



## Sermon Transcript October 25, 2020

### The Gospel The Righteousness of God Received Romans 3:25-4:25

This message from the Bible was addressed originally to the people of Wethersfield Evangelical Free Church on October 25, 2020 at 511 Maple Street, Wethersfield, CT, 06109 by Dr. Scott W. Solberg. This is a transcription that bears the strength and weaknesses of oral delivery. It is not meant to be a polished essay. An audio and video version of this sermon may also be found on the church website at [www.wethefc.com](http://www.wethefc.com).

**Sermon Text: Romans 3:27 - 4:25**

**Romans 3:27** Then what becomes of our boasting? It is excluded. By what kind of law? By a law of works? No, but by the law of faith. <sup>28</sup> For we hold that one is justified by faith apart from works of the law. <sup>29</sup> Or is God the God of Jews only? Is he not the God of Gentiles also? Yes, of Gentiles also, <sup>30</sup> since God is one—who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. <sup>31</sup> Do we then overthrow the law by his faith? By no means! On the contrary, we uphold the law.

**Romans 4:1** What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh? <sup>2</sup> For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. <sup>3</sup> For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness.” <sup>4</sup> Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift but as his due. <sup>5</sup> And to the one who does not work but believe in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness, <sup>6</sup> just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works:

<sup>7</sup> “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; <sup>8</sup> blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin.”

<sup>9</sup> Is this blessing the only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? For we say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness. <sup>10</sup> How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before he was circumcised. <sup>11</sup> He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well, <sup>12</sup> and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised.

<sup>13</sup> For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. <sup>14</sup> For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void.

<sup>15</sup> For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.

<sup>16</sup> That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all. <sup>17</sup> as it is written, “I

have made you the father of many nations”- in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. <sup>18</sup> In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, “So shall your offspring be.” <sup>19</sup> He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old, or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah’s womb. <sup>20</sup> No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, <sup>21</sup> fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. <sup>22</sup> That is why his faith was “counted to him as righteousness.” <sup>23</sup> But the words “it was counted to him” were not written for his sake alone, <sup>24</sup> but for others also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, <sup>25</sup> who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

## Introduction

I love hearing stories of how people come to faith in Christ. The former slave trader, John Newton, who later penned the hymn *Amazing Grace*, first turned in faith to Jesus while in a raging storm in the middle of an ocean. Chuck Colson, former aide to President Nixon, gave his heart to Christ in a car that was pulled over to the side of a road. C. S. Lewis, the author of *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *Mere Christianity* converted to Christ while riding in a side car of his brother’s motorcycle on the way to the zoo. Some of you first expressed faith in Jesus while kneeling along the side of your bed and others did so while attending a church service. Some of you came to faith in Jesus in the midst of great hardship and others of you just found yourself believing and you find it hard to pinpoint a time and a place when you first believed.

Here is how it happened for C. S. Lewis. Three days before he was making his way to the local zoo, he had a long conversation with two friends who were Christians. One of these friends was J. R. R. Tolkien, who wrote *The Lord of the Rings* and the other was a man by the name of Hugo Dyson. They were up until 3:00 in the morning arguing over whether or not truth about God could be communicated through story and myth. After Tolkien left, Dyson continued to share his faith with Lewis and told him how Christianity puts a believer at peace and frees him from his sin and then helps straighten out his life. Three days later, Lewis found himself in the side car of his brother’s motorcycle on the way to the zoo. Of this ride he said, “When we set out, I did not believe that Jesus was the Son of God and when we reached the zoo I did.” It was on this day that Lewis was made right with God.

Chuck Colson was one of the central figures of the Watergate scandal under President Nixon. As his life began to unravel, a friend of his by the name of Tom Philips confessed to Colson: “I have accepted Jesus Christ. I have committed my whole life to him and it has been the most marvelous experience of my life.” Tom Philips was the president of Raytheon, a leading aerospace and defense manufacturer located in Massachusetts. During his conversation with Colson, Philips shared with Colson a portion of C. S. Lewis’ book *Mere Christianity*. Colson could feel his heart being warmed to what Philips was sharing with him, but when Philips asked if Colson would like to give his life to Christ, Colson said he wasn’t ready. Philips told Colson to read Lewis’ book and the gospel of John. He then prayed for Chuck, while Colson was holding back the tears. Colson got into his car and began to drive away but he couldn’t see through the tears forming in his eyes. He began to sob uncontrollably and he pulled off to the side of the road. It was at this point he cried out to God, “Take me!” “Take me!” It was on this day that Colson was made right with God.

