



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

6420 Churchill Way | Dallas, Texas | 75230 | t 972.239.5371 | believerschapeldallas.org

The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Romans 4:1-8

"Abraham's Salvation"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] In the exposition of the word we are in Romans chapter 4 this morning, and for the Scripture reading, will you take your Bibles and turn with me while I read verses 1 through 8, Romans chapter 4, verse 1 through verse 8? Now, just one word by way of connection of chapter 4 with chapter 3, the apostle has just set forth, in some detail that God's plan of salvation is through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ. That redemption is received by the instrumentality of faith and the salvation is one that is ours on the principle of grace.

Well that would raise quite a few questions in the minds of some who had the idea that the Law of Moses was the source of salvation and that works was the principle by which we received rite and title to heaven. So the apostle is answering questions that might arise in the minds of some who had false ideas concerning personal salvation. He says in verse 1 of chapter 4, "What shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath something of which to glory; but not before God." Of course, when Paul says that he doesn't have anything to glory before God; he rejects the condition stated in the first part of that verse. Abraham, therefore, was not justified by works. Turning to the Bible, he says,

"For what saith the Scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness."

Now that does not mean that his faith is substituted for righteousness, but, rather, his faith is counted toward the obtaining of righteousness in the sense that faith is the instrumentality, or the means by which, that righteousness is received in grace. We don't have time to deal with the technical side of that, but that is the essence of the construction here and harmonizes the statement with other many statements of Paul concerning the place of faith and salvation. It's the means, the instrumentality, by which we receive the salvation of God. Remember the statement I made last week, and I made it because, I think, it's a very important one. We are not saved by faith, but we are saved by Christ through faith. So if we remember that we will not be confused when individuals say that we are saved by faith. They mean that we are saved through faith as an instrumentality. We are saved by Christ through faith.

At this point the apostle turns to another illustration. It really is not so much an illustration as a support of the Abrahamic illustration because it's clear, since the remainder of the chapter is further exposition of Abraham's experiences, that David is not considered a parallel illustration, but, simply, confirmatory of Abraham's case which is the illustration he is expounding. "Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness apart from works, Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." I will ask you a question and then we will stop because I'll try to answer the question in the message. Paul says that David describes "the blessedness of the man unto whom God imputeth righteousness," but he cites a text which is negative in force. "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." Is non-imputation of sin the same as the imputation of righteousness? Is the negative the kind of thing that contains

within it the positive as well? Well we'll seek to answer that when we come to the message in a moment or two.

May the Lord bless this reading of his word, and let's bow together, now, for a time of prayer.

[Prayer removed from audio]

[Message] The subject in the continuation of our exposition of Paul's letter to the Romans today is “Abraham's Salvation.” As many of you know in the audience, I am traveling up every week to Chicago in order to serve as Professor of Systematic Theology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School this fall, and when I wrote the message for you, which you are able to read, which I am going to give, it so happened that this would have been the third time that I would have spoken on Romans chapter 4 verses 1 through 8 over the past twenty or twenty-five years.

In the mean time, this week, however, I came back on Friday night and then early Saturday morning went down to Salado to speak at a conference down there. And as we got out of Waco, I had not had breakfast, and we saw this nice little place called, I think, Tanglewood Inn. And we went over, and I was amazed to look on the menu and see "fried mush" on the menu. Now I'm a Southern boy, but I never have had "fried mush" in my life. And I thought of all the mornings that that seemed to appeal to me, this was it. I wanted something different, and so I ordered "fried mush," and it was good. [Laughter] It was very good. And in fact, it was so good I ate everything on the plate, including the sausage that they brought with it and was late for the message by about five minutes. [Laughter] One of the people had prophesied, however, that I would be there and proved himself a prophet because as I came it so happened the way the audience was there, they could see, and I came in and everybody started clapping at the fulfilled prophesy that I appeared there.

Therefore, when I got there, by the way what I was leading up to was that, I spoke on this passage because I was asked to speak on the subject of the grace of God and the use of the Old Testament and the New Testament. And in the light of the fact that we have here a passage which is really an exposition of certain Old Testament texts and the truth of them, it would be very nice, I thought, to give this message which I'm going to give to you, and it would save me an extra preparation too, since I'm traveling up each week to Chicago. Incidentally, the reason I did that, Yankees in the audience, please don't listen, the reason I did it is because these Yankees need truth. [Laughter] And that's why I decided that it was imperative that I travel up there every week and teach on the faculty of that very good seminary.

