



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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

The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Romans 4:1-8

Romans

"Faith Alone"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] The Lord told the Pharisees that even evil men who are fathers know how to give good gifts to their children. Well, we have a good father in the Lord and He gives us the best gift of all, and that is the righteousness of Christ, and that is what we study this morning. Romans 4:1-8, one of the great texts of the Bible that draws upon one of the most important texts of the Bible.

Paul writes, "What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something to boast about, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.' Now to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due. But to the one who does not work, but believes in Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness, just as David also speaks of the blessing on the man to whom God credits righteousness apart from works:

"Blessed are those lawless deeds have been forgiven, and whose sins have been covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account."

May the Lord bless this reading of His word and our study in it together. Let's bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we come to a great text of scripture, a text that tells us how salvation occurs, and as we study it in light of what Paul has already told us in the book of Romans, we realize very clearly the

word of God teaches that salvation is Your work. It's all of grace, it's in faith, and it's in Christ. By grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. That's the gospel.

And when we come to understand it, we must confess there's nothing that we can boast in. There's nothing at all which we can take any credit. All glory goes to our great triune God, and so we begin our time together with praise to You and Thanksgiving for what You've given to us. We who are believers in Jesus Christ and children of God are that because of Your grace.

So we thank You, Father, and pray You'd help us to understand the things that we will study. Give us guidance. You have blessed each believer in Christ with the Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity. What a blessing that is to comprehend, to try and comprehend, to appreciate that God Almighty, the third of the Trinity, lives, literally dwells, within the hearts of each believer in Christ. He's really there and He guides us in our thinking. He directs us. And so we pray for that ministry this morning, that it would go unhindered, that we would be yielded to His instruction, and we would be encouraged through the truth of the gospel as Paul sets it forth in Romans chapter 4.

Bless us spiritually, bless us materially. We are a people with material needs. We look to You to bless in all areas of life, and we think of the material things of life, the physical things. We pray for those who are sick. We pray that You'd give them healing and encouragement. We remember that ultimately even our employment is a gift from You, in a time when the economy is not as firm as it has been and when jobs are in peril, or individuals have even lost work. We pray that You would bless and provide and open doors of opportunity and employment.

And we pray for those who grieve and pray for those who are in difficulty in various ways, such as that. Give encouragement. Give blessing. Encourage those who are weighed down by the problems of life.

Father, we pray for Your blessings upon us this evening as we come back to this place and we remember the Lord and the Lord's supper, and we also celebrate salvation and the ordinance of baptism. Bless our meeting tonight. Bless all the meetings that go on in this place. We pray for edification, for people to be built up in the faith, and we pray for salvation, for young lives to come to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. We pray for ourselves now, Lord. Prepare our hearts as we study together. And we pray these things in Christ name. Amen.

Dr. Boice is, I think most of you know, was for many years, the senior minister at Tenth Presbyterian in Philadelphia. And he followed the ministry of Donald Grey Barnhouse, I think seven or eight years later, but followed Barnhouse who for many years was the minister there. Donald Grey Barnhouse was a great preacher and an effective evangelist. He devised a way of introducing the gospel in conversation with what he called the diagnostic question. It is a method that has been adopted by organizations, such as Evangelism Explosion and has been used by many people in conversations that they have had with others.

But he would ask, "If you were to die today and appear before the gates of heaven and God should ask, 'What right do you have to enter My heaven?' what would you say?" Well, it's a question that opens up the possibility of all kinds of answers. "He should let me into heave because I've lived a good life." "He should let me into heaven because I've tried to live a good life; I've tried to follow a good standard; I try to live by the Golden Rule. Or He should let me into heaven because I'm a spiritual person." That might be a contemporary kind of answer. "I think about spiritual things. I believe in God. I believe in heaven." Things like that would probably be the answer that many would give, though I suspect the vast majority of people today have given little thought to heaven, probably think very little about death itself. The future that they plan for largely is

retirement in Florida. It's pretty much the extent of people's planning in thought of what's coming.