After serving his term in prison for his role in Watergate, Colson founded a ministry called Prison Fellowship. Through this ministry, untold numbers of prisoners from many different countries have come to faith in Christ. One such man is a man from Scotland, His name is Alan. Due to drinking and heavy drug use, Alan’s life began to unravel. One day, he was pursued by a person with whom he had a long feud. This encounter led to a fight in which the other man died. Alan was found guilty of culpable homicide and was sentenced to nine years in prison. He was a man consumed with anger. One night, while serving out his prison term, he went to a Prison Fellowship meeting. He heard stories of how God had transformed the lives of other prisoners and that through Jesus Christ, he could be forgiven and granted a new start in life. That night he went back to his cell and began to seek God with all of his heart. He came to faith in Christ and God changed his life. Upon his release from prison, he began to attend a church where the pastor also came to faith in prison through Prison Fellowship. Alan found Jesus and was made right with God.

Reflecting on these stories, I am forced to conclude that while each story is unique, at the same time, they are all the same. Each person came to a point where they recognized that if they wanted to be right with God they needed Jesus. We saw this last week when we talked about **“the righteousness of God revealed.”** God reveals his righteousness to us through Christ and the cross. This morning I want to talk about the **“the righteousness of God received.”** As was demonstrated to us in these stories, we receive the righteousness of God through faith. A key verse for us this morning is Romans 3:28. *“For we hold that one is **justified by faith** apart from works*

*of the law.*” The word *justified* means “to be declared righteous.” We are made right with God through faith in Jesus. “*Faith*” is what is common about each of these stories.

I have been at that spot on numerous occasions, when someone moves from unbelief to belief and in doing so, repents of their sin and then turns in faith to Jesus. It is that point that I have the profound privilege of looking them in the eyes and assuring them that they are forgiven by God. They are now right with God. In writing to pastors, Harold Senkbiel says, “whenever a person admits their sin before God and us, then you and I are under orders. We are duty bound . . . as emissaries of the living Christ: we say, “All your sin—including that one—has been placed on Jesus’ back and he has taken it all away with him in his death.”<sup>1</sup> In his name, the name of Jesus, you are forgiven!

Sometimes, when I am in that situation, I find myself wrestling with doubt. I find myself fighting within myself thinking, “there has to be more to it than that!” Isn’t there something I need to do to prove myself worthy? That is not what the Bible says. It says that we are justified, made right with God, through faith in Jesus Christ. This morning, I want us to look at **the righteousness of God received**. The question I want to ask is simply this: Is it true? Are we really made right with God through faith in Jesus Christ?

### **Righteousness Received by Faith: No Surprise**

First of all, if you have been tracking with us through the book of Romans, this should not catch you by surprise. It should not surprise you to hear Paul say in verse 28, “*For we hold that one is justified—made right with God—by faith.*” I like the phrase *for we hold*. Paul is saying with this word that “this is where we hang our hat.” Or, “this is **the point** we have been driving home.” It shouldn’t surprise us to hear Paul say that one is made right with God by faith. Because if it is not by faith, we have no hope.

The main point Paul has been driving home in the first three chapters of Romans is summarized in Romans 3:10, “*None is righteous, no not one.*” He is referring here to our legal standing before God. He says in Romans 3:9 that we are *all under sin*. In the first three chapters of Romans, Paul says this applies just as much to the person who lives a good moral life as it does to the person who lives a life of tremendous immorality. This applies to the respectable academic like C. S. Lewis, the accomplished president of a major company like Raytheon—Tom Philips—and the powerful advisor to the President of the United States, who frequents the Oval Office where decisions are made that impact a nation and the entire world, Chuck Colson. These men who occupy positions of credibility are just as much under sin as people like Alan, who came to the end of his

rope when he found himself in prison from a life of addiction and anger, resulting in the taking of another man's life. *There is none righteous, not even one.*