Now I comment in the message, and I'm leading up to this, that it seems to be a coincidence that every time that I preach on this passage, there is some very well publicized murder that has just taken place. The first time that I preached on this publically, that I remember, was upon the occasion in nineteen hundred and fifty-three, when there was a very well publicized murder case in the United States, the murder of Bobby Greenlease by Bonnie Heady, who was convicted of that crime and then was sentenced to death. A few days after the sentence, or before the execution, someone attempted to minister, in a Christian way, to Bonnie Heady. And in the Dallas paper there was a long editorial on the editorial page, by Mr. Harry Withers, concerning the response of Bonnie Heady to the attempt to minister to her. She said, "I have never had anything to do with religion during my life, and I don't intend to start now. The only thing I want to do now is to die in the gas chamber." And then Mr. Withers went on to expound upon that particular statement of hers, and in the course of it, he made a very interesting statement himself, a very well respected newspaperman in community, of course, but he made this statement, "Judaism and Christianity have set conduct as the compass by which their believers may attain the perfect life here and eternal life, or bliss hereafter." Now it is evident that the theology of Mr. Withers is not true to the Scriptures. It's not true to what the Bible says about the men of the Old Testament, or the men of the New Testament.

The next time that I preached on this subject was the Sunday after John F. Kennedy was assassinated here in Dallas on a Friday, and that was in nineteen hundred and sixty-three, then years later. There were many things, of course, that were said in the newspapers at that time, and one of the things that I remember a commentator making was simply this, he said President Kennedy has gone to his reward. Now, of course, I am disqualified, as you well-know, from knowing the destiny of John Fitzgerald Kennedy. But if he is in heaven, you can be sure of one thing. He is not in heaven as a result of a reward. That is, heaven is not the reward of his life. The Bible tells us very plainly that if we are, ultimately, to be in heaven, it is not as a reward of our good works. It is a result of a saving faith of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now that is Paul's great emphasis in the context of this passage that we are looking at today. He has just expounded the doctrine of justification by faith in one of the normative passages of the New Testament, this, the normative passage on justification by grace. He has then, also expounded in the remaining verses of chapter 3 some of the consequences that flow out of the doctrine that he is proclaiming. And the first that he mentions is that the way of salvation that the apostle proclaims is a way of salvation that means that we cannot possible boast. "Where is boasting then?" he asks in verse 27 of chapter 3. "It is excluded," or shut out. "By what sort of law? By the law of works? No: but by the law of faith."

Now, then in chapter 4, he continues his emphasis. He speaks about Abraham, and he talks about glorying or boasting. He says, "If Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God." So what he is trying to do is to show that the way of salvation taught in Scripture means that we cannot possibly boast in what happens to us. That's his point. It's expressed most plainly and fully in that 5th verse of chapter 4. "But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted with a view to the obtaining of righteousness."

P. T. Forsyth, who was the Barth before Barth, but more conservative than Barth, said, "Christianity is not the sacrifice that we make, it is the sacrifice that we trust," and he alluded, of

course, to the work that Jesus Christ did on the cross, that if a man becomes a believer and is saved it is because of what Christ has done. It is because of that sacrifice that he has made. We are saved by the sacrificial lamb of God, through faith, but it is Christ who saves, and Christ who saves through faith.

Now this chapter is not a very easy chapter to read, but it's very important because it does deal with the ultimate question, the way of salvation, and it's particularly appropriate that Paul should bring up Abraham because Abraham was thought, by Judaism, to be a man justified by works. It seems startling, to us, to think that anyone could read the Bible and come to the conclusion that Abraham was justified by works. But that is exactly what Rabbinic Judaism has taught concerning him. For example, in one of the pieces of literature of Rabbinic Judaism, it is said, "So you will find that our father Abraham became the heir of this and of the coming world simply by the merit of the faith with which he believed in the Lord, as it is written, he believed in the Lord and he counted it to him for righteousness."