But if confronted with the question about entering heaven, most who didn't show complete indifference to the question and ignored it, most, I suspect, would answer as I've suggested. Good works are the ticket in. In fact, after the first service this morning, I was talking to one of the one Sunday school teachers, who's a businessman, and he was talking about a flight he had back from somewhere on business this week - lengthy flight. He was studying his Bible and the man sitting next to him noticed he was studying his Bible and so after a while struck up a conversation, asked him if he was a minister. No. He's not a minister; he's a businessman, but he does teach in a church.

And so they began to talk and he asked him that very question, that diagnostic question. "What right do you have to enter heaven?" And the man thought, "Well, I'm a good person." And the illustration he gave was the toll way. "When I drive on the toll way I let people in usually. I'm basically good." And that's generally the kind of answer that people give. I live a good life. Or at least what's important is good effort. After all, nobody's perfect. But if we do our best, if we do the best we can, God will let us in, won't He? It's only fair.

Now, there's nothing new in that idea of salvation. It's as old as Cain, who thought that he could gain God's approval by the fruit of his labor. And it was the Jewish method of salvation in Paul's day. The Jews believed in salvation by keeping the Law of Moses. One of their proofs for that was Abraham. They believed that he was saved by his works. His obedience gained God's acceptance.

In some of the early Jewish writings, that is stated. In the book of Jubilees, written around 100 B.C., it is stated that "Abraham was perfect in all his deeds with the Lord and well pleasing in righteousness all the days of his life." Later, in the Mishna, which is the collection of rabbinical sayings and traditions, it is stated, "We find that Abraham our father had performed the whole Law before it was given."

So God accepted Abraham because he was worthy. He lived a good life. He kept the whole Law before it was even given. God was pleased with him and so God saved him. Now, if that were true, Abraham would certainly have something to boast about, wouldn't he? Well, he certainly would. He had earned his way into salvation and there is no greater achievement than that, no great boast than that. In fact, everyone who worked and labored hard enough and well enough to gain God's approval could brag about it.

But Paul has just written that in terms of salvation, in terms of entering heaven, all boasting is excluded. It was our lesson last week, 3:27. No one has grounds for boasting before God, because salvation is a free gift. That is what Paul has developed in the last half of Romans chapter 3. That is the gospel.

Verse 21, "But now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested." Being righteous is necessary for entering heaven. Being righteous is necessary for salvation. We must be holy. We must be perfect. That's what God demands in order to enter into heaven. But that righteousness cannot be produced by us. It cannot be self-produced by Lawkeeping. "But," Paul says, "now apart from the Law the righteousness of God has been manifested." In fact, just the opposite is the case.

Verse 22, "the righteousness of God is received," he says, "through faith in Jesus Christ." So the righteousness of God is received. It's not achieved. Salvation is a free gift of God to all who believe in Jesus Christ.

So, if Paul had been asked his diagnostic question, "What right do you have to enter My heaven," he would have answered, "I have a right to enter Your heaven because I have believed in Your Son. I have trusted in the Savior of the world." Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone. That is what Paul has been teaching. That is the gospel. That is the good news of salvation.

Now, in chapter 4, Paul proves his position by showing that it is the teaching of the Bible. He does that first by giving two examples of

men who were saved by faith alone, Abraham and David, Israel's greatest patriarch and Israel's greatest king. And Paul's appeal to Abraham goes to the very heart of this matter with the Jews. They took pride in their relationship to Abraham.

In John 8:33, we read that they boast, "We are Abraham's offspring," as though that gave them in some merit with God, because they are His physical descendants; they are worthy. They have some merit because of their connection with Him. And so by citing Abraham as an example of salvation by faith apart from works, Paul exposes the error in what has been called the center and stronghold of the whole Jewish position.

Abraham was a righteous man. The Bible's clear about that, and Paul doesn't deny that. He was a man of extraordinary obedience. We can look at Abraham's life, and in many ways, see it as a model for our lives. We learn a great deal from Abraham. When God called him out of Ur of the Chaldeans, Abraham obeyed.