This doesn't mean we are all as bad as we can possibly be. But while there may be degrees to which we sin, we are all equally lost and incapable of making ourselves right with God. Tim Keller illustrates this by asking us to imagine three people trying to swim from Hawaii to Japan. The first swimmer can't swim at all; he sinks as soon as he gets beyond his depth. The second swimmer is an average swimmer, and he flounders for a little while before drowning. The final swimmer is a championship swimmer and goes strong for about 30 miles. But after 30 miles she begins to struggle and at 40 miles begins to sink and at 50 miles drowns. To which Keller asks, "is one more drowned than the others?" "No!"<sup>2</sup> So it is with those *under sin*. We are all equally lost and equally condemned in our sin.

This is what Paul is driving at in verse 27 when he asks, "*Where, then, is boasting? It is excluded.*" I have nothing in my hand to bring to God that obligates God to me. Paul describes the depravity of man at the end of Romans 1 by describing what is in our hearts. He says of man, "*They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless.*" Paul goes on to say later in Romans 3 that the words that come out of our mouths are Exhibit A to the sin that lives inside of us. When Abraham Lincoln was voted in as President of the United States and was awaiting his inauguration, Thomas Jones was charged with the responsibility of sculpting a bust of Lincoln to commemorate the occasion. Lincoln was an outsider to Washington and he was self-conscious of his gangly look. When the bust was presented to him, Lincoln looked it over and said, "Yep, that pretty much looks like the critter." That is the reaction we should have to Romans 1-3. After hearing Paul say that *there is no one righteous, not even one* we ought to see ourselves in that description and our honest reaction ought to be, "Yep, that pretty much looks like the critter."

So if we can't make ourselves right with God, we need someone outside of ourselves to make us right with God. So last week we affirmed **the righteousness of God is revealed** to us in Christ Jesus and the cross. Jesus was the perfect son of God who died on the cross to atone for our sin. The cross is the place where the wrath and the mercy of God is on display. On the cross, Jesus absorbs the judgment of God for our sin. On the cross, Jesus took our place. It is often called "the great exchange." On the cross, Jesus took our sin so that through faith in Jesus we can receive his righteousness. Do

you want to get right with God? You need to place your faith in Jesus. That is the only way you can be right with God. *For we hold that one is **justified by faith** apart from works of the law.*” After all Paul has said to this point, it should not come as a surprise. **The righteousness of God is received by faith.**

### **Righteousness Received by Faith: It Has Always Been This Way**

In order to illustrate the point that **righteousness is received by faith**, Paul comes to Romans 4 and uses the illustration of a man by the name of Abraham. He asks in verse 1, *What then shall we say was gained by Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh?* By bringing up Abraham, Paul is going all the way back to the beginning of the Bible, Genesis 12. Abraham is a beloved figure in the hearts of the religious Jew. Abraham is the father of the nation of Israel. Paul is making his appeal to the religious Jew who held that in order to be right with God you needed to keep the law. And he has already proven that no one is able to fully keep the law. So Paul asks them, “What do we learn from Abraham?” “How was Abraham made right with God.?”

Do you know what we learn from Abraham? Man has always been made right with God through faith. Man has never been made right with God through works or through being good. In verse 3, Paul quotes from Genesis 15:6 where God says of Abraham, *“Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness.”* There are two important points we learn from Abraham.

First of all, we learn that Abraham was made right with God through faith. In Romans 4, the word *belief* is used six times and the word *faith* is used nine times. It is the prominent theme of this chapter. Abraham was made right with God through faith all the way back in Genesis 15.

In Genesis 12, God came to Abraham and told him to leave his country and his family and to go to the land that God would show him. He was told that he would have many descendants; and through his offspring God would bless the nations of the world. Looking back from where we are on 2020, we know that the descendants of Abraham are the people of Israel, through whom came Jesus. It is through Jesus that God is blessing people from every nation and restoring this fallen world. But Abraham didn't know all of that. All Abraham had was a promise from God to give to him a descendant and land and somehow, through all of this, a nation would arise through whom God would bring his blessing to the world.

