

“Blessed Are They”

Sermons on Romans # 9

Texts: Romans 4:1-12; Psalm 32:1-11

Paul has said a number of striking things about the gospel. The gospel is the power of God for the salvation of all who believe. Through its proclamation, both the wrath of God as well as a righteousness from God are being revealed. Embracing the gospel through faith brings life, delivers us from God’s wrath and justifies us, that is, gives sinners a right-standing before God. In fact, these points are so striking that some of Paul’s critics could easily argue that this gospel was Paul’s invention and amounted to a betrayal of the Judaism which Paul claimed to be upholding. Paul must now prove that his gospel is no innovation. Not only was this gospel revealed to him by Jesus Christ, it is the same gospel believed by Abraham, the father of all the faithful.

Given the sorts of problems faced by the Roman church, it is vital for Paul to demonstrate to the Jews in Rome that the gospel he has been preaching is no mere innovation. As Paul has pointed out in Romans 2-3, the failure of the Jews to understand the true purpose of the law and the meaning of circumcision, does not at all mean that the Old Testament says nothing about the gospel that Paul is now preaching. In fact, for Paul, the Old Testament anticipates, indeed points the reader ahead to that one event which marks the turning point in redemptive history—the coming of Jesus Christ to inaugurate the long-expected messianic age of salvation in which God will deliver his people—Jew and Gentile—once for all from the guilt and power of sin. This is what God promised throughout the Old Testament, and what God has now accomplished through the person of his son.

Paul has already spoken to some of these matters earlier in the epistle. In Romans 2:28-29, Paul made the point that the true Jew is the one who believes God’s promise to save sinners, not someone who merely hears the law and trusts that by possessing the oracles of God, he is somehow exempt from judgment. In Romans 2, Paul has also addressed the question of Jewish superiority and the false hope on the part of those who undergo circumcision, thinking that it makes them members of the covenant and exempts them from that judgment which is coming upon the whole world.

In believing God’s promise, the true Jew recognizes that God has acted in Jesus Christ to bring about all that he has promised. Through faith in Christ’s blood, shed to redeem God’s people and to turn aside God’s wrath toward sinners, God justifies all of those who believe in Jesus. Trusting in the cross of Christ is the only way for sinners who are under the curse because of their sins to receive a right-standing before God, and this trust excludes all human boasting. Furthermore, far from eliminating the law from the life of a Christian, seeing the law in the light of the coming of Christ actually establishes proper role for the law, as both the teacher of sin and as the rule of gratitude.

To make his case in the most effective way possible, Paul will now demonstrate how Abraham, the father of Israel, was himself justified, and that Paul, far from inventing his own gospel, stands directly in the line of Abraham. In fact, Paul is preaching the same gospel which Abraham believed, only Paul is preaching that gospel in the glorious light of the dawn of the messianic age, and not through the dim shadows of Old Testament typology. That promised seed for which Abraham longed has now come in the person of Jesus Christ. If anyone had a right to boast before God, surely it would be Abraham. But if Paul can show that Abraham was justified by faith and not by works, then not even Abraham could boast before God. And if Abraham had nothing to boast about before God, then it is obvious, none of Paul’s

Jewish readers/hearers had anything to boast about either.¹

As we turn to our text in Romans 4 once again, we will divide our passage into two parts. In Romans 4:1-8, we will discuss God’s justification of the wicked, and then in the second part of our passage (vv. 9-13) we’ll discuss the relationship between faith and circumcision.

Having made the declaration in Romans 3:28 that “*a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law,*” Paul proceeds to show that this was the case for Abraham as well. But Paul not only uses Abraham as an example of the unity of the covenant of grace—namely that Abraham believed the same gospel that Paul is presently preaching—but Paul also uses this discussion to draw out some of the unstated implications of the doctrine of justification *sola fide*.² This means that Romans 4:1-8, is an elaboration of sorts upon Romans 3:27-28 where Paul makes the case that the doctrine of justification by faith alone necessarily eliminates all boasting while at the same time establishing the true purpose of the law.³