He left his family and his friends. He left his home and he went where God told him to go. He went to a foreign land, a place that he had never been before. When a dispute occurred between his herdsmen and those of his nephew Lot, to keep the peace Abraham suggested that they part ways and he gave Lot the choice of the best land. It was a selfless act, a benevolent act on the part of Abraham. When Lot was taken captive by a foreign army, Abraham, with only 318 of his men, rescued Lot in a daring military victory.

Years later, when God told Abraham to offer up Isaac, his son, his only son whom he loved, as a whole burnt offering, Abraham responded with remarkable obedience. We read it in Genesis chapter 22. Abraham was a great man. Paul doesn't deny any of this. What he does is cite a text of scripture which refers only to Abraham's faith and not his works. And this is the text of scripture where Abraham is declared righteous.

So Paul begins, "What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found? For if Abraham was

justified by works, he has something to boast about." That's true. If it were true that Abraham could boast because of his works, then the case of Abraham overturns Paul's whole argument about salvation by faith alone. We do earn our way into heaven. That was the Jewish claim and Paul states it here, not because there was any reality to it, but in order to prove it false. He brings forth their position in order to disprove it. He quickly denies it. Abraham would have something to boast in if he had obtained this great position and this salvation by works, but he says, not before God.

It's true that Jewish tradition alleged that he did, alleged that he had kept the whole Law before it had even been given. But Paul asked the crucial question in verse 3. He says in effect, "I know what the tradition says. I know what the rabbis have written. I know these things quite well, having been a rabbi myself. I know what tradition says, but," he asked in verse 3, "what does the Scripture say?" Because that, for Paul, was the final authority, not tradition, not human reason. What does the Scripture say? And he knew exactly what Scripture said. He cites it, Genesis 15:6, "Abraham believed God; and it was credited to him as righteousness." Abraham believed; he didn't achieve. That is the point of the text. There is no mention of works or Lawkeeping, only faith, which is no ground for boasting. You can't boast in having received something.

Genesis 15 is one of the greatest passages in the Bible. It's all about God's grace. So much of our understanding of the grace of God and His relationship to us goes back to Genesis 15. It's about salvation through faith. It is the chapter in which God made His unconditional covenant with Abraham that affects us all.

Abraham had been living in Canaan for a number of years when the events of this chapter takes place. It was his promised inheritance, Canaan was. And yet at this time he doesn't own a plot of land. He owns nothing. He's living as a stranger and a sojourner in his own inheritance. God had promised to make of him a great nation.

Wonderful promise that had been given to Abraham, and yet at this time he's childless, doesn't have a son.

So to look at his future, with all these great promises, but nothing tangible in his life, it might seem that his future was a little bleak. And then one night God appeared to Abraham in a vision, told him not to fear, that He was a shield, and his reward would be great. Abraham responded by reminding the Lord that he didn't have a child, didn't have an heir, which might reflect some confusion on his part about the promises that had been given, perhaps even suggesting some discouragement on his part, because without a descendant, the blessings would come to nothing. And he didn't have a descendant.

And so the Lord reassures Abraham that he would have a descendant. Then He took him outside his tent to make that even plainer and to illustrate it. Told him to look up at the sky and to count the stars, "If you are able." Well, of course, he wasn't able to do that. He couldn't do that, not in a near eastern sky that was filled with the Milky Way. And that was the very point of the command, the instruction, to count. He couldn't do. And the Lord said, "So shall your descendants be, an innumerable multitude from a man who hadn't fathered a child." It was a promise of grace.

And Abraham's response is given in the next verse. "He believed in the Lord; and He reckoned it to him as righteousness." He believed in the Lord's promise and the Lord reckoned his faith for righteousness. In other words, he was justified. He was declared to be just. He was declared to be right in God's sight by faith, not by works. No works are mentioned, not his obedience in leaving Ur, or his kindness, his generosity to Lot, not his historic deeds or his heroic deeds in battle, only his faith in the promise of God. That is what was reckoned to him.