Three chapters later, Genesis 15, God comes to Abraham again and reiterates his promise. I don't know how old Abraham was in Genesis 15, but at the end of Genesis 16 he was 86 years old. I also know that at the beginning of Genesis 16 he had already been in the land God had promised to give him for ten years. But still there was no child given to Abraham and Sarah. I could imagine Abraham saying to God, "God, time is wasting away. God, are you aware of a thing called 'the biological clock?'" It may have actually stopped ticking.

Listen to the interchange between God and Abraham in Genesis 15:1-5. *"After these things, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: 'Fear not, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.' But Abram said, 'O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?' And Abram said, 'Behold, you have given to me no offspring, and a member of my household will be my heir.' And behold, the word of the LORD came to him: 'This man shall not be your heir, your very own son shall be your heir.' And he brought him outside and said, 'Look toward heaven and number the stars, if you are able to number them.' Then he said to him, 'So shall your offspring be.'" As crazy as it may have sounded, we read in verse 6, *"And he believed the LORD, and he counted it to him as righteousness."* Paul is saying here that it has always been by faith in the promise of God that one is made right with God. Just look at Abraham!*

The second thing we learn through Abraham is that being made right with God does not come from within us, but it comes from outside of us. Did you notice another important word in Romans 4—the word *counted*. It is a word used eleven times in Romans 4. *"Abraham believed God, and it was **counted** to him as righteousness."* And so Paul is saying that it has always been the case that righteousness is something that is given to us from outside of us and it is not something that can be manufactured from inside of us.

So what is this righteousness that was credited to Abraham because he believed in God's promise? The answer is found in Romans 4:36-8, where Paul quotes David in Psalm 32. *"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."* It is transgressions forgiven! It is sin covered! It is God not counting our sins against us! That is what it means to be made right with God. That blessing has always come to man through faith. Righteousness is something that is counted to us through faith.



If you grew up going to church camps as a little kid, or if you have been in our Boy's Brigade program, perhaps you remember a silly song that is often sung around the camp fire. It is the song "Father Abraham." It is a crazy song because each time you sing a verse of the song you add a body motion until almost every part of your body is moving. I call it the Christian version of the Hokey Pokey. I am not sure how the body motions were ever connected to this song. To be honest with you, when I was a kid, I had no idea what the meaning of the song was; or if it even had a meaning. The words go like this, "Father Abraham had many sons, many sons, sir, had Father Abraham. I am one of them, and so are you, so let's just praise the Lord." How could Abraham have many sons? He was 100 when his son of promise was born. But he did have many sons and Romans 4 tells us who his sons and daughters are.

These children of Abraham that Paul speaks of are the children of faith. Abraham was declared to be righteous prior to being circumcised and prior to the giving of the law. Abraham lived 500 years prior to the giving of the ten commandments. The point that Paul is making—primarily to his Jewish brothers—is that Abraham was not made right with God through keeping the law. Rather, he was declared to be righteous through faith in the promise of God. Therefore, the true children of Abraham are not children of the flesh, but the children of faith. That is why Paul says in verses 16-17, *"That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all. as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations"- in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist."* "I am one of them, and so are you. So let's just praise the Lord."

This is the way it has always been. I like how Paul ends our passage this morning. In Romans 4:23-25 he says, *"But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone, but for others also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification."* We are citizens of the kingdom of God through faith. We are made right with God through faith. It is through faith in Jesus that our sins are not counted against us.

### **Righteousness Received by Faith:**

My final point is a practical point. We talk about the need for faith if you want to be right with God. But what does faith look like? What does it mean to have faith? Again,

Abraham provides an example for us. The faith that makes us righteous is the faith that believes God has the power to do what he says he will do. That is what it says in verse 21 that Abraham “*was fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.*”

Some may take issue with the assertion that Abraham *was fully convinced* in his faith. What about the moments where he struggled? He took things into his own hands by fathering a child with Hagar, thinking that might be the child of promise. He and Sarah laughed, when he was told at the age of 99 that the following year Sarah would give birth to the long awaited promised son. Yet, give the man his due. For twenty-five years he trusted the promise of God over the long haul. If you ever doubt that, just look at his willingness to offer Isaac as a sacrifice at the command of God, believing that God would raise him from the dead. His faith was demonstrated in that he followed God and trusted God. It was a faith that impacted the way he lived. It led to acts of obedience. It was more than just an intellectual assent. It was a faith that shaped his life.

