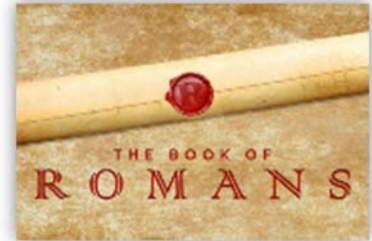


We know that you have lots of big questions about life, and so that's why each week we invite you to open this Book [Bible] because in here we have the answers. There's lots of noise out there, lots of talk about a lot of different things—the answers are in here. We also bring you every week to Jesus because we know that in Jesus, He brings everything together for us and we have to put our eyes on Him.

If you have your Bibles, open up to the book of Romans. I'm going to give you just a really, really quick reminder of where we've been if you have not been with us. First two chapters they just went over and over and over how much we've blown it, and we all said, "Yup. We know that." And then as we moved on to chapter 3 we realized that Heaven is a place that is prepared but it's for those who are righteous, that sin's not going to get in there, and we realize so if we're guilty and we're sinners, then now what? How do we get there? And we get why that wouldn't be a place where sinners would be. After all, it's the thing that messes up the world that we live in. The last thing we want is to go to another place like that. But now what? How do we get into that situation? How do we get to that place?



There's something inside of us that wishes that just everyone got in and everything would be okay until we think of the people that we wish would get justice. And we think *I wish they would get justice* – but I want somehow to have forgiveness. And God says yes, that's exactly what I'm going to set up for you. The problem is somebody has to pay the price of those sins. And God makes it very clear – it can be My own Son Jesus who will pay the price or you can pay the price, but you will have to choose. And if you choose Jesus, the price that He pays will cover your sins.

By the middle of chapter 3 there's a little phrase where he (Apostle Paul) says "but now." But now after all sort of hard news and tough stuff and not sure how to make it all work, he says here's what's happened. The righteousness of God has come to you which, because of the righteousness of God coming to you, you can have forgiveness, you can have a place in the family of God, and it will transform your life. And on top of that you are going to be redeemed. You may remember that picture of slavery at the time and how there was one way where a ransom price could be paid for the redemption of that slave where they would never be bought or sold again, but they were free forever. And we began to talk about a simple word when he said "but now," the simple word is such a word that doesn't make a lot of sense to us, it's the word *propitiation*. And that word speaks of the blood of Jesus Christ that *satisfies* God's wrath against sin, and we're reminded that God did it.

When we get into this text he says I know that you're all going to struggle because we live in a world where, if we're going to get anything done, we have to do something. But that's not how this works. This is all about God doing something. So he gives us this illustration of a hero of their faith, a guy by the name of Abraham that had lived many years before but they all talked about all the time and they all considered Abraham. And he talked about how Abraham was called out of Ur; how he was called out of this place that was an idol-worshipping, godless location. And He calls them out of there and He says "Hey, Abraham. I'm going to use you and I'm going to do amazing things in your life. I'm going to make a great nation out of you and ultimately the Savior is going to come from you, so here's the deal: I want you to leave here and I want you to start walking." And Abraham says, "Yes, God, I'm in."

And what he tries to bring up in the illustration that we found here in Romans is that Abraham believed God *by faith* before he ever did anything, and his *doing* only happened after he responded in faith. And when he responded in faith God said you're righteous. And the righteousness came to him, the forgiveness and the being part of God's family and the transformation, came to him long before any

rules came. In fact, we learned that it was two chapters later that he institutes this sign of the covenant that God had with him of circumcision. It's 400 years later that the law comes into play.

If we continue reading in Romans, chapter 4, I would love for you to look there in your Bible to Romans chapter 4, verse 13, and we read this:

¹³ For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world

— and just, again, he restates this, that it —

did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. ¹⁴ For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. ¹⁵ For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.