Now this word, reckoned, is very important in this chapter. It's used five times in our passage, in verses 3-8. It can be translated in a number of ways: To count, as it is in the New American Standard Bible; to credit or to impute - that is, to put to one's account. That's

the idea here. God considered Abraham's faith acceptable, or reckoned it for righteousness. His faith was counted as unto righteousness.

Faith, not works, secured Abraham's justification before God.

Now, there is another interpretation of this text, which is the Armenian explanation. But it's also very common today among evangelicals. The statement "faith was imputed as righteousness" is taken to mean faith was regarded as complete obedience. God requires obedience. God requires perfection for salvation, but no one is able to do that. No one is able to keep the Law. And so under the gospel, God accepts faith in place of the obedience that the Law demands. We can't keep the Law, but if we'll believe, that will suffice. So He considers faith as equal to righteousness.

That's taking the place of legal obedience, which, if true, makes faith the ground of justification, rather than the instruction or means of obtaining it. Now, grammatically, that interpretation is possible, but it contradicts the rest of scriptures.

For example, Titus 3:5, Paul writes, "He saved us, not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness." Notice that: "Not on the basis of deeds which we have done in righteousness, but according to His mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewing by the Holy Spirit." In other words, the basis of salvation is God's work. The basis of salvation is His doing, not our doing. Nowhere in the Bible is faith regarded as a meritorious work, or the ground of justification. We are never said to be saved on account of our faith or because of our faith. We are saved, as Romans 3:25 states, through faith. Ephesians 2:8, "For by grace you have been saved through faith." Faith is the channel of blessing, the God-given means of receiving salvation, not the reason or the cause of blessing or justification.

So it's better to understand the preposition in this text, this translated "for" or "as," credited as righteousness according to its normal usage, that of "to" or "unto" or "toward." Or it can be taken as result, indicating the result of faith, as it is in Romans 10:10. "With

the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness." That's the idea of the text. Abraham's faith was imputed. It was reckoned to him unto righteousness, meaning in order to his being given righteousness or resulting in justification, salvation is not achieved by works in any way. It is received through faith, and that is the point of this text. Salvation is all a free grace.

Well, having established that from Scripture that salvation isn't earned, what's the point of Genesis 15:6? Paul now explains in verses 4 and 5 that very truth from everyday life, from common experience of labor and earning a wage, and contrasted with receiving a gift. He writes, "But to the one who works, his wage is not credited as a favor, but as what is due." That's obvious enough. We all know that. When a person agrees on a wage to do a particular task and he does that task, his employer is in his debt until he pays what is owed. He's agreed to do work. He's done the work. The employer has promised to pay a certain amount, and until that work is compensated, until that payment is made, that employer's in his debt. And when he receives the money that is due, he doesn't rejoice and thank the employer for his generosity. There's no generosity. There's no reward. All that he has was earned. It's his by right, by achievement.

In contrast to that is the man in verse 5 who doesn't work but believes. His faith, Paul says, is credited as righteousness. Faith is not like labor. That's what Paul is saying here. Believing is not working. It doesn't put God in our debt, but that is what God counts toward righteousness. In other words, work earns a wage; faith receive a gift. and faith is what Abraham had, which God reckoned to him, took into account.

Now, it's important to notice two things: First, faith has an object. The one who doesn't work believes in Him who justifies. Faith has a specific direction. It is not faith in general that Paul is speaking of. It's not believing in some higher power. It's not believing in God generally. But faith in the Lord, the one who justifies, the one who gives righteousness. This is very specific about who the Lord is and

what He does. In other words, it's not faith in a God who requires works for salvation, who demands us to do certain things in order to earn His blessing, but faith in the God of grace, in the God of the Bible.

There must be content to faith. Now, all faith has content. Faith is in something and everyone has faith. They have faith in something. Saving faith has content that is true, and saving faith, has as its object, the God of the Bible and the specific promise that the God of the Bible gives, because it is a promise that Abraham believed.