The kind of faith that is counted to us as righteousness is a faith of the mind and of the heart. It is a faith of the mind that concedes the fact that we are indeed sinful and in need of a righteousness from outside of us. It is a faith that identifies that righteousness as coming from Jesus Christ and his death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead. But it is not just a faith of the mind. It is also a faith of the heart. It is a trust in Jesus that changes and shapes the way we live. Like Abraham, we follow God and we trust what he tells us in the Bible, even if it goes against everything else around us. It is a belief that God has the power to do what God says he will do.

For the first seven years of his life, John Newton was raised by a Christian mother. But after she died, that influence was gone from this life. At the age of eleven, he was working on a merchant ship and was on the first of six sea-voyages. He turned away from the faith of his mother and he was known for his “unsettled behavior.” He said of himself, “I sinned with a high hand and made it my study to tempt and seduce others.” He eventually found himself working on a slave ship and he experienced a lot of hardship during this part of this life.

One night, while sleeping in the cabin of the ship, he was awakened by a violent wave. They were caught in a furious storm for several days and they did not think they would survive. The days leading up to the storm, to pass the time, he had been reading some Christian literature. At the height of the storm, he was surprised to hear himself cry out, “Lord have mercy.” He had an overwhelming sense of his sin, but he said he couldn’t bring himself to cry out to God because he thought his sins were too great to be forgiven.

So he decided to brace himself and wait for his doom. But the storm subsided and he began to read the Bible every spare moment he had. Then he said this, "I began to pray...to think of that Jesus that I had so often derided; I recollected his death: a death for sins not his own, but, as I remembered, for the sake of those who should put their trust in him." By the time the ship arrived in Ireland, he had been made right with God. He would later pen the words to one of the most recognizable songs in all the world. "Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me. I once was lost and now am found, was blind, but now I see."

## Conclusion

The promise of God is this. If you recognize that Jesus Christ is Lord of all, and if you confess your sin and put your trust in what Jesus has done for you on the cross, the promise is that you will be made right with God. The righteousness of Jesus will be counted to you. God is able to forgive you. It doesn't matter where you are when you turn in faith to Jesus. You can be in the middle of the ocean in the midst of a storm. You could be in the side-car of a motorcycle, in a car pulled off to the side of the road, by your bed or in your living room or right here at church. You can pass right now from living under sin and the judgment of God for sin to being made right with God. It simply requires faith. That is the way it has always been. "*But now*. . . there is a righteousness of God revealed in Christ and the cross. And there is a righteousness of God received by faith.

"Father, I know you are God and that I have sinned and made a mess of my life. I repent of my sin and ask for your forgiveness. As best as I know how, I turn in faith to Jesus who died on the cross for my sin. I know that he took the punishment for my sin. This morning, I want to submit to Jesus as the Lord of my life. Thank you for the promise that if we turn to you through faith, you make us right with God. Amen."

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<sup>1</sup>Harold Senkbiel *The Care of Souls: Cultivating a Pastor's Heart* (Lexham Press, 2019)

<sup>2</sup>Tim Keller *Romans 1-7 For You* (The Good Book Company: 2014) 67

**Sermon Title:** The Gospel: The Righteousness of God Received  
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COMMUNITY  
**GROUPS**

## Getting To Know Me Questions

1. What are you celebrating today and what concerns you?
2. What update do you have on the people you are praying for to come to faith? Is there anyone else to add to your list?

## Diving Into The Word

3. Read Romans 3:25-31: What apart from Christ, might you be tempted to boast in as the grounds for your confidence or self-worth today? How will you ensure that you boast only in Christ?
4. Take time to read Romans 4

How would you define faith from your reading of Romans 4?

How do you experience the blessing of forgiveness? Are there things that cause you to forget or under-appreciate it?

How is having hope that goes beyond all human hope of particular encouragement or comfort to you today?

Can you think of ways recently you acted in faith when it was hard? Are you being called to do so right now?

## Taking It Home

7. Close in prayer by having each person “fill in the blank.”

Lord, from this study, I want to thank you for \_\_\_\_\_  
and I need your help to \_\_\_\_\_.