

Romans 4:1-7

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[0 : 00] There isn't a topic under more question and attack than that of salvation. See, all the enemy has to do is not confront it head on.

! That would be ridiculous. That would be... It just wouldn't work for him. Just put it that way. Just wouldn't work.

But what he does do is he attacks the details. He attacks the little things. The things that maybe from our vantage point, from our viewpoint, isn't that big of a deal. For example, liberal evangelicals pleading with conservatives to drop the harshness and vulgarity of the cross.

The blood. Get rid of the blood. Because it's hard to hear. People don't want to listen to that. It's harsh. The problem is if you get rid of the blood, you get rid of the atonement.

If you get rid of the atonement, you get rid of Christ's death, meaning anything. Then you get rid of salvation altogether. It's a horrible, slippery slope.

[1 : 06] Or the enemy will get us fighting ourselves instead of the enemy himself. Like maybe a theological debate over Calvinism versus Arminianism.

Where we become more for what we're against than what we're for. Or he can use the seeker-sensitive modernists who have turned salvation into a walk down the aisle.

Some of you have come from a church like that. Where the line is so vague and so skewed together that you can't tell if they're talking about walking down the aisle or saying a prayer or knowing Jesus himself or being reborn.

Regenerate. Nathan last week, or two weeks ago, I'm sorry, used a great illustration to open up his sermon. He talked about the crux of mountain climbing.

The hardest part of mountain climbing. The hardest move. The hardest problem that he faces or you face in a climb. Everything works up to it and then once you get it, the rest is cakewalk.

[2 : 14] The rest is celebrating what you've accomplished. And this morning, we're still on the crux of the book of Romans and of all Christianity. We are still there with the biggest problem that we have to get right.

Christianity differentiates itself from any other religion by this doctrine of salvation. any religion, pagan or Catholic, Muslim or Jehovah's Witness, Mormon, cult, Hindu, Buddhist, all other religions have a works-based salvation.

I will do this and I will achieve glory. I will achieve a salvation. Christianity sits firmly, or at least it's supposed to sit firmly, on the doctrine of salvation by faith alone, by grace alone, without works.

See, the enemy has even brought that into question. Now, it's one thing to say it. It's one thing to say, I believe in the justification by faith alone, by grace alone.

It's, you may know it in your head, but I think sometimes there's a disconnect between the head and the feet. You may know it, but you don't do anything about it. You may know it, but you don't know the details.

[3 : 35] You don't know the ins and outs. Whatever the case may be. So this morning, I want to help. I want to help the college student, the teacher, the nurse, the firefighter, the lawyer.

I want to help this morning so we're all rooted and grounded in the truth of God's Word. So that we can all ask the question that Paul does in verse 3 of chapter 4, what does the Scripture say?

And we can answer it. That's what I want to happen this morning over this topic. So we must let the Scripture be our foundation. Let it be our authority. So let us learn what Scripture says.

Romans chapter 4, verses 1 through 8. God's Word says, What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather, according to the flesh?

For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say?

[4 : 39] Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness. Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift, but as his due. 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, blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven and whose sins are covered.

Blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin. I ask you to pray with me now.

Great God, Almighty God, our Father, this is your Word.

we pray God that your Word speaks this morning. I pray God that you use me, that you hide me behind your cross and the work on the cross by your Son Jesus, that His name will be proclaimed, that He will receive all the glory.

Spirit, I ask that you would move in our hearts, that we would be able to respond to what we hear this morning by and from you. we trust in what you're going to do this morning.

[5 : 55] We are excited about what you're going to do and the lives that you're going to change. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen. I have three points this morning and they're straight from the text.

They're nothing, no fancy alliteration or anything like that. In fact, John MacArthur uses these too and there's nothing special about them. the first point is Abraham was not justified by works.

Abraham was not justified by works. Verses 1 and 2. What then shall we say was gained by Abraham our forefather according to the flesh?

For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. Paul, like he does in other writings, uses logic.

He's using logic here for his argument. What shall we say was gained by Abraham? The faithful, obedient patriarch of the Jewish people. If Abraham was justified by works, he would have something to boast about.

