

Sermons through

Romans

The Message for Us

Romans 4:23-25

With Study Questions

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Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, ²⁴ but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, ²⁵ who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification (Romans 4:23-25).

Introduction

There is as much history between Abraham and Paul as there is between Paul and us. So for Paul's readers, Abraham was an ancient figure. Notable characters in history often fall into exaggerated categories. We may view them as overly vilified or overly canonized—often neither being entirely accurate. With this exaggeration we might view historical figures as something other than mere humans. And this could certainly be the case with someone as notable as Abraham—the father of the faithful. But when it comes to the topic before us in these chapters of Romans, Abraham is simply one of us, and the message for him is the message for us.

When it comes to the imputation of righteousness—being accounted righteous before God by faith—that which was true of Abraham was true of Paul and true of us. In these three short verses we have what Charles Hodge called “a comprehensive statement of the gospel.”¹

- In verse 23 and 24a we learn that the events recorded in Scripture are designed for our benefit.
- In verse 24b we are told that it is the believer who receives this benefit, the benefit of the imputation of righteousness. With that we are told what the believer is to believe.
- Finally in verse 25 we are informed of what the Father did with the Son and why He did it.

¹ Hodge, Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans, p. 129.

Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him but also for us (Romans 4:23-24a).

Now it's Personal

Paul now gets very personal. Up until now he has engaged off and on in a diatribe (an argument with an imaginary opponent) to make his points. But it is here in the discussion where you look the person straight in the eye to challenge what they believe or how they behave. It is no longer hypothetical. It is about us. This is not a novel or a piece of interesting history. That which is written in Scripture has an authoritative claim in the lives of every one of us.

We must not put Christ to the test, as some of them did and were destroyed by serpents, ¹⁰ nor grumble, as some of them did and were destroyed by the Destroyer. ¹¹ Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come (1 Corinthians 10:9-11).

For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope (Romans 15:4).

It is no wonder that the world would like to reduce the message of Scripture to mythology to feel more comfortable in ignoring it—something at which they tend to miserably fail. This antipathy should not come as a surprise to those familiar with Scripture. Paul explained it quite simply:

But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession, and through us spreads the fragrance of the knowledge of him everywhere. ¹⁵ For we are the aroma of Christ to

God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing, ¹⁶ to one a fragrance from death to death, to the other a fragrance from life to life. Who is sufficient for these things? ¹⁷ For we are not, like so many, peddlers of God's word, but as men of sincerity, as commissioned by God, in the sight of God we speak in Christ (2 Corinthians 2:14-17).

The message contained in Scripture contains the smell of life for some and the smell of death to others. An exception would be those who peddle God's word which, by implication, would not carry a message of life or death—a benign message designed merely to motivate or cheer the congregation perhaps through a particularly difficult week; something we're beginning to see with more regularity in our current culture.

But we also must be careful to avoid pursuing our theological studies as a mere academic endeavor lest we find ourselves taking the name of God in vain. The Scriptures must be read more like a will which explains the conditions of our inheritance. When the estate lawyer utters the words, "the billion dollar inheritance will be yours when you..." we all listen very intently, seeking to understand and ready to act. Either way, Paul is informing us that the message is for us.

It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead (Romans 4:24b).

Belief in What/Whom?

That which was true of Abraham, true of Paul and which is also true of us in that we stand in need of an imputed righteousness—an alien righteousness—a righteousness that is not our own but which comes by faith in God—the God who raised Jesus from the dead. The simple, yet profound, question might be asked, how one obtains the requisite righteousness for entrance into heaven and eternal peace with God.

Abraham believed God and via that belief was accounted righteous before God. Abraham is in heaven to this day through

the instrument of faith—but faith in what or whom? Is it the simple bald yet, inactive statement of believing in the existence of some god out there; something, even with the modern swell of contemporary atheism, uttered by a majority of people with great ease? Few will admit not believing in a god of some sort. It would appear that it is not merely believing in a god who may, or may not, have done certain things, but believing in Him who raised Jesus from the dead.

Abraham believed that God could bring life from the dead. And the drama surrounding Abraham's life, as mentioned earlier, was not merely that of a man who desired children, but a man who knew his very redemption revolved around this promise and power—a promise and power culminating in the resurrection of Christ Himself—though his perception of Christ might have been distant and obscure, Jesus taught:

Your father Abraham rejoiced that he would see my day. He saw it and was glad (John 8:56).

So what is it the believer believes? If a person walks into church or if we are in a conversation with a neighbor who asks, what must I do or believe to be saved, how is that answered? When the elders of a church meet with a prospective communicant member and seek to ascertain whether or not there is a credible profession of faith, what is the faith we are seeking to discover—faith in who or what? There may be ancillary or attending doctrines, but at the heart of what the believer believes is the resurrection of Christ.

Early in Acts, this was on the lips of the apostles:

And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all (Acts 4:33).

Along with the Lordship of Christ, this is what Paul will communicate to be believed requisite to salvation:

But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); ⁹ because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved (Romans 10:8, 9).

In short, the believer who believes that God raised Jesus from the dead is the one who, by the very grace and power of that event, receives the imputed righteousness which grants eternal life and all that entails.