Now, notice that expression, "By the merit of faith," so that for them Abraham was justified by the merit of faith. His faith is the thing that gained him merit before God, and enabled him to be justified. In fact, in other passages in Rabbinic Judaism referring to that same passage in Genesis 15:6, "Then he believed in the LORD; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness," you will find in some of the rabbinic literature the text cited in this way, "And he believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for merit." So that Abraham is conceived to be an individual who is justified by merit before the Lord. His faith is regarded as a work that Abraham does which merits salvation.

Now the apostle, knowing that and knowing also the exposition that was given of Genesis chapter 15 verse 6, alludes to that text right here. You can see then why the apostle would, no doubt, have someone come to him and say, "Look Paul, in your exposition of the way of salvation, you have eliminated law works as a source of salvation and consequent boasting, but what about the teaching of the Bible? We hear you saying what you are saying, but what does the Bible say? What do the

Scriptures say? And for them, of course, the Scriptures were the Old Testament. What do they say? Do they not say that men were justified by keeping the law?

And this is what Paul has in mind when he comes in chapter 4 and asks the question, "What shall we say then that Abraham, our father, has found as pertaining to the flesh?" Is it true that Abraham was justified as I have been saying a man is justified on the principle of grace through the instrumentality of faith, not by the merit of faith, not by the merit of anything other than the merit of Christ, but through the instrumentality of faith and on the principle of grace as a free gift? That, I think, is the purpose of this entire 4th chapter. It is to show that there is only one way of salvation. And that way of salvation is taught in the Old Testament, and it is taught in the New Testament as well. The details are slightly different for we have progress in the Divine Revelation. They did not, in the Old Testament, believe in a Jesus who was born in Bethlehem of a woman by the name of Mary, but they looked forward to the redemption that the redeemer promised in the Old Testament would accomplish. Further details are given as the Scriptures are unfolded. But in essence the message is the same, and, in essence, their faith is saving faith. The faith that Abraham exhibited in Genesis 15 is the same faith that you and I exhibit today. The details are slightly different.

So the apostle in the 4th chapter is expounding the one way of salvation, Old Testament or New Testament, men are saved on the principle of grace through the instrumentality of faith. Now this is something that the apostle has alluded to twice already. He has said in the 2nd verse of the 1st chapter concerning the gospel, that it was promised before hand by his prophets in the Holy Scriptures, and then in chapter 3 verse 21, he says, "Now the righteousness of God apart from the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets." So if you had come to Paul and you had said to Paul, "Paul, is the doctrine you are proclaiming different from the doctrine that we have been told down through the centuries?" He would have said, "Absolutely not, what I am saying to you is witnessed by the law and the prophets and the gospel of God is that which is promised beforehand by his prophets in the Holy Scriptures. I am just expounding to you the same message that God has been teaching down through the centuries."

Now the problem is set forth for us in that 1st verse, "What shall we say then that Abraham has found as pertaining to the flesh?" He's still thinking this boasting, that justification by faith excludes boasting. Now, "What shall we say that Abraham has found?" "If," he says, "Abraham were justified by works as it is claimed then he would have something of which to boast." But Paul adds, "He would not be able to boast before God." And in the denial of being able to boast before God, for salvation is not by what we do, he denies the premise as well that Abraham was justified by works. And then he asks the simple question, "What do the Scriptures say?"

Now, I love that. I must say. That may seem very simple to you but I'm around a lot of people who talk about the Bible all the time, and they have very, very many ideas about how the Bible ought to be read, and I just happen to love it when someone says, "Well let's turn to the supreme court of biblical teaching. Let's turn to the Bible." That's what he means, "For what saith the Scripture?" How relevant it was to turn to Abraham too, because of all of the men of the Old Testament, if you're going to have a man justified by works, he would stand out. If you're going to call the men of the Old Testament saints, in the sense in which a large religious organization calls men and women saints today, at the top of the list would be Saint Abraham because he was a man who surely qualified to be a saint. He was a man, to whom God spoke in Ur of the Chaldees, and he went out not knowing where he was going, remarkable demonstration of faith, then later on when they were in the land and the herdsmen of Lot and the herdsmen of Abraham began to squabble among themselves.