[6 : 58] Clear logic, nothing fancy, nothing hidden there. True words. We would, if we would be justified by works, we would fall right there with him.

Meaning, if we obey God perfectly, if we were good and loving to all people, if we did all the religious activities, attended all the church things going on, if we spoke Christianese, if we said the right things, if we get baptized, if we act good in front of certain people, maybe the pastor or other people, if we followed every rule and every law, every written, we then would have something to boast about.

if, of course, our salvation resulted in those activities. It would be centered on us.

We would have received the praise for what we accomplished and what we did. We accomplished something great by getting to heaven. The problem is we can't.

It is impossible. This is the point that Paul is making here in this letter to the Romans. See, without God, we have no hope.

[8 : 13] See, Abraham was called by God. Abraham was called and didn't know where he was going. He just went. God didn't say to Abraham, Abraham, why don't you go to Birmingham?

Jump on I-20, head west, you'll be there in two hours. It wasn't that way. God said, go, and I'll show you where you're going to go. Abraham needed God to lead him.

Likewise, for us, we need God to lead us. Now, we've all used maps. We've all used Google Maps or MapQuest or whatever. Now, mind-blowing statement here.

A map is only helpful if it's accurate, right? It's only helpful if it tells you where you are and where you're trying to go. Otherwise, it's useless.

For our map this morning and our map as a Christian is the Word of God and is Christ Jesus Himself. See, other religions are maps that are inaccurate. Other religions are maps that take you nowhere.

[9 : 16] But this morning, we have a map. We have the Word of God sitting in your lap, on your phone, on your iPad, whatever it is. Sitting on your shelf. And we're able to follow God and know where we're going.

So see, it's God's action on our life. See, so if we have something to boast about, if we receive salvation by our works, justification by works, if that was possible, the end of verse 2, Paul clearly says it's not going to happen.

Abraham cannot boast before God. Can't do it. It's not possible. Which means, stop playing the game.

Stop pretending you're somebody that you're not. Stop being in bondage to a set of rules and laws that you cannot keep. You are enslaved to those laws and to your hard work to do right.

Stop. I've used this illustration before and I'm going to use it again because it works so well for this application. You guys know in mythology, in Greek and Roman mythology, the king named Sisyphus, great name, Sisyphus, his eternal punishment was to push a giant boulder up a hill.

[10:49] When the boulder got almost to the top, the boulder would roll all the way back down and he would have to repeat over and over and over throughout eternity. This is what you and me, you and I, proper grammar, do when we try to achieve salvation by works.

When we try to do things, when we pretend to be something we're not. When we, I've given you the list of works. When we do those things and we try to do those things, we are pushing a rock up a hill for it just to roll back down and not get anywhere.

It is all pointless and it leads to death. Don't be fooled. Don't be fooled into believing that you just need to be good.

Don't be fooled into believing that you just have to do a certain thing or pray a certain prayer. You need God to call you. You need God.

Do not be fooled. If you are trying to be someone you're not, if you're trying to be moral and be good, if you're trying to gain your salvation through works, you are condemned.

[12:11] But there's good news. Romans 8.1 There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. Which means because of what we were enslaved to, what we were condemned by, what we tried to achieve, we were sentenced to death for, has been removed and can be removed by Christ and His life, death, and resurrection.

Then, there is no condemnation. There is life, life eternal with Jesus Christ because of His work on the cross and His death and resurrection. Now, I would have to imagine that no one would come out and say that they were trying to ascend to heaven by works.

I'm pretty sure that nobody would say that. But you would say something like, I'm just trying to be a good person. Or people around you would say, I'm just trying to be good. I'm just trying to love those people around me. I'm just trying to live a good, balanced life.

But see, we do when we try to gain salvation by works. I'm going to answer, I'm going to ask you a question.

One, if you're 100% honest, are you humble towards God? Another way to ask, are you repentant?

[13:38] Are you repentant for the things that you have done? Is God, is Jesus Christ your Lord? Or is He just your parole officer where you check in and tell Him how many good things you've done for Him?