Asking yet another rhetorical question in verse 1 designed to flesh out this very point, Paul then raises the critical issue in verse 2 when he suggests how one of the possible answers to that rhetorical question would play out: “*What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? 2 If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about—but not before God.*” It is very important to notice that Paul speaks of Abraham as forefather of the Jews (προπάτορα) “according to the flesh” (κατὰ σάρκα)—a phrase which is omitted by the NIV—but which suggests several important things which ought to be considered. The first is that according to Israel’s own history, Abraham is father of the Jewish race.⁴ All Jews are the biological ancestors of Abraham. But a second point is soon to follow. While Abraham is clearly the historical/biological ancestor of those who call themselves Jews according to the flesh, Paul will soon make the point that Abraham has other children, children who are his in a different way, not through the flesh, but through faith in the promise.⁵

In verse 2, Paul offers one possible answer to the rhetorical question raised in verse 1. What if Abraham *was* justified by works? That Abraham was righteous because of his obedience was a view widely held among the Rabbis of Paul’s day.⁶ As we proceed through Paul’s argument here, we need to keep in mind

¹ Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, I.224.

² Moo, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 255.

³ Moo, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 259.

⁴ Morris, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 194.

⁵ Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, I.227.

⁶ Morris, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 195. This is precisely the point of contention with the advocates of the so-called New Perspective on Paul, who think that the view of Morris (representative of the historic Protestant interpretation of Paul on this point) is based upon a fundamental misunderstanding of Second Temple Judaism, which, according to the New Perspective, held to a theology based in God’s gracious election, and not a works-righteousness in the Pelagian/semi-Pelagian mode of the Roman Catholic church on the eve of the Reformation. See my discussion of this elsewhere in, Riddlebarger, “Reformed Confessionalism and the New Perspective on Paul,” on-line @

that this whole line of questioning by Paul is framed with the Rabbinic understanding Genesis 15:6 in the background, a passage which reads—“*Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.*” One passage in the Book of Jubilees (a second century BC Jewish apocalyptic book), interprets Genesis 15:6 as follows: “Abraham was perfect in all his deeds before the Lord,” (Jubilees 23:10). In Sirach 44:20 (from the apocrypha), we read: “Abraham kept the law of the Most High, and was taken into covenant with him; he established the covenant in his flesh, and when he was tested he was found faithful.”⁷ Clearly, then, a significant number of Jewish writers believed that Abraham was reckoned righteous as recounted in Genesis 15:6, because he obeyed the commandments of God. If this is the correct interpretation, Paul is wrong about justification *sola fide* being taught throughout the Old Testament. Therefore, Paul must prove that Abraham was not justified by works, but through the means of faith, and that justification is gracious and not a reward.⁸

To do this, Paul answers his own question with a kind of *reductio ad absurdum* (an argument which shows the absurdity of the premise). If Abraham was justified by works he had something to boast about. But the very idea of a sinner boasting before God is itself an absurdity. The way the sentence is constructed—“*but not before God*”—is designed to show the impossibility of standing before God on the day of judgment and claiming to have right-standing before God because of obedience to God’s commandments.⁹ Paul has already clearly shown that the Old Testament tells us that there is no one who has done good, no not one. Under the terms of covenant of works God made with Adam on behalf of the human race, Adam, as the divine image-bearer, was perfectly capable of obeying God’s commands and fulfilling the terms of the covenant. But after the fall of the human race into sin, all human boasting is necessarily excluded. We have all sinned in Adam. We have all sinned as individuals. There is not one of Adam’s fallen race who has done good and can then boast about it—no not one. Not even Abraham.

This is why Paul must appeal to Scripture in verse 3, to come up with the correct answer to the question framed back in verse 1, “*What does the Scripture say? `Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.*”¹⁰ As we have already noted, the text Paul cites is Genesis 15:6, and a number of Jewish scholars of the period interpreted Abraham’s faith in this passage as a kind of meritorious work. Cranfield cites the words of Rabbi Shemaiah from about 50 B.C. in a commentary on Exodus 14:15: “The faith with which your father Abraham believed in Me merits that I should divide the sea for you, as it is written: `and he believed in the Lord, and He counted it for righteousness.”¹¹ Since many Jews of

<http://www.alliancenet.org/pub/articles/riddlebarger.perspective.html>

⁷ Cited in Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 195, note 5.

