March 2, 2003 Northwest Bible Church  
Worship Service Alan Conner  
  
Rom. 4:1-5  
Abraham and Justification by Faith Alone  
  
  
INTRO  
Paul knows that many of the Jewish readers of his epistle are straddling the fence, doubtful, suspicious of his teaching. They need convincing. He knows that he cannot just state his belief, he must also prove it.   
  
I. INTRODUCING THE WITNESSES.  
  
Four witnesses to support His gospel of justification by faith alone.   
  
Two explicitly named witnesses:   
Two implicitly named witnesses:   
  
  
II. ABRAHAM WAS JUSTIFIED BY FAITH, NOT WORKS (4:1-5).  
  
v. 1 Paul raises Abraham as a test case for doctrine of justification by faith alone. Paul seems to be specifically developing his point found in 3:27-28.   
  
"According to the flesh" =  
  
v. 2 The conditional sentence states the idea that IF Abraham’s righteousness was based on his works, then he would have reason to boast. This was the belief of Rabbinic Judaism.   
  
"But" Paul adds concerning Abraham, "not before God," that is, the truth of the matter is that Abraham can’t boast before God because his righteousness is not based on his works, for he is a sinner like everyone else. See the word "ungodly" in v. 5.   
  
v. 3 "For" brings in the Scripture of Gen. 15:6 to give an answer as to how did Abraham become righteous before God. Not by works, but by faith.   
  
vv. 4-5 In v. 4 Paul illustrates the principle of that works involve earning merit and v. 5 shows that justification is not based on this principle of work-based merit.   
  
v. 4 The principle of payroll.  
  
v. 5 "But" indicates a strong contrast. The gospel is quite different than the illustration. The point is that when it comes to justification, we do not earn it like we earn our wages. Abraham teaches us that righteousness comes by faith, and not by works. So salvation is not like a salary.   
  
The principle of v. 2 must be remembered: if justification is by works then boasting is allowed, but if it is by faith, boasting is not allowed. Or, simply:  
Works = merit = boasting  
Faith = grace = no boasting  
  
Conclusion: Abraham cannot boast before God because his righteousness before God is not based on his works but on his faith.  
  
  
III. GEN. 15:6 – A CLOSER LOOK.  
  
Referred to three times in this chapter: vv. 3, 9, 22. Also Gal. 3:6; Jas. 2:23.  
  
A. DOES NOT MEAN: Abraham’s faith was a righteous act which is the basis of God crediting him as righteous.   
  
B. IT DOES MEAN: Rather, the whole phrase is a short hand way of saying that by the means of his faith, God credited His righteousness to Abraham (3:22; Phil. 3:9). This is actually spelled out in the following verses:  
v. 6 "to whom God credits righteousness apart from works"  
v. 11 "that righteousness might be credited to them (who believe )."  
  
  
C. Abraham’s faith in this context was in believing God’s covenant that he would give him a seed that in number that would rival the stars of the heavens. But we also know from other places that his faith included a knowledge of Christ, (Jn. 8:56; Heb. 11:16; Gen. 12:3).   
  
  
IMPORTANT CONCLUSIONS  
  
1) Works can never justify or make one righteous before God because they would have to be 100% perfect. Justification comes only by faith.  
  
2) Faith has no merit.   
  
3) Saving faith will always be imperfect.