

6. Justified by Faith

Romans 4:1-25

Introduction

What sort of knowledge do you have of your own family tree? How many generations could you trace back? Who would your earliest known ancestor be?

The Jew could trace his or her lineage back to Abraham. He was regarded as the father of the nation. Every Jew saw him as their father and themselves as his children and heirs. Being a son of Abraham was regarded as an enormous privilege. It involved a great inheritance. For the Jew it was like being sons of Murdoch or Packer, but much better. If you were a son of Murdoch or Packer it might mean inheriting a worldwide media empire. The Jew however believed that they inherited much more than this. It was nothing less than the world itself. "Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world (4:13). Abraham therefore was the old man as far as the Jews were concerned. He was the supreme example of what it meant for them to be Jewish.

In chapter 4 Paul purposely turned to what the Law reveals that Abraham had discovered about being justified. Please read the chapter to discover more about righteousness and Abraham.

What father Abraham discovered.

In the first five verses Paul outlines what father Abraham discovered about being declared to be righteous. Please read 5:1-5 again to discover what we find out about Abraham.

1. As far as the apostle was concerned, Abraham had no grounds for boasting before God. Why didn't he have any grounds for boasting?

2. Who or what was Abraham's faith in?

Think about it

The story of Abraham comes from the section of the Bible that Jews referred to as the Law (see Gen. 12-25). At the end of chapter 2 of Romans Paul concluded that faith doesn't nullify the Law but upholds it. How does the story of Abraham demonstrate this?

Paul is arguing here that some Jews who were physically children of Abraham were in real danger of not following in their father's footsteps. What do you think it was that they needed to discover for themselves?

What King David discovered

For the Jew to disagree with Paul over justification by faith might have seemed to be of no consequence. But Paul in this chapter demonstrated that they were not only disagreeing with him, they were also disagreeing with the old man himself, Abraham their forefather. But if that wasn't enough, Paul also brought in another heavy weight from Israel's past. Please read verse 6 to 8 to discover what king David thought about this matter.

3. Who are the blessed ones according to David?

Think about it

Paul wanted to show that David was also in agreement with father Abraham and quoted this psalm of David (Psalm 32:1-2) to demonstrate this. When God called Abraham, God promised to bless him and his descendants and all the families of the earth (Genesis 12:1-3). David wrote in this psalm about those who were truly blessed.

What needs to happen for people to enjoy God's blessing (see also Psalm 103:1-18)?

Do you approach God knowing that you have been forgiven? Do you enjoy this blessedness? How do you think we ought to respond to such a gift?

Abraham's Heirs

Paul turned next to the question of who are Abraham's heirs? Who are those who enjoy the blessing of Abraham? Who are the heirs of the promise of God to bless Abraham and his descendants? Who are Abraham's legitimate heirs? For many Jews being a rightful heir was not only a matter of being a descendant but also a matter of having been circumcised and been taught the Law. Again, Paul answers the question by looking at Abraham. Please read verses 9 to 15.

4. What were Abraham's circumstances at the time he was declared righteous and why was this important?

5. Abraham's true heirs include both those who are circumcised and those who are not. What make someone a child of Abraham and an heir?

6. Paul argues so that Abraham did not receive the promise through keeping the law. The law isn't a guarantee of inheritance. What does the Law guarantee for those who have it (14-15)?

7. Why must the promise come by faith (16-17)?

Think about it

Why is it important to be a child and heir of father Abraham?
What is it that his heirs inherit (see also Gen. 12:1-3)?

Are all Jews by birth truly children of Abraham according to Paul? What makes a physical descendant of Abraham also his heir?

Faith like Abraham

What does it mean to follow in father Abraham's footsteps and to have faith like him? Please read verse 18 to 25 where Abraham's faith is described in some detail.

8. What did Abraham's faith involve for him (18-21)?

9. What promise of God do we, who are declared right with God, believe in today (24-25)?

Think about it

At times when we look at ourselves, our own wickedness and sinfulness might cause us to think that we are as good as dead. We might be tempted to think that there is no hope for us. How is Abraham's story an encouragement to us?

Why is there hope for those who believe?

Conclusion

We all know the saying, “you can choose your friends, but you can’t choose your family”. Well it is not quite true. God gives us a chance to choose whether we want to be part of Abraham’s family. He gives us all the opportunity to have Abraham as our “old man” so that we might share in his inheritance.

What qualities or characteristics define members of this family?

What benefits accrue to the member of this family?

It is obviously a great privilege to be a member of this family but there is no boasting in it. Why?

Going Further

1. Continue to learn either Romans 3:10-12 or Romans 3:23 or both of these.
2. Read Romans 5:1-11 where Paul and talks about the benefits that belong to those who are justified through faith in Jesus and why we can rejoice.
3. You might like to read Psalm 103 where King David calls not only himself but everyone to praise the Lord for all his benefits. Please list out all those things that David encourages us to praise the Lord for.