⁸ Cf. Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 195.

⁹ Morris, *Epistle to the Romans*, p. 195.

¹⁰ γὰρ indicates that “Paul’s argument proceeds along the lines ‘Does Abraham really have matter for boasting before God? Not at all, for Scripture says . . .’” See Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p. 196. The fact that Scripture (ἡ γραφή) is singular may indicate that Paul is appealing to the Scripture as a whole (the Old Testament) of which Genesis 15:6 is cited as but one particularly relevant passage (Cf. Kasemann, *Commentary on Romans*, p. 106).

¹¹ Cranfield, *Commentary on Romans*, I.229.

this period understood Abraham's faith in a legalistic manner (as a good work), "in appealing to Gen 15:6 in support of his contention that Abraham was not justified on the ground of works and has no right to glory before God, Paul was deliberately appealing to a verse of Scripture which his fellow Jews generally assumed to be clear support for the diametrically opposite view."¹² The Jews had come to regard Abraham as an "ideal figure" of sorts, and were using the Genesis 15:6 text as a proof-text for their views.¹³ This is why Paul appeals to this text, so as to refute the Jewish misreading of the passage.

In verse 4, Paul makes his case by contrasting the way of works (the issue is a wage or reward which is earned) and that of grace (where a free gift from God is in view). By emphasizing the graciousness of Abraham's justification, and not the fact that Abraham's faith is the means by which God reckoned Abraham as righteous, Paul will be able to refute the mistaken notion that Abraham's faith was a good work which earned for him a justifying righteousness. Rather, the righteousness Abraham received from God through faith was not a reward, but an unmerited gift, an act of pure grace. And if Abraham's righteousness was a gift from God, then it wasn't earned, even by believing the promise.¹⁴ This was same point I made last time when I mentioned that we are not justified by the merits of faith. Rather through faith, we receive the merits of Jesus Christ our righteousness, ensuring that our justification is a gracious gift from God, and not a wage (reward) we have earned. Paul puts the matter this way in verse 4: "*Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation.*"

Once again, this assertion makes perfect sense against the backdrop of Paul's earlier point in Romans 2:6, that God will give to everyone according to what they have done. In the divine economy, anyone who obeys the terms of the covenant of works will receive that life promised to him by God. Since God is bound to bless his creatures for their obedience to his commandments as a matter of divine justice when they obey his commandments, God is obligated to give them their due. There is no grace involved whatsoever. Nor is there any gift involved, only justice. But this is the case before the fall and not after.

In verse 5, Paul moves from the theoretical to the historical. He's already made the point that no one has obeyed God and earned the reward as a matter of obligation. No one can! Indeed, because of human sin, the notion that anyone can earn the wage of eternal life and boast before God is an absurdity. But in verse 5, Paul speaks of the manner in which God saves people now that human sin is in the equation so as to demonstrate his mercy without doing violence to his justice. Says Paul, "*However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.*"

The contrast Paul sets out in verses 4 and 5 is between someone who trusts in his good works to earn favor with God, and someone who trusts in the promise of God without such confidence in their own good works.¹⁵ The latter is certainly the case with Abraham, since Genesis 15:6 makes no mention whatsoever of any work that Abraham performed, only that he believed the promise of God, and God therefore, reckoned him as righteousness, making the justification of Abraham an act of God's grace and

¹² Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, I.229.

¹³ Nygren, Commentary on Romans, p. 167.

¹⁴ Morris, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 197.

¹⁵ Morris, Epistle to the Romans, p. 198.

not a matter of divine obligation.¹⁶

Furthermore, we must not overlook the rather shocking fact that Paul speaks of Abraham, the great father of the faithful, as ἀσεβῆ or “wicked.” Someone who is wicked in this sense is one who violates the first table of the law (the first four commandments),¹⁷ which is why several modern English translations render the word as “ungodly” (NASB, ESV, NKJV). Because Paul regarded Abraham as “ungodly,” the great Abraham, like everyone else in Paul’s audience, is absolutely incapable of being justified by works, since sinners cannot put God in their debt. God owes them nothing. But since God justifies the wicked who believe God’s promise, the righteous status we receive must be a matter of divine grace and mercy. And God does this without sacrificing his justice, because Jesus Christ has satisfied God’s justice for those so justified by faith, apart from works. This is the case with Abraham. He did not seek to put God in his debt or perform an act of justifying obedience as the Rabbis were arguing. Rather knowing himself to be a sinner, Abraham believed God, and God reckoned him as righteous.