You remember when we talked on that passage, I told you I had a friend who's a Southern Baptist minister, and he says, "That's where the Baptist church began," strife in the Bible. Now he smiled when he said that because I have another good Baptist friend who says that we're not really feeling good among the Baptists unless we're squabbling a little bit over something. That's not so bad. They squabbled a lot in the early church over biblical doctrine, just think of the Council of Jerusalem and the squabbling that took place there and, as a result, the clarity of the doctrine that

came out of that conference, nothing wrong in having a good old argument over the teaching of the word of God.

Well finally, or rather, in that instance Abraham, in the squabbling, said all right Lot you just take any place in the land that you want, and so, Lot chose, that which to him was, the finest most fertile plot of ground that God had supposedly given to Abraham. He chose that beautiful garden. It was like the garden of God, before those cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. Now then, God, of course, said all right Abraham, privately, he took him up and he said, now look in every direction, north, east, south, and west, and it included Lot's property too, he said I'm going to give the whole thing to you, but it was a manifestation of humanity on the part of Lot's uncle and love for him as well, remarkable exhibition of selflessness. And of course, finally, when he offered up Isaac on the altar, that is the great evidence of the faith of Abraham and the voice from heaven speaks out and says now Abraham I know that you love me because you've not withheld your only son from me. In the New Testament Paul uses that in the 8th of Romans as an expression of the greatness of the love of God. So if any man could have ever been justified by what he did Abraham could have been justified by what he did, but Abraham was not justified by what he did, and furthermore, Abraham tells us in the New Testament that he cannot do anything for anyone, that the Scriptures cannot do for them.

Do you remember that the Lord Jesus told a little story about Lazarus and Father Abraham? It's striking that that's the story found in the New Testament because here is this rich man. He had beautiful purple garments. He faired sumptuously. He ate fried mush every morning. [Laughter] And he poured that warm syrup over it, with the butter, and he had all of the sausage and bacon that he wanted, and here is the beggar outside his gate who was in the poor garments, who didn't have anything to eat. Lazarus, evidently, was a man of faith. The rich man, well he was not a man of faith, and the time came that both died. Lazarus, when he died, was carried to Abraham's bosom, and the rich man was in Hades in torment. And in the midst of the story, the Lord Jesus says that the rich man said to the Lord, or asked that Lazarus might be sent to dip his finger in water and cool

his tongue because he was in torment. And he was told that that was impossible, and furthermore there was a great gulf fixed, and those who wanted to come from Abraham's bosom to the right man in Hades could not come. I don't know who would want to do that.

Or the other way, they could not go the other way. In other words, their destiny was fixed. And then the rich man said well I have five brothers, please send Lazarus to my brothers and tell them the news in order that they might not suffer as I'm suffering. And you remember that Father Abraham said they have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them. And he said, oh no, send someone from the dead. They will surely believe someone who rises from the dead, and Abraham replies if they do not hear Moses and the prophets, they will not hear, though someone rise from the dead. So, that Abraham himself is testimony to the fact that he cannot do anything for anyone beyond this life, that the only thing that can be done for them is found right here in the word of God. So what shall we say that Abraham has found? Was he justified by works? No, not before God. What does the Bible say? "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness."

Now the way the apostle cites that text is very interesting because while he cites the Greek translation of the Old Testament here, he reverses the order of a couple of words. And in reversing the order of a couple of words achieves a great deal of emphasis on the word believe. And if you read this in the Greek text, that would be the emphatic word of the quotation. "Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness." In other words, Abraham believed. He did not achieve. Now he is thinking, of course, about the statement in Genesis chapter 15 and verse 6, where it is stated, "And Abraham believed in the LORD; and he counted it to him for righteousness." It is the time in Abraham's life when he had had the promise of the promised seed for some time, but no seed had come to him. He was still barren himself, and Sarah was barren. The only person they had was a man by the name of Eliezer in the house. And he was the steward. Sometimes stewards were the inheritors of pieces of property or the estates of individuals.

So Abraham said Lord what are you going to give me? You've promised me a seed, and the only thing I have is this Eliezer in my house. And the Lord said Eliezer shall not inherit Abraham. Someone from your own loins will inherit. Now later on he will say someone from Sarah, but here he says it's going to be your own son, Abraham. And then to enforce it he takes Abraham out. It's nighttime. And he says Abraham take a look at the sky. And Abraham took a look at the sky which was filled with the stars of that night. And he said, "So shall thy seed be." And the Bible says, "And he believed in the LORD; and it was accounted to him for righteousness." Now that is one of the most important texts in the Bible. Dr. Chafer, who was the founder of Dallas Seminary, used to like to point out that the word believe in Hebrew is the word *aman* from which we get amen, ultimately, the term that we use so often at the end of our prayers. Amen or *aman*, it's translated in the New Testament in our Lord's words, "Verily I say unto you," by that our Lord achieves a great deal of emphasis upon the truthfulness of the things that he says.