¹⁶ That is why it depends on faith,

— we're not gonna depend on works that we did and all the good things that we can do—we need faith. And he says —

in order that the promise may rest on grace

— and you remember the meaning of the word means “God's unmerited favor.” So all of a sudden we recognize that it is nothing about me and what I've done, it's everything about what God has done for us. And he's using Abraham in this illustration of Abraham to explain it. If you look down to verse 18, still speaking of Abraham, it says this:



¹⁸ In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, “So shall your offspring be.” ¹⁹ He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body which was as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb.

— he hadn't had a child at that point, he's still waiting for this child of promise at age 100. He had been made this promise some 26 years before and he's just there waiting and waiting for God but he still has faith in that. And some of you know that exact feeling; been waiting for God, you know God's gonna answer that prayer and you're going, *Is this the moment? Is this a situation?* and it doesn't happen. But it says here that he did not weaken in his faith. Verse 20:

²⁰ No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God,

— in other words, there's something that as God begins to move in our life, something can even grow in our faith. It's not just that initial faith, because remember when he originally said yes to God he didn't understand much, but evidently as time goes on, as he builds that relationship in the family of God, he understands more and more and his faith becomes stronger and stronger. Verse 21:

²¹ fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. ²² That is why his faith was “counted to him as righteousness.”

~ ROMANS 4:13-16a, 18-22

So over and over, whether it was at the very beginning when he first trusted in God and he said, “God, okay, You said it, doesn't make any sense but here we go,” or if it's later on when God says, “I'm going to give you a child,” and he says, “I don't know how that's going to happen,” he continues to trust in God. And God says, “That's what I'm looking for, and that is the righteousness that I place on you. It

transform you, it changes.” And if you just keep reading a little bit lower there it says—hey, and by the way, that wasn’t just for him and for the people in his time, that’s for all of us ever since—that righteousness comes by faith and comes by faith alone:

²³ But the words “it was counted to him” were not written for his sake alone, ²⁴ but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, ²⁵ who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

~ ROMANS 4:23-25

And one of the things that I just really want to continue to emphasize is the Scripture says that that righteousness is counted or accounted to us, it's placed on our account, so it's what God has done and when God looks at our account He doesn't look at what we've done, He looks at what He has done. And so He gives us this righteousness, He pours it out on us. I like to talk about food all the time because I'm always hungry, and about this time of the day it even gets worse, and so it's like all-you-can-eat righteousness. It's all yours, it's all there, it's all the time, there is nothing holding you back. It is all of God by faith alone.

One of our pastors this week told me of a conversation that he had, so it was someone who he was meeting with, and they were talking about choices in their life. And the pastor made the comment to them, “Well, that's a sinful choice you're making. You can't continue in that sin.” And he told me, he says, “They truly honestly looked a little bit set back and a little bit surprised, and they said, ‘Well Pastor Lee has been describing this a little bit differently. He's been telling us that the way to God is through faith alone and that God's going to give His righteousness to us. I don't understand why we have to do anything more. So if it's not by works, why do I have to do anything at this point?’ ” Later on and in the book of Romans Paul's gonna actually make this point. He's going to say so should I just go on living in a terrible way so that there's more of God's grace, you know, more of what God has done and poured out on me? And he's no, no, no, no, no! And the reason again for this is because righteousness not only changes our status of forgiveness and our family status but it changes us, it transforms us.

**What shall we say then?
Are we to continue in sin that
grace may abound?**

**By no means!
How can we who died to sin
still live in it?**

— ROMANS 6:1-2

Can you imagine going into the doctor, you tell the doctor what your problem is and they tell you have some sort of crazy disease, but the good news is if you take this pill it's gonna heal you and you'll be fine from here on out. So you take the pill and nothing happens, what do you say the doctor? It's a worthless pill. And if you take the pill and it does what it says then you're no longer in the sick spot anymore. You're no longer in pain or whatever the situation was because it has transformed you, it has changed you. The Gospel is meant to change you and to change you in ways that you couldn't have changed yourself. You know all these people trying to turn over a new leaf, make it happen again. And, you know, at the beginning of the year you all set out and you thought *This is going to be my year* and here we are and it's not your year. And a lot of times I think that's exactly where we're at with the Bible type of stuff is we're like, “Yeah, the Gospel is supposed to change me but it hasn't, but, well, thankfully I'm saved. I have the righteousness of Christ on me, I'll just keep on living however I want to live.” Does that work? What do I do with that?