And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵ that whoever believes in him may have eternal life (John 3:14, 15).

Paul then completes his thought with a very brief explanation of why this must be believed and why this message is for us.

who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification (Romans 4:25).

The Love of Deliverance

At least in this passage, it would appear that Paul would direct our praise to the Father as **“deliver up”** and **“raised”** are both in the passive. Certainly God the Son played an active role in His own passion and resurrection, but here it is the Father who gives His Son. And this act on the part of the Father (in the most commonly memorized verse in all of Scripture) is that act which most deeply presents to us that great love with which we are loved.

For God so loved that world that He gave His only begotten Son (John 3:16)

Jesus was delivered up. Delivered up to what? To pain, suffering, death and wrath beyond human comprehension. Who can grasp the depth of a virtually inexpressible phrase that He became a **“curse for us” (Galatians 3:13)?** He became **“sin for us” (2 Corinthians 5:21)?** **“He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree” (1 Peter 2:24).** In God’s covenant made with Abraham that through his seed all the world would be blessed, the fulfillment of that promise was not that God would ignore the sins of man but that He would satisfy His own divine justice by sending His Son to weather the blow of sinful humanity in His own person.

To be honest, a comprehension of the depth of the wrath eludes me, as does the depth of the love. I don’t love any person enough to give up one of my children. So if I am to grasp, by comparison, the magnitude of God’s love for me in delivering His Son I can only seek to take refuge in Paul’s prayer for me that I might have the strength to comprehend **“the breadth and length and height and depth, ¹⁹ and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge” (Ephesians 3:18, 19).** In light of these things I must conclude that the phrase **“surpasses knowledge”** is no hyperbole.

Add to this, so far removed from our general perception of ourselves, Paul’s explanation of our own character when this love is administered:

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— ⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us (Romans 5:6-8).

It is a love administered to enemies, transforming them into sons and heirs. And this delivering grace and love of God forms the platform for all Christian comfort.

He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things (Romans 8:32)?

This is called a lesser to the greater argument. Would the Father perform the greatest act of love and follow through with any form of neglect? Would He provide a mansion yet fail to provide running water? Hardships, discipline, trial and tragedy now can be understood from the perspective of coming from the hands of a loving Father who works all things **“together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose” (Romans 8:28).**

Raised For Our Justification

And what is meant by the words **“and was raised because of our justification”**? Various suggestions include the resurrection being the observable testimony of Christ’s victory in securing the Father’s favor on our behalf. That when the angel moved the rolled away the stone so as to set Christ, the prisoner, free from the tomb, it provided the greatest assurance possible that **“divine justice was satisfied.”**²

We have not merely been saved from the first death by a dead savior, as noble as that might be. But we have been eternally saved by living Savior who has come forth from death as a Mighty Conqueror and in whom, by virtue of our unity with him, we receive the designation **“more than conquerors” (Romans 8:37).**

With that comes the suggestion that Jesus was raised for our justification as He continues the office of our great High Priest who ever intercedes for us (Romans 8:34) carrying his own blood into the most Holy Place. He would suffer in the outer court but ascend to heaven where He would present His own righteous blood before the Father for our justification. The brethren are accused **“day and night before our God” (Revelation**

² Henry, M. (1994). *Matthew Henry’s commentary on the whole Bible: Complete and unabridged in one volume* (Ro 4:23-25). Peabody: Hendrickson.

12:10). But God’s gracious answer to that accusation, an accusation which does not readily escape the hearts of God’s children is:

Who shall bring any charge against God’s elect? It is God who justifies. ³⁴ Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us (Romans 8:33, 34).

The priestly office of Christ should serve as a great source of comfort and conviction for the believer:

Since then we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus, the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession (Hebrews 4:14).

I tend to think Paul means these things and more in this passage. Our minds like to put things in categories which is often useful. But as Paul is writing about the accomplished work of redemption, it is safe to conclude that the deliverance and resurrection of Christ assume the birth, life, death, resurrection and ascension—all of which were necessary for redemption. After all, in the Lord’s Supper where Paul explains that in partaking, we are proclaiming **“the Lord’s death until He comes” (1 Corinthians 11:26)** he is not excluding the Lord’s resurrection when, a mere four chapters later, he will make clear that apart the resurrection his entire ministry would be mere vanity (1 Corinthians 15:14).

The message for Abraham, Paul and us is a message that righteousness and its attending redemption is acquired by faith in a God who raises the dead, who delivered His Son whose victory is the great spring and foundation of all true comfort.³

³ Henry, M. (1994). *Matthew Henry’s commentary on the whole Bible: Complete and unabridged in one volume* (Ro 4:23-25). Peabody: Hendrickson.

Questions for Study

1. What do we tend to do with historical figures? How might this affect our reading of Scripture (page 2)?
2. How does Paul get personal in this passage? Why is this both loved and hated by people (pages 3, 4)?
3. What is imputation and how is it acquired (page 4)?
4. What is a believer to believe (pages 4, 5)?
5. What does it mean that the Father delivered the Son? Delivered to what? What is achieved through the deliverance? What do we learn of the Father's disposition toward us from the deliverance (pages 6, 7)?
6. What are some things we can cling to because of the resurrection of Jesus (pages 8, 9)?