Dr. Chafer used to like to say, "Abraham amened the Lord." In other words, God gave him the message, "So shall thy seed be," Abraham said, "Amen Lord." That's faith, that is, what is required in faith. That is, that the message which concerns the redemptive plan of God in Jesus Christ for that was essentially in that statement, "So shall thy seed be," Abraham would never have a seed like the stars of the heaven were it not for the fact that, ultimately, the seed would come and die on the cross at Calvary and make the fulfillment of that promise possible. So that, essentially, he believed in the coming of the Messiah, and all he did was simply believe the truth in that statement, and he was justified before the Lord, God. He didn't say I think I believe that statement, and I'll go out and do a few good works. I'll join the church. I will observe the ordinances. I will educate myself. I will seek to secure a little culture. I will try to do a good turn to my neighbor or so. But he believed in the Lord, and it was reckoned to him for righteousness. It was as simple as that. And by the illustration that follows, when he says, "Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth, his faith is counted for righteousness." It's clear that faith is regarded not as a work, but as a gift of God

because he says, "To him that worketh not, but believeth." If believing was a work that we did, we would be saying, "But to him that worketh not, but believeth." That very fact lets us know that faith is a gift of God. It is something given us by God. So that, in the final analysis, our salvation is of the Lord. It's possessed through faith.

Now he says, "What says the Scripture? Abraham believed." He did not achieve. He simply believed. He simply received from the Lord, God. Now as a good preacher should do, he illustrates. A very common illustration, an illustration of a working man, applies to all people but preachers. He says, "Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt." Let's just assume a person is an employee of General Motors, and at the end of the two week period of time, or the monthly period of time when he receives his check, after he's labored for the fifteen days or the thirty days, the check is either placed on his desk, or he goes to the cashier, or the pay window, or whatever you do if you work for General Motors, and you get your check. He doesn't fall down on his knees and say, "Oh General Motors I do praise thee and thank thee for the grace manifested to me in the gift of this check." It's something that they owe him. It's a debt that is paid him. It's something for which he has worked. It's not grace. Now I know that many of you say, "That's what some people that I know ought to say when they get their check," [Laughter] but ideally that's not true.

So he says, "Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. But to him that worketh not," when he receives this free gift, what is it? It is of grace. And that's what believing is. Isn't it interesting, in fact, Abraham so beautifully illustrates, and then Paul's use of it confirms, that this plan and program which God has been carrying out is a unified plan which God in measured sovereign steps is carrying out through the centuries? In the ages past, he determined Abraham will exist. Abraham will be justified by faith. And so the time came when Abraham appeared on the scene and God called him. He appeared to him, "Abraham come out of Ur of the Chaldees, and follow me." Abraham did. He became the father of the faithful. God instituted his program through Abraham, which is not finished yet, for it looks on into the future and the Second

Advent of the Lord Jesus Christ and the kingdom that shall come. And so Abraham is here in history at a certain time. Then the time comes for the Lord Jesus Christ to die. The seed comes. The seed accomplishes the work of redemption. And then the apostles begin to preach, and the apostles preach, and they speak of Abraham. Everything is following in the measured steps of a sovereign triune God.

And then in nineteen hundred and forty-one, in February, the word of God comes to an individual, and his name is Samuel Lewis Johnson, Jr., and he responds, by Thy grace of God, to the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. Now it, from heaven’s standpoint, is not unexpected. Every now and then those saints walk by and take a brief look at the Lambs Book of Life. "Well what do you know, there it is, "Samuel Lewis Johnson, Jr," written in there before the foundation of the world. Now I know it's there. I'd like to see the handwriting. I confess. I'd like to see whether it's as nice as mine. [Laughter] But nevertheless, it's there. You see everything is transpiring according to God's program. He's not surprised. He's not surprised when Donald Grey Barnhouse preached the gospel, and I responded, and the Lord rushed over and said, "Did I put his name down there?" [Laughter] "Yea, there it is." [Laughter] He's not astonished by anything. He possesses infinite wisdom, infinite knowledge. These are the attributes of our great God. So he's not astonished. He doesn't learn anything. He didn't have to go to Dallas Seminary or Trinity Seminary or anything like that. He wouldn't learn one thing from all of the things that are said there. Think of all the wasted words as far as God is concerned. So you see this should be a tremendous encouragement to us that these things are transpiring according to God's program.