I want to introduce you to what I would call a tension. Paul says here in Romans by grace through faith alone. In the book of James, Jesus' half-brother writes about this same subject. He uses the same

person as an illustration, Abraham, and he says hey, as a result of your faith there ought to be something showing up in your life, some works, something ought to change as a result of it.¹

Let me give you an illustration. I lived in Arizona for many years. We'd go out hiking in the desert and there are lots of mountains around. There had been a time when people went out into the desert because someone had found gold out there and they built, they'd dig these tunnels and go back and create these mines and find more and more gold. And so as you're walking out in the desert today you can see what they'd call "tailings," you can see where that someone's dug into the side of the mountain because you can see all the dirt that has come out from inside of that mountain, so when you see that you can just go up there and oftentimes you can find a way into these mines. Sometimes they have them closed off because they're so dangerous, but most of the time someone's come along and broken off the door or whatever and so you can get into this thing, so it's a lot of fun to go back into these things.

And I've gone back into them but inevitably when you go back into these mines you get to a place where you come to what you see is a huge what they would call a shaft that goes down probably what I would say forever. It surely looks forever, I never have seen a bottom in one of them. And it's this big hole and you're out in the middle of this cave that they've dug back into this mountain. You come to this deep hole, you shine your light down in it, you don't see a bottom, but the good news is we *can* keep going forward if we want to because there's a tiny little board that spans that distance, you know, of the 20 feet across there so you just have to get on that board and start walking.

And, you know, you imagine shaking—I hate that kind of thing—and you just know that if I get halfway across there that board starts doing that sagging little thing. And then I'm stupid, when I get about two-thirds of the way across I stop losing my patience and I try to run the rest away. Well, can you imagine if I was doing this, this never happened to me but I have thought about it quite a bit, as I'm doing that little last run thing where I'm just like *I just gotta get to the other side*, as I'm doing that last run thing I slip and I fall.

Now, hopefully I've fallen and I just straddle the board like this, now how



Straddle the board

you get back up I've thought through that one, too, as I'm staring down into the pit. But say I wasn't that lucky that day and I fall down over the edge and I'm there holding by one hand and finally a finger slips and I'm down to just one hand and it's just my little fingers onto it and all of a sudden I hear the guy that's been hiking with me on the other side of the big hole go, "Hold on, stay still, don't let go, I will be right there for you." And you're thinking *You can't come fast enough. I don't think I can hold on any longer, I don't think I can hold any longer.* And all of a sudden you feel his big hand grab you like this [demonstrates around



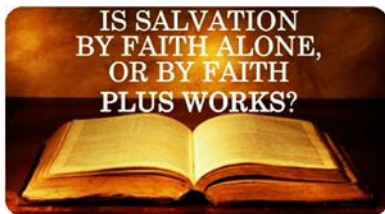
¹ See James 2:14-28

the wrist] and he pulls you up and you get standing onto that board. Probably what you'd do is just run the rest of the way across like I normally would do, get to the other side and say, "Dude, you can go back to the car. I'm fine from here on out." Right? "I don't need you anymore. You saved me, thanks, but cool, just go back to the car. I can do the rest of this hike myself."

Is that what you'd say? That'd be the last thing you would say. This person has just saved you. You are indebted to them. You are thankful to them. You are, like, "Dude, you're going hiking with me everywhere I go. I want you nearby. I don't know how you did that, that was amazing, that was impossible. I don't know how you did the impossible. I don't know how you had the mind to do that. Right now I think that was miraculous but God used you, thank you so much. Don't you ever, ever, ever leave my side."