Because I'm afraid that that's a lot of what we, we won't say it, but that's the picture we have. Is Jesus, think of all these things I've done for you. Look at God, look at how good I am and the prayers I've prayed and the people I've loved.

Jesus says, whoever follows me must deny himself, must die to himself and take up his cross. Luke 9. Notice which is first.

Deny yourself and then take up your cross. See, if you deny yourself, if you die to yourself, you will not boast about what you've done for Him.

Instead, you'll say, have mercy on me, a sinner. Let me, let me please you today. This is the day that you have made. It's a big difference. Big, big difference.

[14:47] So, we know the, we know the religious activities here in, in, in our churches. We, we, we can name them all. How about some religious activities in two other religions?

Hindu. A Hindu religion. Live a life that has a growing awareness of God. Learn about God. He's around everywhere. Sounds okay.

Worship an icon of your choosing. Okay? Pick a statue and worship it. Pray with chants and songs so that the gods can hear you. Hindu is where we get the word karma from or where the word karma comes from and the definition of karma is the path of right action.

So, it's a work, it's a do, do, do religion that leads to nowhere. Islam. Islam's big. Five pillars of Islam.

Do you know what they are? I'm going to pronounce these incorrect so don't judge me. Shahada, there is no God but Allah and Muhammad is his messenger. Okay?

[15:56] Number one. Salat, the practice of praying five times a day at times set by Allah. Zarkat, giving up, giving of a set amount to charity.

Psalm, fasting during Ramadan and haji. Muslims from all ethnic groups stand together in front of the Kaaba, I think, the cube-shaped building in Saudi Arabia.

You've seen it. It's supposed to be the holiest place for Muslims. works-based religion. Do, do, do, do, do, and it leads to nothing.

It's all works and it doesn't work. We have nothing to boast about before God and ourselves. If, however, you are a Christian, if you are born again, regenerate believer, and you believe that Jesus Christ came, died, and resurrected for your sins, then you can boast.

But you boast about Christ and you boast in Christ. Galatians 6, 14. But Paul says, but far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world.

[17:17] So, Abraham was not justified by works. Paul clearly communicates that. So, second point, Abraham was justified by faith.

And this we find in verses 3-5. It says, For what does the Scripture say? Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness.

Now, to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift, but as his due. And to the one who does not work, but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.

See, Paul uses the patriarch of the Jewish people. The father of them. They would all claim him. He uses him to make his argument. A man who lived 2,000 years before Christ, which means he lived 2,000 years plus some before Paul is writing this letter.

He chooses Abraham because what we do so often by we tend to elevate guys and put them on pedestals, don't we?

[18:27] John Piper, Billy Graham, David Platt, Bono. Come on, you're laughing, but it's true. That is an odd collection of people, but throw Bono in there.

But we do it. We lift up people and we say, sometimes we lift up our pastors. I did. And now I'm a pastor. I'm like, please don't lift me up. I lifted up my pastor and I thought, man, this guy, he's got it. He looks perfect like it. And we lift him up. See, the Jewish people lifted and elevated Abraham. The perfect, faithful patriarch.

And because of that, let's dig a little deeper. Abraham was called by God out of Ur, land of the Chaldeans.

Okay? It was an evil, pagan, worshiping country. Evil. Abraham was his name before Abraham. He was a pagan.

[19:37] He did not know who this God was when God called him. Out of the millions of people that God could have chosen, He chose Abram and God had no idea or Abram had no idea who this God was.

But God called him and he followed. He went where he didn't know. He obeyed without understanding. This is where the story ends for a lot of people.

See, we pick out this story and we pick out Abraham with Isaac where he obeys God and he takes Isaac up to sacrifice Isaac and God provides a goat for him.

So we say, oh, Abraham, he's so faithful. Hebrews 11 talks about Abraham being faithful, but there's more to the story. How about the story in Genesis 12 where Abraham tells Sarah, his wife, to lie and say she's his sister because he feared his life.

Not so honest. So we have Abraham who is faithful and we have Abraham who's sinful. What about later on?

[20:51] God has given Abraham the covenant. I'm going to bless you. I'm going to bless generations after you. Your people, your children's children's children will be blessed.