If you recall, some time ago, on Reformation Sunday, we discussed in some detail the fact that the words “God justifies the wicked” simply do not sound right to the human ear. So, I won’t focus upon that point now. But the comments of Scottish theologian James Denny are surely spot on as they say, “The whole Pauline gospel could be summed up in this one word - God justifies the ungodly....The paradoxical phrase, Him that justifieth the ungodly, does not suggest that justification is a fiction, whether legal or of any other sort, but that it is a miracle.”¹⁸ The justification of the ungodly is surely an act of God’s grace and not the result of God rewarding a sinner for performing a certain good work.

That Romans 4:5 and the statement that God justifies the ungodly, separates Christianity from all other religions ought to be self-evident. The religion of the fallen and sinful human mind is based upon the premise that good people go to heaven and bad people go to hell. This is the American religion and makes perfect sense to people because it appeals to vague notions of divine justice, although it does not regard the human race from God’s perspective—in rebellion against him, guilty before him, and subject to his just judgments. Christianity teaches that sinners—not the self-righteous—can be justified through faith in Jesus Christ, while all other religions seek divine justice through the merit of good works, through spiritual quests, or through some sort of mystical union with the divine, whatever the divine is understood to be. Paul’s gospel is that God justifies the wicked, by grace, through faith, on account of the merits of Christ, which is why people cannot be saved apart from the preaching of the gospel, where the justifying righteousness of God is revealed. This is how God justifies tax-collectors and prostitutes while religious people who see no need for the righteousness of Christ, inevitably suffer eternal loss.

Romans 4:5 also presents a serious problem for Tridentine Roman Catholicism. The Roman church does not like the concept of justification *sola fide*. In fact, the Council of Trent (1544), which was convened by the Roman church as a direct response to the emerging Protestant movement, stated in Canon IX on justification: “If any one saith, that by faith alone the impious is justified; in such wise as to mean, that nothing else is required to co-operate in order to the obtaining the grace of Justification, and that it is not in any way necessary, that he be prepared and disposed by the movement of his own will; let him be

¹⁶ Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, I.230-231.

¹⁷ Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, I.111-112.

¹⁸ Cited in Morris, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 199, n. 23.

anathema.” In other words, says Rome, if anybody believes that God justifies the ungodly through faith alone, apart from human co-operation with divine grace, they will come under the divine anathema! With these words, Rome ceased to be a true church.

As we saw last time, not only do the over twenty church fathers (including St. Thomas Aquinas) agree with Luther on the translation of Romans 3:28 that faith “alone,” is required by the context, but how exactly do the “ungodly” co-operate with grace to obtain justification? In Romans 4:5, Paul is speaking to this very point regarding the justification of the ungodly by affirming the fact that Abraham contributed absolutely nothing to his justification—he believed the promise and was reckoned as righteous! Rome can blame Martin Luther for the view of justification we have been presenting until our Lord returns, but the fact of the matter is, it was Paul who said, “*for we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from observing the law,*” and “*However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.*”

To reinforce his point one more time, in verses 6-8, Paul returns to yet another Old Testament example of justification by grace through faith alone, on account of Christ alone, this time citing directly from Psalm 32 (our Old Testament lesson), in which David speaks of the blessedness of “*the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works.*” David is an important example for Paul, because in David’s case, there is no question of his doing good works and earning a right-standing before God. The biblical account everywhere describes David as a sinner. The fact that David is justified through faith and not works, adds great weight to Paul’s case regarding Abraham.

When David speaks of the blessedness of the forgiveness of sin in Psalm 32, he does so with the personal experience of a sinner to whom God credits (imputes) a justifying righteousness apart from any good works. In Psalm 32:1-2, now quoted by Paul in Romans 4:7-8 to bolster his argument that justification is gracious and not a reward, David states, “*Blessed are they whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him.*” After David’s sin with Bathsheba and the arranged death of her husband on the field of battle, and now being confronted by Nathan with his sins, David knows full well what it is like to feel God’s disfavor—the wasting away, the inward groaning, his strength being sapped like on a hot summer day.