Well now he says, in this great text, I think it's the important text of this passage, "But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness." It's clear that with the apostle, there are two kinds of people. There are workers, and there are non-workers. And those workers are never justified. It's the non-workers who are justified in spiritual things. When we get to heaven and we stand before the gate, if there is such a thing, I don't think there is, but just for our thinking, if we stand there, and if we have the faith that God has

given us in the Lord Jesus Christ, we shall have absolute rite and title to heaven because we have the righteousness of God. And we can be bold when we stand there. "To him that worketh not, but believeth," I said. That's a word of grace. In a moment, Paul will express it plainly. He'll say in verse 16, "Therefore," the way of salvation, "Is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure," so he wants men to know that they are saved, so that in order to know that they are saved, it has to be by the principle of grace, a free gift. And if it's by grace, the only way that you can receive it is not by doing, but by non-doing things. So this is the divine method. He justifies the only. He justifies the ungodly. The only kinds of people that are saved are ungodly people. Why? Because there are no godly people, there isn't one godly person in this auditorium, naturally. There isn't one godly person in any church auditorium, naturally. There are no godly people. Dr. Barnhouse says that when he was a young man he remembered seeing a booklet which had the title "Ungodly People: The Only Kind of People That God Saves." That's true.

Eight times, incidentally, in verse 3 through verse 11, he uses the word translated impute, count, reckon. Some people say the Authorized Version made a big mistake in doing that. No, the writers of the Authorized Version had a little literary sensibility. It's true, we could have rendered it impute every time. That would have been all right, or count, or reckon. But these three words mean the same thing, to impute, to count or to reckon. It's simply to put to one's account. Paul wrote Philemon, remember, and he was writing about Onesimus, that servant. And in verse 18 of the chapter he says if Onesimus owes you anything, or if he's wronged you in any way, put that to my account. I will repay. Well that's what this word means. When a man believes in the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ, his faith is the means by which he receives righteousness. It is put to his account. My account in heaven reads, "Righteousness of God." Now if you put it in money, it would be infinite amounts of money are on my account. It's just as if you went to pay a bill at a store and you owed it, you thought. And you asked to pay it, and the man looks at your account and says, "But your account is paid." And you say, "Well now wait a minute, I know I owe." "But sir, I wasn't supposed to tell you this, but I want you to know that someone has come in, and he has put a certain

amount of money to your account. Evidently you have done him some good deed." Righteousness is put to our account by the Lord God when we believe. And as we sing "Jesus Thy robe of righteousness, my beauty is my glorious dress."

Now at this point he introduces the parallel of David. This is not another illustration. It's simply; David is brought in because David is the recipient of covenantal promises which the exposition of certain aspects of the Abrahamic promises. God said to Abraham, "Kings shall come out of you." And when David came along full details were given concerning the kings. So we speak of the Davidic covenant. It really is part of the Abrahamic fundamental promises. Now Paul says, "Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness apart from works." So he says, David, in his Psalm, Psalm 32, he speaks about the blessedness of the man who has righteousness imputed to him apart from works. Now surprisingly, however, Paul, when he turns to cite the text, cites a text that is negative. There is no statement here that says that righteousness is imputed to an individual. It's rather sins are not imputed to them. Listen, "Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." He doesn't say "impute righteousness." He says "not impute sin."

Now some Bible teachers, unfortunately, not thinking to deeply about this, have said, "Well in the Old Testament they didn't understand the doctrine of justification by faith. And even Peter didn't. He always talks about forgiveness. He doesn't talk about justification, but Paul, the preeminent theologian, he talks about justification. So Paul has been given further knowledge. He's been given knowledge, not only of the negative, but also of the positive, whereas in the Old Testament and Peter, they only had knowledge of the negative. They talked about forgiveness, the forgiveness of the things that we have done.