So first of all, saving faith has a correct object. It has true content. Secondly, notice the object of justification. Notice who it is that's justified. God justifies the ungodly. Now, that would have been a shocking statement to the Jew - really, a shocking statement to most people, if you think about it. The ungodly are those who deserve God's wrath, not His blessing. Paul has made that plain already. Go back to the first chapter and there he makes it very clear. This is where he begins his indictment on the human race. He first indicts the Gentiles in chapter 1, then he indicts the Jews. He explains that all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

And he begins that section of the book of Romans with verse 18 of chapter 1, where he writes, "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men." Against all ungodliness, and yet here Paul says God justifies the ungodly. Goes against our moral sensibilities, it seems, to go against scripture. It seems to go against what Paul has just written, and also against the entire Old Testament, because the Old Testament is very clear on this issue.

God condemns the wicked. God condemns the ungodly. And the judges in Israel were to do the same. The book of Deuteronomy, for example, there is instruction that is given to judge us on how they are to conduct themselves in courts of law and how they are to carry out justice. And in the court of law, the innocent were to be acquitted and the guilty were to be condemned, not justified. That's very clear in

Deuteronomy 25:1, when a dispute goes to court and a judge decides the case. The text says he is to justify the righteous and condemn the wicked. Now, that's consistent with God's character and His holiness.

In Exodus 23:7, the Lord says, "I will not acquit the guilty." I'm not gonna let the guilty go free. So to say as Paul does, that God justifies the ungodly, that He acquits the guilty, seems to contradict the teaching of Scripture. But clearly this is what Paul says. Like a judge who renders a verdict in a law court, God declares sinners innocent of wrongdoing and righteous in His sight. That's the meaning of justification, not making people righteous. There's a major distinction. Not making people righteous - God doesn't change or transform a person's character in justification. He does that in sanctification, but not in justification. He doesn't change a person so that he or she becomes acceptable to Him over time and through a process of ceremonies, like baptism, or other things - good works - becomes acceptable to Him.

That would seem to be the fair way of doing it, bringing a person to the point or having a person work to a point where he or she deserved to be justified. That is not the meaning of justification. Justification is a declaration, not a making of righteous, but a declaring of righteousness, in which God pardons sinners and accepts them as righteous, as innocent at the moment of faith.

That meaning is clear from the text that we just looked at, just considered. In Deuteronomy 25:1, the judges were instructed to justify the righteous and condemn the wicked. Now, obviously that doesn't mean to make people righteous or make them wicked, but to declare them to be what they are. That was the job; that was the responsibility of a judge. If those standing before him are innocent, treat them as innocent. Declare them to be righteous. Declare them to be innocent. Acquit them.

Well, we see that in the book of Romans. Back in 3:4, Paul wrote, "Let God be found true, though every man be found a liar, as it is written, 'That You may be justified in Your words.'" Now, what

does it mean for God to be justified? Certainly not to be made righteous. God cannot be made righteous. God is perfect. God is righteous. It means to be recognized for what He is, to be recognized as being righteous, or through the words that He has declared to be demonstrated to be righteous before men. So justification is a legal act in which God as our judge declares the ungodly believer to be innocent and just before Him.

Now, if that seems a bit technical - well, maybe it is, but it is important, because justification is all about the gospel, whether salvation is by works or whether salvation is by grace. This is the issue that was at the center of debate during the reformation in the 16th century. There's no more important issue than this one. In fact, Luther said that it is the article with and by which the church stands without which it falls.

Go astray on the doctrine of justification by faith alone and everything falls apart. We lose the gospel. So it is an important issue. But it raises an important question, one that we must think about for a moment. How can God, who is holy - how can God declare the guilty to be innocent, the wicked to be righteous?

Critics of justification by faith alone have called this a legal fiction - guilty people can't be declared innocent. They are not innocent. They must be changed first. They must be made righteous before they can be declared righteous.

