

GRACE TO YOU

ROMANS 4:1-12

STOP TRYING AND START TRUSTING



FIRST BYRON CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

DAVID MURRAY
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INTRODUCTION

Do you remember the time you first realized you were saved by grace alone. Do you remember the joy, the laughter, the exhilaration of embracing salvation through faith in Christ? Do you remember the relief, the liberty, the freedom you experienced when you realized that God was offering you a salvation that had zero contribution from you? Do you ever wonder where that joy has gone? What happened to that exhilaration that spiritual high? Do you ever wish you could get it back again? Are you asking, **How do I recover the joy of my salvation?** Paul has a surprising answer for us in Romans 4:1-12.

BACKGROUND

In general terms we can summarize the first three chapters of Romans as follows:

- Chapter 1. The Gentiles are guilty
- Chapter 2. The Jews are guilty
- Chapter 3:1-19. Everyone's guilty
- Chapter 3:20-31. Get from deadly guilt to healthy joy through faith in Jesus.

Paul got us from deadly guilt to healthy joy by introducing us to seven characters (see previous sermon). But how do I stay joyful? How do I restore my joy? How do I increase my joy? Paul answers by introducing us to two other characters, Mr Abraham and Mr David.



What can we learn from Mr Abraham?



1. FOLLOW THE EXAMPLE OF ABRAHAM

Paul attacked opponents of justification by faith with what they thought was their strongest argument: Abraham (1). Jewish teachers regarded Abraham as perfectly righteous by his own works. Paul conceded that if the Jews were correct, then Abraham had a reason to boast (and therefore all who follow his example do also). But Paul rejects that hypothetical (2), arguing his point by appealing to what the Old Testament said about Abraham.

Abraham believed God (3)

When it comes to salvation, everyone believes. We just vary in what we believe. Some believe in themselves: their riches, wisdom, goodness, or pedigree. Some believe in the church or religion. Some believe in science. Some believe in an idol. Some believe there's nothing to believe in. Everyone believes; we just differ in what we believe in.

What about Abraham? **He believed God** (Gen. 15:6). It's as simple and straightforward as that. He put no faith in anything or anyone other than God. God was the sole and only object of his faith. It wasn't God +, or God *, or God-, or "God but..." It was God completely, totally, simply, and exclusively. It wasn't just faith in God's Word but faith in God personally and relationally. He didn't just believe there was a God but believed in (into) God.

The literal translation of "believed" in Genesis 15:6 is "kept on Amen-ing." Abraham kept on believing, kept on considering as reliable, kept on trusting the Trustworthy." This was not a new faith but a new exercise of a faith begun in the past (Gen 12:1-4; Heb. 11:8).

God justified Abraham (3)

Just as Gen 15:6 was not the first time Abraham believed, it was not the first time Abraham was justified by faith. It was the first time Abraham's faith in God's promise of a Seed was revealed in the Bible (Gal. 3:16). It was the first time God openly attested his justification. Whenever that first moment of of "God-alone-faith" connected Abraham with God, something miraculous happened. The whole of God's righteousness transferred irrevocably to Abraham's account. God declared Abraham just, righteous, perfect, and accepted. That wasn't a lie because God actually credited Abraham's account with his righteousness. That's the "it" in this verse. The "it" was not Abraham's faith but what Abraham's faith was in: God's righteousness.

God justifies all believers (9-12)

We'll come back to David's experience in verses 6-8 in a moment, but let's jump down to Paul's application of the Abraham story in verses 9-12. Anticipating that some Gentiles might say, "Well this gracious salvation is only for the circumcised," Paul reminded them that Abraham believed and was justified before he was circumcised and therefore a massive encouragement to the uncircumcised (9-11). But the Jews were also to learn from Abraham's example not to put their faith in their circumcision but to follow the faith of Abraham in God alone (12).

CHANGING OUR STORIES WITH GOD'S STORY

There are only two ways to be saved (4-5). Working for God or not working for God. Wages or gift. God owes us a debt or God pays our debts. Deserved or undeserved. Works or faith. Justifying ourselves or justified by God. Rewarded or redeemed. Which is the happiest way? It also happens to be the only way.

Believers have the whole of God's righteousness. As soon as you believe, the whole of God's righteousness is transferred to your account and it's an irrevocable transfer. When God counts you righteous, he's not lying.



Any other Old Testament character to support this?



2. FEEL THE EXPERIENCE OF DAVID

Paul then turned to the experience of David not only to further assure the Romans of salvation apart from their works but to experience the blessed joys in this way of salvation

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" (6-8).

Paul encourages his readers to enter into four blessed joys:

- The blessed joy of Christ's perfect character and conduct being counted as ours (6).
- The blessed joy of not contributing one good work to our salvation (7)
- The blessed joy of getting all our evil works forgiven and covered (7)
- The blessed joy of God not counting our evil works against us (8)

CHANGING OUR STORIES WITH GOD'S STORY

Quadruple your joy at the beginning of each day. Before you start the day, follow Abraham's example to feel David's experience. Nothing you do or fail to do can increase or decrease your righteousness account.

Quadruple your joy at the end of each day. As you close your eyes, reflecting on the days successes and failures, let faith in Christ give you joy in Christ. Nothing you did or didn't do, increased or reduced your account.

Quadruple your joy when you fall and fail. Don't wait until you feel better or do better, but believe and be justified as soon as you sin. Let faith determine your feelings rather than feelings determine your faith.

Quadruple your joy when you remember past sin. For some of us, when we look back on our lives, we remember a particularly sinful time or moment and shame steals our joy. If anyone was vulnerable here, it was David, and yet he used four joys to overwrite the pain of that memory.

Quadruple your joy when you feel worthless. Maybe childhood or domestic abuse has made you feel you are worth nothing. Perhaps it's bullying at school. Maybe it's that you are not as clever or gifted or successful as others. Or could be you feel lonely and forgotten.

Quadruple your joy when you are dying. Whether thinking about our death or actually dying, death scares us. Sometimes it's fear of the process, but sometimes it's fear about whether we'll go to heaven or hell when we do die. Every thought about whether we are good enough drains joy and fills with fear. Every thought about whether Christ is good enough fills with joy and drains fear.

YOU CAN TRUST TRYING
OR TRY TRUSTING



Hear God's Story > Change your story > Tell the story > Change others' stories



SUMMARY



A NEW CHAPTER

Stop. Stop trying and start trusting. Trying harder is hard. Trusting harder is easy. Please don't take another step of life until you stop trying (even 1%) and start trusting (100%).

Restore. Restore joy to your faith by restoring your faith in Jesus. The more you try to find joy in what you've done, the less you will find joy in what he's done (and vice versa).

Practice. Practice joy-restoring faith this week. As soon as you sin, remind yourself, you have not lost one ounce of God's righteousness in your account. You are as righteous after you sin as before you sinned. See how much joy that gives you.

Prayer. Joyful Savior, you save joyfully to give us a joyful salvation. Please restore the joy of my salvation by helping me to follow Abraham's example of faith and David's experience of joy.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What was your greatest joy when you were first saved?
2. On a scale of 0-10, how would you rate your present level of joy in your salvation?
3. What has reduced your joy and what have you tried to restore it?
4. What is justification? See Heidelberg 60-64 and Shorter Catechism 33.
5. How much of God's righteousness is yours right now?
6. Which of David's four joys is your greatest joy?

First Byron Christian Reformed Church
8541 Byron Center Ave SW, Byron Center, MI 49315
Phone: (616) 878-9768
www.firstbyroncrc.org

Pastor David Murray
www.thestorychanger.life