Abraham didn't believe God or didn't trust completely because what did he do? He had an adulterous affair with Hagar. Coming, his wife's idea, Sarah's idea, you need to have a son because you don't have one yet and you're getting old.

the luster is being removed. The shine from Abraham is being removed.

The elevated Jewish leader is just a man and a man in need of salvation. And this salvation comes to the conduit called faith.

Faith is the conduit. Now, some people will teach that my faith, I give Jesus, I give God my faith and I receive righteousness. That it's an exchange.

[21:59] That I have so much faith that God saves me. That is incorrect. Faith is the conduit by which we receive salvation.

And I'll explain in just a minute. Verse 3 says, For what does the Scripture say? Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness. Counted.

This word is a credit, a transaction, an exchange. See, Abraham believed the conduit and our Lord's righteousness came on him.

Transaction, exchange, credit. Here's why faith is a conduit and not an exchange. Okay? There's an exchange that happens but faith is not that trade.

I hope I'm not confusing you. If our faith wasn't a conduit but the payment for the price then we would have all room to boast.

[23 : 01] And then what Paul is saying here would not mean anything because we would be able to boast. Verse 4 says, Now to the one who works his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due.

Okay? Clear. God makes perfect sense. Which then is works-based salvation which Paul is proving impossible.

If this happens then the person who worked and received salvation, justification through his works receives glory and steals the glory reserved for God Almighty.

All creation was created for God's glory. Romans 11 36 For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever.

Amen. Now this is not just a conclusion to a thought. This is a proclamation. To him be glory forever and ever. Amen. John MacArthur says the primary purpose of the gospel is not to save men but to glorify God.

[24 : 15] Now let's John MacArthur said it but it's rooted in Scripture. Ephesians 3 20 and 21 Now to him who is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think according to the power at work within us to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever.

All generations forever and ever. Amen. It is an act by God on our lives and not the reverse. Now we do have responsibility.

We do have we do respond but not after or not until God has worked. Verse 5 And to the one who does not work but believes in him who justifies the ungodly his faith is counted as righteousness.

Praise God for verse 5. For the ungodly is you and it is me. That's the Muslim. That's the Hindu man. That's the pagan atheist.

All of us before Christ with a need greater than any other need. with a debt we could not pay. I'm going to read a story to you called A Great Debt Who Can Pay.

[25 : 37] I hope I don't bore you. Harry Ironside used to tell about a young Russian soldier because his father was a friend of Tsar Nicholas I. The young man had been made paymaster in one of the barracks.

The young man meant well but his character was not up to his responsibility. He took to gambling and eventually gambling away a great deal of the government's money as well as all of his own.

In due course the man received notice that a representative of the Tsar was coming to check accounts and he knew he was in trouble. That evening he got out the books and totaled the funds he owed.

Then he went to the safe and got out his own pitifully small amount of money. As he sat and looked at the two he was overwhelmed at the astronomical debt versus his own small change.

He was ruined. He knew he would be disgraced. At last the young soldier edit that for me John.

[26 : 49] at last the young soldier determined to take his life. He pulled out his revolver placed it on the table before him and wrote a summation of his misdeeds.

At the bottom of the ledger where he had totaled up his illegal borrowings he wrote a great debt who can pay. He decided that at the stroke of midnight he would die.

As the evening wore on the young soldier drew drowsy sleep. That night Tsar Nicholas I as was sometimes his custom made the rounds of the barracks.

Seeing a light he stopped looked in and saw the young man asleep. He recognized him immediately and looking over his shoulder saw the ledger and realized all that had taken place.

He was about to awaken him and put him under a rest when his eyes fastened on the young man's message a who can pay. Suddenly with a surge of magnanimity he reached over wrote one word at the bottom of the ledger and slipped out.