When you get back home the first thing you do is you tell everyone, "You should see what just happened today. I fell off and I was hanging by, you know, two fingers," because now it's gone from five fingers to two fingers, "and I was hanging by two fingers and I screamed and he said 'Hold on' and he lifted me up and we went on. I mean, I owe my life to this guy." You're in a party a couple weeks later, "I owe my life to this guy." You go to work, you tell the story, "You just gotta hear what happened to me. I never saw it coming and all of a sudden I'm hanging and I'm sure I would have died if I'd fallen and no one would ever come back to get me. I'm just telling you he saved me, he saved my life."

And here's what I'm convinced of that I want us to hear today: It is not incongruent to say, "I am saved by Jesus Christ by what *He* did and what He did alone," but it's not incongruent to say that I'm going to go tell people; it's not incongruent to say I'm gonna take Him with me everywhere I go; it's not incongruent to say, "Hey, what's the best way to live? I'm gonna live that way." In fact, it would be inane not to. It'd be craziness then not to. And what James is going to say some people would say is absolutely odd that in Romans it would say that it is by grace through faith alone, and in James, James comes and says, "Wait a minute, but if you're not doing anything this probably never happened."



So let me read to you what James says, but I also – I just want warn you in advance there's a little bit of a tension because we've been hearing over and over it's by grace through faith, and now he's gonna say you gotta do something. James chapter 2, verse 14, it's just further to the right, it's a small little book so if you're having trouble finding it, I actually always have trouble finding James. I know exactly where it's at and I still can't find it because it's only a couple of pages. James 2, verse 14:

¹⁴ What good is it, my brothers, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can that faith save him? ¹⁵ If a brother or sister is poorly clothed and lacking in daily food, ¹⁶ and one of you says to them, "Go in peace, be warmed and filled," without giving them the things needed for the body, what good is that? ¹⁷ So also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.

¹⁸ But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. ¹⁹ You believe that God is one; you do well. Even the demons believe—and shudder! ²⁰ Do you want to be shown, you foolish person, that faith apart from works is useless?

~ JAMES 2:14-17

And we've talked about this quite a bit. There are people who say, "Well, I have faith, I believe Jesus lived. I believe He was a historical figure. I believe He was a great prophet." And we're like, "Oh, cool." No. Not cool. Have you placed your faith and trust in Him alone for your salvation? The demons believe that He lived, they get it, they believe that He's alive today. It says they shudder. But saving faith is when I put my faith and my trust in Him; when I realize He reached down when I was about to fall into an endless pit of eternity separated from Him and grabbed me up and rescued me never to be the same again. And he says you can't separate that act of Him saving you from you being the rest of your life living for Him. When He places that righteousness on you it transforms you. There is no way to have it any other way. Then he goes into an interesting illustration.

So, you remember, we talked about the illustration of Abraham. God says, "Go" – he goes. God says, "I'm gonna give you a son" – he tries to make it work, and God says, "That's not how we do it, but I will give you a son." Finally his son is born, that's at age 99-100, right at 100 it says. At age 112 God says to him this son that's supposed to be the promise, that's going to be your heir that from you, is going to become this great nation of which the Messiah is going to come from, you know that son? God says, "I want you to take that one son, his name's Isaac, and I want you to go sacrifice him on an altar" – Genesis chapter 22. If you haven't read it, you've gotta read it. It's an amazing story. What I find is I find this to be an incredibly awful story as any of us who have ever had a kid it's like – No. You amp that up one and especially when that kid now is supposed to be the promise that has implications for the world going forward and for God's plan of salvation going forward, you go, "No-No." But the text here tells us that Abraham by faith takes Isaac. Let me just read it because I want you to hear it from God's Word. Verse 21 of James 2:



And Abraham laid Isaac on the altar. But then an angel stopped Abraham. "Do not sacrifice your son," said God. "You have shown your devotion to Me by not withholding your only son from Me."

²¹ *Was not Abraham our father justified by works*

— that's what's hard to grasp here —

when he offered up his son Isaac on the altar?

