that one of the photos has been affixed to the passport with a seal: the great seal of the United States. It is stamped into the passport in such a way that it is impossible to remove or alter the photo without damaging and thus invalidating the document. This seal indicates that the authority of the United States government stands behind the passport in affirming that the person whose picture appears there is a true citizen of the United States.

Important? ... .. Yes... the sign and the seal of what has happened spiritually and invisibly... was important... *but not as a means of salvation.*

Today... we have baptism and communion as our sign and as our seal. Baptism and communion point to the New Covenant God has established with us through Christ... and what has happened to us spiritually and invisibly. But baptism and communion are not the means by which we are saved.

... .. P A U S E ... ..

Now I want to go back and pick up an important concept in verse 12...

### **Romans 4:12**

Abraham was a pilgrim... and anyone who subscribes to sola-fida... as he did... must also be a pilgrim that walks in his footsteps. Verse 12 says that we are to imitate the faith that Abraham showed before he was circumcised. ... So let's see what copying his faith might look like.

In Genesis 12... Abraham left Ur and Haran (his family and everything that was familiar to him) for a destination unknown to him. All that was told to him by God was "*I will let you know it is the place when you get there...*"

Do you completely trust God with your future? Do you insist that God satisfies all your questions about His leading... before you will move...? Exactly where are we going, God? How are we going to get there...? What will I be doing...? How will all of my personal needs be met...? Do you demand an understanding of all the details...?

In Genesis 14... Abraham tithed 1/10<sup>th</sup> of his hard-earned spoils to Priest Melchizedek. This was 400 years BEFORE God gave Moses the Law that required tithing. - Do you seek to honor God with all of your

possessions...? Even when it is not required of you...? ... Or does your faith only have you do the minimum of what you think is required of you...?

In Genesis 15... Abraham looked out from a high mountain... over the land that God said He would give to Abraham. ... At the time it was very well inhabited by Canaanites. It did not at all seem possible to Abraham. In answer... God told Abraham how He was judging these people... and would continue for another 400 years. He told Abraham that during those 400 years... his descendants would be exiled as slaves down in Egypt... but that they would be brought back to Canaan to possess it. *Abraham... you wont be around. Your reward will be given long after you have lived your earthly life.*

How do you trust God during your period of prolonged waiting...? Are you looking for your primary reward in the short time that you have on this earth...? Is it rewards that you must obtain before you die... or is your faith centered primarily on what you will receive after you die...?

I love the story that is told of a retired missionary couple who had given nearly 50 years of their lives serving God on a foreign mission field in Africa. ... As they returned home to America for their final time... they happened to be on the same ship that Teddy Roosevelt was on... coming home from another of his famed African safaris.

The missionary couple dreamed about returning home to their friends and church family. As they approached the American shores... they could see a great crowd that had gathered by the dock where the ship would end their journey. The crowd was cheering very loud. A band was even playing joyful music. ... But it was all to welcome home Teddy Roosevelt from

hunting wild animals – which he did not even need for his food and clothing.

The missionary couple looked for any of their friends. No one was there to greet them. No one was there to take them to their new living accommodations. Their heads drooped as they walked past all the fanfare and celebrating for Teddy.

After paying the cab driver to drive them to the address he had scribbled on a piece of paper... he had used the last bit of American money that he had. Maybe their friends would be at the apartment... they hoped. They arrived... but there was no welcome for them (there) either.

They had never felt so lonely... and the retired missionary wife burst into a flood of tears. *“It just is not fair!”* she cried. *“Mr. Roosevelt merely goes on a contrived animal hunt to put a trophy on his wall... and he receives a hero’s welcome home! We gave our lives very sacrificially to the service of Christ... and not even one person was there to welcome us home.”*

That is when her husband took her into his arms and whispered... *“But dear... we are not home yet...”* ... .. [ P A U S E ] ... ..

You and I are not home yet. When we get there... we can expect our primary rewards!

In genesis 18... Abraham prayed for Sodom. Does your faith have you pray for the worst kind of sinners that you are aware of...? Does ANTIFA sicken you... as much as it does me...? Maybe we should commit them to prayer. (Just say’n...)

These are just a few of the recorded acts of faith that Abraham modeled for us. Romans 4:12 says that we are to walk in his steps.

### **Romans 4:13-16**

Trying to earn God's favor nullifies God's promise that He will give His favor as a gift.

Our salvation is dependent on God's promise... and I am glad for that. If it depended on our own working for it... we would have no certainty. How much is enough...? How many good works would we need...? ... How generous with our belongings do we need to be...? Anyone who wishes to use the system of works will never be confident that they have performed well enough. ... On the other-hand... sola-fida makes salvation **firm**.

Sola-fida is certain... because God is faithful and does not waiver. He did not change the way that we are saved. It has always been "faith alone."

Folks... do not be misled by America's most common thinking about salvation. God's way is sola-fida. Anything else is not the Gospel.

Oh how badly our frog paddling world needs to know the truth of Romans 4:1-16. ... On Thursday I was reminded of this fact. A student at the community college where I teach has been staying around after class to discuss spiritual matters. He knows that I am a pastor... as well as a college professor... and he has asked for this extra time to talk about Biblical faith. He honestly confesses that he is searching... and on Thursday he told me something that I have read before... but I have never had a seeker tell me. (I say this because I hope that it will encourage you... as much as it did me.) He said that he has observed an age range

of about ten years younger and 10 years older than him of a lot of earnest seekers who are open to the truth.

Please pray with me... that God would use us to declare these powerful truths that we have been studying. Oh! That God would make them more than truth that we use only ONCE – for our own salvation... and assurance.