[28 : 00] When the young man awoke he glanced at the clock and saw that it was long after midnight he reached for his revolver to shoot himself but his eyes stood upon the ledger and he saw something that he had not seen!

before there beneath his writing a great debt who can pay was written Nicholas he was dumbfounded it was the tsar's signature he said to himself the tsar must have come by when I was asleep he has seen the book he knows all still he is willing to forgive me the young soldier then rested on the word of the tsar and the next morning a messenger came from the palace and with exactly the amount of the tsar could pay and the tsar did pay now we compare God's righteousness with our own tawdry performance we asked the question a great debt to God who can pay but then the Lord Jesus Christ says for the signs his name Jesus Christ only he can pay Jesus paid the debt that we could not pay remember that I said that faith is the conduit by which the righteousness of our

Lord Jesus was was imputed or exchanged or counted to us there was another exchange used by the same God conduit our sin was imputed or counted on him he bore the wrath of the Father intended for us Isaiah 53 verse 4 and 5 surely surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows yet we esteemed him stricken smitten by God and afflicted but he was wounded for our transgressions he was crushed for our iniquities upon him the chastisement that brought us peace and with his stripes we are healed 2nd Corinthians 5 21 some of you have this memorized for our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin so that in him we might become the righteousness of God Abraham was justified by faith not by works the third point this morning justification is a blessing verse 6 through 8 says just as

David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven and whose sins are covered blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin now Paul used Abraham for his argument and now he brings in David whom God the king whom God chose a man after God's own heart to make his argument a man who clearly understood God's grace turn to Psalm 51 and we have referenced this a few times throughout the book of Romans so far Psalm 51 is the psalm that David wrote after Nathan calls him out with his adulterous act with Bathsheba and the murderous act of killing her husband Uriah

David understood God's grace verse 1 have mercy on me O God according to your steadfast love according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions verse 2 wash me thoroughly from my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin for I know my transgressions and my sin is ever before me against you you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight so that you may be justified in your words and blameless in your judgment skip over to verse 10 created me a clean heart oh God and renew a right spirit within me cast me not away from your presence and take not your Holy Spirit from me restore to me the joy of your salvation and uphold me with a willing spirit that I will teach transgressors your ways and sinners will turn to you deliver me for blood guiltiness oh

[32 : 37] God oh God of my salvation and my tongue will sing aloud for your righteousness David understood God's grace the person of genuine faith is blessed another word for blessed is privileged or fortunate blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven and whose sins are covered privileged fortunate are you Abraham was justified only by faith and he was blessed David was justified blessed not in a stuff not in things he was blessed because he knew the creator God he was blessed because he knew at some point when he died he was going to be eternally with him he knew the promises of God and he believed them privileged and fortunate

David was justified only by faith and every believer has been justified only by faith I close with a story story is told of a poor farmer who had saved his money for years in order to buy an ox to pull his plow when he thought he had enough he started a long journey to town great distance he soon discovered the paper money that he was saving has been replaced by a new currency the date had long passed for the exchange because the man was illiterate he asked the schoolboy to write a letter to the president told the president in his letter about his dire situation and asking for an exception the president was touched by the letter and wrote back to the man said this the law must be followed because the deadline for exchanging bills has already passed the government can no longer change your bills for the new ones even the president is not exempt from this rule however because

I believe that you really worked hard to save this money I am changing your money for new money for my own personal funds so that you will be able to buy your ox there was nothing the farmer

could do he was shown favor by the president he was blessed by the president he was shown grace likewise when sinners us before christ have no ability none to buy their salvation we have to cast ourselves at the mercy of almighty god and accept by faith the lord's atoning work on their behalf on our behalf then we can stand we can stand forgiven and righteous not because of our works not because of what we've done but because of our lord jesus christ let's pray father we thank you for this time thank you for your word thank you that your word proclaims truth and in that truth tells of a redeeming story the redeeming story of us of abraham!
of david! and the call that you have on lives god i pray that you would call those to you this morning those that you have called that you have chosen god that you would bring people to you this morning for the first time they could not do anything but respond to the call that you have on their life i thank you for for justification i thank you that that i have nothing to boast about that nothing i've done has earned what you have done for me but what i can boast about i can boast about you and your son lord jesus christ i can boast about his life his death and his resurrection i can boast about the grace that you have shown us i can boast about the work that you're doing in this world around us i thank you for for calling me i thank you that i can stand here and call you father and i can pray to you i thank you for the people in this room that can do!
! we love you in Jesus name! in