~ JAMES 2:21

By the way, the book of Hebrews, chapter 11, you need to read that when you have a chance. It talks about this very story again and it says Abraham was thinking in his mind when he lays his son on that altar, *Well, if this is what God wants, I just do what God tells me to do.* Remember, that's how Abraham got started, that was his faith walk, "If God tells me to do it, I'll do it." But in his mind Hebrews 11² says he was thinking, *If God has me kill my son, He'll raise him from the dead.* Really cool metaphor that is painted there. It continues to be what we're driving towards next week.

Verse 22:

²² *You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was*

² *By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, of whom it was said, "Through Isaac shall your offspring be named." He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back. ~ HEBREWS 11:17-19*

— I think this is an important word —

completed by his works;

~ JAMES 2:22

The faith existed before that, God placing righteousness on him was by God alone, but now we act that out. In the book of James there's a whole, if you were study the entire book, has all these different tests to let us know whether we are really, truly a follower, whether what's going on in us is the real deal. In this little section that we've just read we would call the "sixth test," it's the test of faith. Is your faith the real deal? Any of you in quality control, when you test something you're trying to prove that it is what it said it was or what you're trying to promote that it is. Does it hold a hundred pounds? Will it take a pressure of a certain amount? And when you put it under pressure it shows if it's the real deal. That's what's going on here in James. And that's what James, Jesus' half-brother says, "You say you believe in Jesus, but then you don't live like it? Then I'm not so certain that you do. You say that God has transformed you by placing Jesus' righteousness on you, but you have no transformation? That doesn't compute. You should step back and say, *Then I don't know if I'm saved.*"

Now here's something I'm confident of. You may be stepping back here in that right now being sort of scared because in these moments God's Spirit will do something in a true Christian's heart. In a true Christian's heart God's going to cause you conviction right now. We have this problem and it's called "selective

SELECTIVE CHRISTIANITY

*I will believe what I want to believe
and there's a couple things that I'm
just not going to go there.*

Christianity" – *I will believe what I want to believe and there's a couple things that I'm just not going to go there.* And normally it's because there's a sin in our life that has created complexity after complexity after complexity and now we – to back out of that is to unravel a whole lot of mess – and we can't see how it's gonna work.

Well, Abraham didn't see how it was gonna work when he stepped up to the altar and God said put your son on that altar. And so when we step into that place, in that one sin in our life that we've been holding back on God on going, "Hey, I'm doing everything else God's way. I'm living it all God's way." That one sin we say, "No. God, I'm going to believe You even though it makes no sense. I have no idea how I'm gonna do it financially if I obey You in that area. I don't know what people are gonna think of me. I don't know, I just don't know what tomorrow's gonna look like if I obey you in that area." But you boldly put that on the altar and you give it over to God. And James is saying that true believers do that.

Listen to what happens afterwards, verse 22:

²² You see that faith was active along with his works, and faith was completed by his works; ²³ and the Scripture was fulfilled that says, "Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness"— and he was called a friend of God.

~ JAMES 2:22-23

Here's what faith always is: Believing what God says. So when God says to Abraham, "Get up and start walking" – he does. When God says, "I'm going to give you a child of promise" – he believes Him. When eventually God says at age 112, "Put your son on the altar" – doesn't make sense, he does.

HERE'S WHAT FAITH
ALWAYS IS:
BELIEVING WHAT GOD SAYS

You talk about works for just a moment. Works don't save you. Works are an expression of what living like one who believes lives. They complete our faith. They are a result of our faith. They are result of our righteousness, a transformed life. And here's what I'm concerned for many of us is that we have never grown in our faith. We've never taken that next step and said, "God, well, I believed You there." You said to start leaving Ur, he left. But now I'm 112 years old, I mean, it's a lot of years later and You're now telling me to kill my son that You said is part of the promise, I'm not there." No, we keep on taking that step and we keep growing in that faith.