Now those Bible teachers didn't go and study the Shorter Catechism. When I was growing up, I didn't learn much, I grant you. I was not converted until I was twenty-five, but don't blame it on that church. They had very poor material with which to work. They had no idea that my name was in the Lamb's Book of Life. In fact, many would have doubted that such was possible. But

nevertheless, they did teach me some things from the Shorter Catechism. And I do remember in the discussion of sin, or maybe it was in the Westminster Confession of Faith, but anyway, in the discussion of sin, I was told, "Sins are not only sins of commission, but sins of omission as well." In other words, our acts of sin are not simply the things that we do, but the things that we ought to have done which we did not do. They are also reckoned as sins as well. Now then if that is true, sins of commission are covered by the forgiveness of God. "Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven," whose sins are covered. But what about those sins of omission? What should I have done? Well I should have presented the Lord with a perfectly righteousness life if I'm going to be justified by the things that I do. Now, if I am forgiven for not presenting him with a perfect righteousness, I am reckoned by God, therefore as possessing that positive perfect righteousness. Therefore, the non-imputation of sin is equivalent to the imputation of righteousness. My Bible teaching friend should have just studied the Westminster Confession of Faith or the Shorter Catechism. They would have understood that when Paul said this, he was not being illogical. We're being illogical.

That's the great difficulty people have with the study of the Bible. And it's particularly true of seminary students. There may be one of them lurking around in this audience right now. That's one of the great failings of seminary students. They look at something like that and they say, "Well we have a problem here." Well speak for yourself young man. The problem may be there for you for a while, but if you will stick to studying the word of God, the problems will, ultimately, resolve, may take ten or fifteen years for some of them, but they will be resolved. There is no problem here, if you understand what sin is. So when the apostle says, "Blessed the man whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin." He is, as Paul says, "Describing the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness apart from works."

So I say, "God justifies the ungodly." Abraham was such. He was an ungodly man. He was a good man who trusted in works until he was justified, like so many good men trust in works, but

they are ungodly. The Christian is a man who believes God justifies ungodly men. And if you try to do something else, that proves you don't understand that. If someone says to you, "But God justifies the ungodly." And you say, "Yes, yes, I see, but I really think that I ought to clean up my life a little bit before I really respond," then you don't understand. God justifies the ungodly. So if you say, "But if, but if," you don't understand God justifies the ungodly. Come just like you are, as ungodly as you are. That's what qualifies you to come. But if you start apologizing for your ungodliness, seeking to improve it, you don't really understand how ungodly you are. All those other things that you do, "but, if," they only increase your ungodliness.

Isn't it wonderful, this bookkeeping of the Lord God? There are three steps in it. When Adam sinned, he put on the books of every human being sin, guilt, condemnation. We sinned in Adam. When Christ died there was imputed to him the ungodliness and unrighteousness of the people of God, and he bore to the full their sin. And when he cried out, "My God, My God, Why hast Thou forsaken me?" and then, "It is paid," he paid their debt. And, then in time, as the Holy Spirit brings the individual to faith in Christ, the third item in this amazing piece of bookkeeping takes place. The righteousness of God is imputed to the person who believes in the Lord Jesus Christ. Now Paul says here David describes the blessedness of the man, "Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin."

Are we blessed? Can you honestly say, "I am blessed?" If you have believed in Jesus Christ that's what you can say, if you have not believed in him, you may be able to say it as you flee to the cross and receive as a free gift what you could never earn. Come as you are, ungodly as you are, nice and pretty and as attractive, approved by the standards of men about you, but you are ungodly. Come like you are. Receive as a free gift the salvation of God, then you'll be able to sing, "Nothing in my hand I bring, Simply to Thy Cross I cling." May God help you to come. Let's stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father we are so grateful to Thee for these wonderful words spoken by the Apostle Paul. We acknowledge, Lord, our ungodliness. But our gratitude for the gift of the Lord Jesus Christ and the righteousness of God, O Father, how wonderful Thou hast been to us. And we pray, Lord, that if there is someone here who has not yet come, O God, bring them to their spiritual senses. May they see themselves as ungodly, Christ as the redeemer. And may they so desire the righteousness...

[RECORDING ENDS ABRUPTLY]