



## **Second Sunday in Lent**

**March 12, 2017 - 10:15 a.m.**

**Rev. Todd Goldschmidt, Pastor**

### **Theme: Justification By Faith Alone Really Is A Big Deal!**

#### **Sermon Text: Romans 4:1-8, 13-17 (NIV)**

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

<sup>4</sup>Now to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation. <sup>5</sup>However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness. <sup>6</sup>David says the same thing when he speaks of the blessedness of the one to whom God credits righteousness apart from works: <sup>7</sup>“Blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered.

<sup>8</sup>Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord will never count against them.”

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

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

**Sunday Worship Service: 10:15 A.M. (Sunday School/Adult Bible Study 9 am)**

7305 208<sup>th</sup> Ave NE, Redmond, WA 98053

(425) 868-9404 - [www.lhlc.org](http://www.lhlc.org), [pastortodd@lhlc.org](mailto:pastortodd@lhlc.org)

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Back in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the mystic **Emmanuel Swedenborg** sarcastically described the Lutheran as a man locked up in a dark room, pacing back and forth and repeating to himself, “**I am justified by faith alone; I am justified by faith alone; I am justified by faith alone.**” Justification by faith alone . . . is it really such a big deal? Or is it simply a worn-out mantra chanted monotonously by those whose vision of one big happy family of believers united under the banner of the cross is so impaired that they’ve become incapable of seeing the rich vistas of the wider biblical revelation? After all, doesn’t the Bible even say that all Christians are created equal? Yes. Yes it does. But it also says that not all doctrines or teachings are of equal value in God’s eyes. Some are true, while others are false. Some lead to heaven if believed, others—if adhered to—will end up leading more souls to hell. Still, ecumenists piously say there’s more than one entrée in the biblical buffet line when it comes to being right with God and having our ticket punched for Paradise.

Not so says the One who proclaimed, “**I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me**” (Jn. 14:6). The Apostle Paul concurs that

### **Justification By Faith Alone Really Is a Big Deal**

It’s a matter of being under a curse or a blessing, of condemnation or acquittal. Yes, justification by faith alone really is a big deal: it’s a matter of life or death!

To make his point, Paul showcases father Abraham. Was he reckoned righteous in God’s sight by faith or by works? Just know that Jews consider Abraham their patriarch extraordinaire. He is an extremely heroic figure from their past, and his attributes and accomplishments are an integral part of their storied spiritual lore. They boast of him as though he were practically God Himself. But he isn’t. And if he appeared before us this morning, he would say, “**Don’t look to me or my works. Look to the Messiah and all that He did to earn your forgiveness and salvation. I not only believed that God would give me countless descendants, but I put my trust in His pledge to bless me and all mankind through the gift of a Redeemer who would come from my family line. God the Holy Spirit worked that faith in my heart, and Jehovah credited my faith in the coming Savior to me as righteousness.**”

The question of justification is quite inescapable for Abraham and for us. If we’re not justified by faith in Jesus, we’ll seek justification elsewhere—usually by trusting in our own righteousness. We’ll muster whatever words we can to declare our actions and attitudes to be good and right; and we’ll make whatever excuses we can to gloss over whatever we, or others, might deem self-serving or unseemly. Like the Pharisee in the temple in last

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Sunday's sermon text, we want everyone we know or deal with to think of us as an upstanding person who always has the best interests of others at heart.

Real godly folks—that's us! You don't have to attend the funeral or memorial service for an unbeliever to hear their lives and works lauded in eulogies that have absolutely no connection to Christ and what He did for them. All we really have to do to understand such hypocrisy is to take a good, hard look at our own heart and our own life. If we're honest, we'll see a Pharisee.

Laudable eulogies, a lifelong-membership in the Rotary Club, contributing vast sums of money to worthwhile causes or a lifetime of public service may make for an action-packed obituary, but they simply do not—in fact, they *cannot*—make a sinner a saint in His eyes. Only Jesus can do that; only faith in Him counts with God. No matter how impressive an obituary is, it can't spring the soul of the deceased from the grave. Circumcision wouldn't cut it for Abraham. Paul painstakingly lays out the chronology of Abraham's spiritual development. Faith came before circumcision. It is by faith, not the cutting of the flesh, that Abraham was reckoned righteous. So it is with you and me this morning: the righteousness that we possess comes through faith in Christ Jesus and not by works of the Law.

And what is this faith that justifies, or declares a person “not guilty” before God? It is trust, plain and simple. It's not the words we say or the deeds we do to impress others so they respect us or value our opinions. Abraham discovered that. His faith in God's pledge of a Savior made him right in God's sight—not his many unselfish deeds. Faith alone saves! There's perhaps no more pointed statement of salvation in all the Bible than these words of God's Apostle Paul: “to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness” (v. 5). This isn't faith in faith; its faith with Jesus as its object. Its faith in God's promise, not a reliance on works—no matter how noble and kind.

Paul holds up Abraham as a model of faith—not because he was circumcised as the father of all who believe, but because although he was just as much a sinner as we are, he trusted God's promise of a coming Savior. That confidence was God's work within him. And because it was, Abraham was acquitted in Judge Jehovah's court. Jesus stepped before His Father's bench to argue Abraham's case. “Put his sin and guilt on me,” He begged. “Let me suffer the sentence he deserves for disobeying you so many times in so many ways,” He pled. And the Father listened to His only Son, just like He does whenever our risen and ascended Lord and Savior pleads our case, too. The Apostle John wrote: “My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have an advocate with the Father—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world” (1 John 2:1-2).

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With that in mind, Paul quotes words originally put to parchment by David in Psalm 32:

“Blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord will never count against them.” That blessing was true for Abraham. And it’s true for you and me today as well. Like him, we’re considered righteous in God’s sight through faith in Jesus as our Savior from sin and death. The promise of that Savior is woven throughout the pages of the Old Testament and fulfilled according to God’s perfect timing in Jesus. That faith is counted to you and me as righteousness as we believe in Jesus, who was “delivered over to death for our sins and raised to life for our justification”

(Rom. 4:25). Praise God that you’re saved by faith in Jesus! In His name we pray, Amen.

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