Well, that's the charge, but it is not a fiction. It is true. The guilty are justified by faith, not because of faith, but because of substitution, because another took their place in judgment, the judgment that was due them. That is what Paul explained in the second part of Romans chapter 3. It's what he states in verse 25 of Romans 3. "God displayed Christ," you'll remember, "as a propitiation in His blood." Christ's sacrifice, Christ sacrificed, is our mercy seat. He is the one, He is the place. It is through Him that God's justice is fully met, fully satisfied, and as a result, His wrath is turned away. From all

for whom He suffered. He bore our sins, was punished for them, and that satisfied God's justice fully and completely.

1 Corinthians 15:3, "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures." No, God can't declare bad people to be good people. He can't call the ungodly godly if they're not godly. But justification doesn't do that. It doesn't say that sinners are not sinners after all. It recognizes that we are sinners. But in justification, God pronounces sinners to be legally righteous, not liable to the penalty of the broken Law because of what Christ has done for them. He already took that penalty. He already bore that punishment in their place.

So there's nothing fictional about justification by faith alone. God's justice was just fully satisfied at the cross. His wrath was exhausted and our guilt completely removed. The work is finished. Christ declared it to be finished. There is nothing left for people to do but believe. God doesn't require us to do something special before we believe or something special to earn His saving grace and His approval. He doesn't require us to feel sorry for our sins, though I think if we understand our sins and the nature of our condition, we will certainly feel sorry about it. We may even weep over it. That's a proper response, but that's not required. He doesn't require that we weep over our sins, that we flagellate ourselves, that we pay penance or make vows, or any of that kind of thing. We come to Him as we are. We come to Him in our condition, our lost condition, in our state of ungodliness, as we are, where we are. We trust in the Lord. We believe in Him just as Abraham did.

Now, in verses 6-8, Paul moves from the example of Abraham to the example of David. And again he develops his argument from the word "reckon," or "credit." The idea of putting to one's account. But here, Paul changes his use of the word. It is still God who does the crediting, but instead of crediting faith to our account, it is righteousness that He credits or imputes to us. This is what David taught in Psalm 32:1, 2, where he writes of God's blessing on the

person to whom He credits righteousness apart from the Law, as Paul puts it.

Verse 7, "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds have been forgiven, and whose sins have been covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will not take into account." That is a blessing. It's a great blessing, particularly for one such as David. David is not talking about little sins or minor failures. David was a man who committed horrific sin: adultery, murder, he lied. The whole scandal that he committed with Bathsheba impugned the integrity of God. It was a blemish upon the name of God and the state of Israel. These are terrible sins. He's not speaking of little peccadillos that God could, well, turn a blind eye to; it's just a minor little thing. these were horrific sins.

And what he says is instead of putting our sins on our account against us, instead of writing them on His ledger in heaven to be used against us, God pardons and He covers all of them. Well, again, that raises the question how can a holy God do that? How can a righteous God take the sins that David committed, and as it were, blot them out. Not charge the wicked with their sins, but instead credit righteousness to them? And again, the answer is found in the substitute, the one who took our place, took our place, and gave us His righteousness.

There's a good illustration of this in the book of Philemon, where Paul, again, uses this word "impute," or "credit." Philemon was a friend of Paul, a wealthy man who lived in Colossi, a city in Asia Minor. He had a slave named Onesimus. Well, one day Onesimus ran away, fled to Rome, probably in the hope of losing himself in that great city. But by chance, meaning by the providence of God, came in contact with the apostle who was a prisoner there. And as a result Onesimus was brought to faith. Onesimus became a Christian and now, as a believer, he must do the right thing. He must live a proper kind of life, and so the right thing to do was to return to his master.

He did that, but he didn't return empty-handed. He returned with a letter written by Paul on his behalf, the book of Philemon. And in it,

Paul explains what happened to Onesimus, and he asks his friend Philemon to accept him "as you would me. But if there is a problem, if he has wronged you in any way, or owes you anything, Paul writes in verse 18, "charge that to my account." Charge all his debts to me. Impute all of them to my account and I'll pay them. I'll pay them all.