With these words, we learn a great deal about our justification. For one thing, to be justified is to receive God’s blessing and to experience the wonderful joy which comes from participating in the kingdom of God with the knowledge that our sins are forgiven and that God is now favorably disposed to us.¹⁹ In the light of the coming of Jesus Christ, and in light of Paul’s discussion of the work of Christ on our behalf in Romans 3:21-31, it is clear from Paul’s discussion of Psalm 32 that justification, in part, entails the forgiveness of sins because of Christ’s redeeming and propitiatory work for us on the cross. Indeed, Jesus bears in his own body the punishment for our sins, so that we can be forgiven. Because of Christ’s shed blood, our sins are covered, so that the Lord will never again count them against us. And this blessing, as wonderful as it is, can never come through human works. This blessing is accomplished for us by Christ’s saving work on Calvary. It becomes ours only through the means of faith in the promise. The blessing is utterly gracious and even avails for the most ungodly of persons who renounce their own righteousness and instead, seek after the righteousness of Christ through faith.

¹⁹ F. Hauck, “Blessed,” in Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, ed. G. Kittel, trans. Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 1979), IV.367.

We now turn to the second part of text, Romans 4:9-12, where Paul discusses the relationship between faith and circumcision.

As we have mentioned earlier in this series, any case Paul can make that the gospel is not his own invention, must include some discussion of circumcision, since circumcision was the sign and seal of the covenant of grace which God made with Abraham. Circumcision not only marked the Jew off from the Gentile in a physical sense, circumcision was considered by the Jew to be that physical sign which ensured his place among the people of God. The word “uncircumcised,” on the other hand, was a term of derision used by the Jews of the Gentiles, and indeed anyone not circumcised, even if born to Jewish parents, was regarded as a non-Jew, likely destined for eternal torment.²⁰

There is no verb in verse 9, but what follows is yet another rhetorical question, obviously arising from the fact according to the Scripture, both David and Abraham were justified by faith apart from works, even before the coming of Christ, although the faith which justified them both looked forward to the coming of Jesus Christ. The question then, is what happens to those outside the covenant line—i.e. the Gentiles (the uncircumcised) who knew nothing of circumcision? If the Gentiles can be justified without being circumcised, this raises a serious obstacle to the Jewish assumption that circumcision is a meritorious work which ensures that any circumcised Jew will escape the day of wrath.

Thus, Paul asks in the first part of verse 9, “*is this blessedness only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised?*” so as to press the point about the false assumption on the part of the Jews that God’s blessing was limited to Jews only, because only Israel possessed the sign and seal of circumcision.²¹ In the second part of the verse—*we have been saying that Abraham’s faith was credited to him as righteousness*—Paul cites Genesis 15:6, yet again, not to answer the question rhetorical question in the first half of the verse, but to make the point that the Old Testament does indeed speak authoritatively to these matters.²² The Jew must accept what their own scriptures say.

Since Abraham’s faith was reckoned as righteousness, Paul’s next question has to do with the circumstances behind this reckoning of Abraham’s faith, especially in relationship to circumcision. In verse 10, Paul asks his next question, “*under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before?*” before he immediately answers it, “*it was not after, but before!*” Paul’s question and answer gets right to the heart of the Jewish assumption that circumcision is a kind of meritorious work. By simply following the chronology of the Genesis account, Abraham believes the promise in Genesis 15:6, but does not submit to circumcision until Genesis 17. This was a period of time the rabbis believed to be nearly thirty years,²³ although the biblical text tells us that Ishamel was born when Abraham was eighty-six (Genesis 16:16) and Abraham was himself circumcised when ninety-nine (Genesis 17:24). In either case, Abraham received his right-standing before God through faith, not works well before he received the sign and seal of the covenant some years later.

²⁰ Morris, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 201, Cf. note 36.

²¹ Cranfield, Commentary on Romans, I.234-235.

²² Moo, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 267.

²³ Moo, The Epistle to the Romans, p. 268.