Many of us have been a Christian one year for 13 times, or 15 times, or 40 times. We're still repeating sermons we heard thirty years ago. It sounds really deep and meaningful, but you haven't grown. Nothing's changed. You're still dealing with sins that you were dealing with a year ago, two years ago, five years ago. You're still feeling convicted on the exact same things that you were then. The Scripture says that by now you should be on the meat of the Word, but you're still drinking the milk of the Word.³ And God says, "I want you to move forward."

And so the thing I'm gonna encourage each one of you in this room today, if you are truly a child of God, He's convicting you of that sin right now. I just guarantee you. If you're not feeling conviction of that sin right now, if you're sitting here defensive going, "Oh, no, I prayed the prayer years ago. I walked forward. I wrote a thing on a card. I know I'm in, I'm good," I'd say be worried, be concerned. But if you're like, "No, I want to please God. I want to live for Him" — He's saying, "Come home, I want to forgive you. I want to rescue you." Because when you walk that faith life you keep saying yes to Him every day. And so as He's convicting you of something in your life right now that is wrong, you're saying, "God, I am going to repent of that and I'm turning."

Here's the other thing that might happen, let's go positive for a moment, maybe He's convicting you of something He wants you to do, something like a fruit of the Spirit that He wants you to begin to exemplify or something in the Scripture that talks about hospitality or serving or giving. And you're going, "Okay, You've been telling me that for a while. I've been hearing that and I've been saying no. I'm gonna say yes today because it is the ongoing step of my faith journey." It is the natural thing for a Christian to say yes to God, not this, "Hey, you rescued me out of here. Can you can go back to the car? I don't need you anymore." "God, I said yes a bunch of years ago, I went forward and signed the card, raised my hand, told my neighbor, and nothing's happened since then." I put my trust in Jesus. I say yes to Him today.

Here's what I ask of you: As you leave here today think of one thing, maybe it's positive, maybe something negative, you figure out which it is, "I'm done doing this" or "I am gonna add this to my life. I'm gonna grow in this area, not to save me but because I love God and I want to please Him and He's been laying it on my heart for a while."

³ References regarding milk and solid food of the Word:

About this we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the basic principles of the oracles of God. You need milk, not solid food, for everyone who lives on milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, since he is a child. But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil. ~ HEBREWS 5:12-14

But I, brothers, could not address you as spiritual people, but as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for it. And even now you are not yet ready, for you are still of the flesh. For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way? ~ I CORINTHIANS 3:1-3

Lord Jesus,

I pray for each person in this room right now that is thinking that through. We want to grow. We don't want to stay where we're at. We thank You, we praise You, we're blown away by You, what You've done for us.

Lord God, I pray that You would just cause us to tell someone about it. I pray that You would cause us to live a life of love, a life of joy. That we deal with that marital issue; that we would deal with that sexual immorality issue; that we would say yes to loving someone that is unlovable; that we would say yes to opening up our home to hospitality; that we would say yes to serving; that giving that has been so hard to us that we'd start becoming a giver—whatever that is, Lord God, I pray that You would cause us to say yes to You today. That our faith would, as your Scripture said today, grow and grow and grow. And that what that thing is that You're laying on our heart today that it would just be something that we'd be soft to You and say yes.

Lord God, I just want to right now, though, think of those in this room who are saying, “Yeah, I don't think that has been me. I thought I was in, I thought I was saved.” Lord God, I pray that they would make that first step of faith today. I realize it's not about their works, it's about what You did, and they can't save themselves and they can't get there on their own.

So Lord, I pray for each one in this room right now that is just right now saying, “I put my trust in You alone, God. I don't know what else to do.” They're reaching up, they're grabbing onto that board with just a finger and it's shaking like crazy. Lord God, I pray that You would reach down and pick them up. They're asking for that right now, and I pray that You'll forgive them of their sins and bring them into the family of God and that You'll transform their lives.

We love you, Jesus. It's in Your Name we pray. Amen.

Vimeo: <https://vimeo.com/330331824>

YouTube: <https://youtu.be/mBfAoAQPr1o>

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