That's what Christ did for us. God puts our debts on Christ's account and Christ paid them for us. He died as our substitute so that God could say to us, "Paid in full, righteous and without debt." That's justification. It is the free gift of righteousness, the pardon for sin which the ungodly receive at the moment of faith, just as Abraham did. God credits our account with righteousness. He gives us a right standing before Him as a free gift, as a result of faith, apart from works of any kind.

When a person stops trying to earn his or her salvation and trusts in Him who justifies the ungodly, trust in Him who saves apart from works, freely by His grace, then his faith is reckoned as righteousness. That is when righteousness is put to the sinner's account and he or she is paid up with God, just and right with Him.

You don't have to strive to become better so that God will accept us. We don't have to wait until the end to learn what God's verdict on our life will be, if in the end we will at last be saved. The verdict is already declared. The believer is not guilty, and he or she lives out each day, or should - we understand justification - should live out each day as though he or she had never sinned. It's what God declares in that great declaration of justification.

We're sinners, of course. Justification doesn't deny that. It doesn't say that sinners are no longer sinners. Recognizes that we are sinners. It's not declaring them to be something that they are not. It is declaring them who are sinners to be free from the guilt of sin because of what Christ has done, because He paid for our sins and paid for them in our place.

Now that is a liberating truth, one that delivers from endless, anxious, and futile striving to gain acceptance with God. Futile

because it can never gain that acceptance. And it's liberating because it relieves from the crushing burden of guilt. The lives of every one of us are lives that read like a slate full of crimes and sins that we have committed. All committed sins every day of our life. And if we were to see the nature of our lives, we would read this endless list of sins and crimes that we have committed.

And those sins can haunt us all through our life, a sin that someone committed 30, 40 years ago, be brought to remembrance and weigh that person down with guilt. Or perhaps it's something that hangs over the head like a cloud every day of that person's life. These things haunt us and weigh us down with guilt and remorse, but the gospel is by faith in Christ, the slate wiped clean and God remembers our crimes no more. Blessed is the man who sinned. The Lord will not take into account.

And we might add blessed is the person who has the righteousness of God, which the Lord does take into account. That is what put to our account, the perfection of Christ. Do you have that? If you should die today and find yourself before the gates of heaven, what right would you have to enter God's heaven? Can you say "I have a righteousness not my own? I have the forgiveness of sins and the righteousness of Christ received through faith alone"? That's all that one must have, but that is what one must have in order to enter heaven - righteousness apart from works.

Well, Augustus Toplady put it very well in his hymn "Rock of Ages." "Nothing in my hand I bring/Simply to thy cross I cling/Naked, come to Thee for dress/Helpless, look to Thee for grace/Foul, I to the fountain fly/Wash me, Savior, or I die."

If you're here without Christ, you have not believed in Him, you are a sinner. You are what Paul calls the ungodly. All of us are that by nature. We're born into this world sinners and ungodly, and God's wrath is against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men.

But that same God also saves the ungodly from that very wrath. He saves all who comes to Christ, so come to Him. Look to Him.

Cling to the cross. Fly to the fountain and be washed. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ to be saved. It's all God calls you to do. Trust in Him. May God help you to do that. That you who have done it, rejoice in the grace of God. That never ends. That never fails. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank You for that grace, thank You for this great text of scripture. We can have the gift of righteousness as a gift, received through faith and faith alone, not predicated on good deeds that we've done, on acts of heroism or generosity, or the doings of various things. But we have that as ungodly people simply trusting in Christ, turning to You in our ungodliness. And in that state of ungodliness, you declare us righteousness. What an amazing truth that is, a great comfort it is to know we are accepted by You, based upon the work of Your Son that cannot fail. So we thank You for that, thank You for the foundation we have in Christ. Thank You for the grace we have in Him. May our lives be lived in conformity with that. We pray in Christ name. Amen.