If this is the case, what, then, does circumcision mean? Paul now tells us in verse 11. *“And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised.”* Every Jew knew that God commanded circumcision of his people under the old covenant, the same way baptism is commanded of God’s people under the new. Paul will take up the discussion of Christian baptism in Romans 6. But in the Genesis 17 account, Abraham’s circumcision was a sign and a seal of his membership in the covenant of grace, a sign given by God to his people and to their children (Genesis 17:9 ff). This is why the circumcision of Abraham’s son Isaac took place on the eighth day and why entire households including believers and their children are baptized throughout the Book of Acts (16:15; 33).

But in the context of his argument in Romans, Paul makes the point that circumcision is God’s seal upon Abraham after he was already reckoned righteous through faith, years before. Paul’s point to his Jewish reader is that to be circumcised (whether in Abraham’s case as an adult—or in the normal case of circumcision on the eighth day) is not to perform a meritorious work. To be circumcised is to take upon oneself the sign and seal which ratified God’s solemn covenant oath, *“I will be your God and you will be my people.”* But in Romans, Paul emphasizes that Abraham was justified *before* being circumcised, a point which completely undermines the Jewish assumption that circumcision is meritorious. If Abraham was justified before being circumcised, then it is possible for Gentiles (the uncircumcised) to be justified, even though they have never heard of circumcision! And this proves Paul’s point that justification is by grace through faith, and not grounded in human works. If Gentiles can be justified without ever being circumcised, then circumcision doesn’t justify!

The broader redemptive-historical purpose behind Abraham’s faith and subsequent circumcision is now spelled in the latter part of verse 11: *“So then, he [Abraham] is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them.”* This means that Abraham is the spiritual father of all the faithful—Jew or Gentile. He is the father of all who believe the gospel, without exception. He is the father of all those in the covenant of grace, which, since the coming of Christ, now includes Jew as well as Gentile, through the means of faith and not by works, just as in the case of Abraham.

Says Paul in verse 12, *“and he is also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.”* Because Abraham was justified by faith, believed the promise, and received in his own flesh and sign and seal of that righteousness which was imputed to him through faith, Abraham is not only the father of those Gentiles who embrace Jesus Christ through faith and enter into the covenant of grace, he is the spiritual father of all those Jews who reject the notion that Abraham was saved by works or that circumcision is somehow a meritorious act. Yes, Abraham is the biological father of all those who are Jews according to the flesh. But he is the spiritual father only of those Jews who trust in the shed blood of Jesus to save them from their sins. He is not the spiritual father of those who boast in the law, but don’t obey it, of those who are circumcised but who don’t believe the promise. Nor is Abraham the spiritual father of those who think that they are exempt from the judgment of God, because they are his biological children.

What, then, do we say by way of application?

What should jump out at us from this passage is simply the fact that justification has its ground in the grace of God and in the merits of Jesus Christ, and not in any human work, or religious ceremony, even those commanded by God. Justification is truly an act of unspeakable grace in that God does indeed justify wicked and ungodly people who call upon the name of Christ, and who renounce all

confidence in their own righteousness. This beloved, is the only way any one of us will stand in the judgment. For unless we are washed with Christ's blood, forgiven of our sins and reckoned as righteous because we are clothed in the perfect righteousness of Jesus Christ, we will never enter heaven. Instead, we will face divine justice, and our sins will condemn us.

As the chief persecutor of the church of Jesus, the apostle Paul knows exactly of what David speaks in Psalm 32 when David describes the horrible state of those under the conviction of sin. Paul also can identify with David when he speaks of the blessedness of the person whose transgressions are forgiven and whose sins are covered by the blood and righteousness of Christ. Like David, like Abraham, like all of us sitting here this morning, Paul's sins were great and many and had his justification depended upon his good works, he would be doomed. But Paul knows that while his own righteousness is as dung, through faith he has received the righteousness of Christ.

Therefore, echoing the joy of David, Paul can likewise affirm, "Blessed is the person whose sin the LORD does not count against them." And this blessedness is a free gift to all who trust in Jesus Christ whether Jew or Gentile. This beloved is the gospel. This is how a righteousness from God is revealed!