



11.
'Put on your feet'
Romans 4.1-12

Background

Paul clearly recognised the need he had at this point to validate his message.

To the Gentiles, the message he proclaimed must have sounded too good to be true – even back then most folk presumed that “there’s no such thing as a free lunch.” Whereas, to the Jews, his message must have seemed so completely at odds with all they’d formerly believed – for most Jews, their standing with God was understood to be dependent on either the rigours of their Law (eg the Pharisees), or the ritual of their circumcision, or the rightness of their pedigree.

Hence Paul’s concern here to underline that his message is nothing new, but instead entirely in line with how God has always dealt with sinful humanity.

Paul was trained in the law, and his approach in essence is really that of the lawyer arguing his case. Thus he brings in at this point a couple of key witnesses – on the very biblical basis that *“One witness is not enough to convict anyone accused of any crime or offence they may have committed. A matter must be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses”* ([Deut.19.15](#) and see [2 Cor.13.1](#) where he references that very text).

His ‘witnesses’ are carefully chosen!

It was to Abraham that the original promise was made by God, and to Abraham that all self-respecting Jews traced their ancestry. God’s dealings with him were, for the Jew, definitive for them. No wonder, then, that Abraham is wheeled into court by Paul at this point!

David was no less significant for the Jews. Not only had he been the great king whose triumphs were the stuff of legend, it was to him that the promise of the coming of the Messiah, the King who would reign forever, had been made. It was David, moreover, who was the ‘sweet psalmist of Israel, the man whose songs they still sang. And it was David, of course, who had sinned so grievously. His experience and his testimony were precisely in line with all that Abraham’s story revealed – and served thus to prove Paul’s point.

The Bible’s consistent message is that our standing with God is only ever secured by grace – a righteousness credited to us on the basis of the ‘payment’ made by the Lord Jesus Himself.

Read the whole passage and start with **‘days’ (3), (4) and (6)**.

1) Monday 18th March – consistent

Read [Romans 4.1-2](#)

“.. what then shall we say that Abraham .. discovered ..” (Rom.4.1)

For the regular Jew, reference back to Abraham settled matters. How God dealt with Abraham, and how Abraham was right with God, was definitive. God is neither arbitrary nor inconsistent. How Abraham was put right with God is the basic paradigm.

Why is so much stress laid on God’s dealings with Abraham?

In what ways has your awareness of how God has worked in the lives of others been a help and encouragement to you?

Prayer: *Lord, You are so wonderfully faithful, so constant in the love You show towards Your people: help me today to show the same constancy to others in all I say and do.*

2) Tuesday 19th March – trusting

Read [Romans 4.3](#)

“.. Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness ..” (Rom.4.3)

Like fireworks lighting up the night sky, Genesis 15.6 is explosive in its impact on our darkened minds. The simple truth to which it points is radical in its implications. No matter who you are or what you’ve done, *trusting* God somehow changes everything!

Read [Gen.15.1-6](#): what did Abraham’s believing God involve?

What single Scripture texts has the Lord used to speak powerfully into your heart over the years?

Prayer: *Your promises, Almighty God, are so lavish and generous! Help me today to live in the light of all the rich promises You have made to us in Christ.*

3) Wednesday 20th March – credited

Read [Romans 4.4-5](#)

“.. the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly ..” (Rom.4.5)

Like Sisyphus striving in vain to push that wretched boulder up the hill, our striving to earn God’s favour by the works we do is a never-ending, hapless, hopeless task. The favour of the righteous God will not be earned by our toil. It’s given to those who trust.

Our natural instinct is to strive to earn God’s favour as a due reward for our living: why is this such a basic instinct in us?

Given that this is such a basic instinct in us, how can we guard against the tendency, even as believers, to try *earning* God’s favour by our good deeds?

It could be argued that our trusting God is itself a 'good work' which makes up for the sin in our life: what would Paul's answer to that have been?

What is the connection between Abraham's believing that promise of God that 'so shall your offspring be' and righteousness being credited to him?

Prayer: The more You open my eyes to see Your glory and grace, O Lord, the more I see the corruption in my own heart and life, and my need of Your mercy in Christ.

4) Thursday 21st March – testimony

Read [Romans 4.6](#)

".. the blessedness of the one to whom God credits righteousness .." (Rom.4.6)

Paul is pulling in the Old Testament's 'big-hitters' in support of his thesis that the gospel he's proclaiming is nothing new. First Abraham, now David. The testimony of two key witnesses, whose experience of God tells the same story. Grace not works.

There was nothing random in Paul's writing! What are his reasons for making reference here to David in particular?

Read [Ps.24.3-6](#): how can these verses from David's pen be squared with the verses Paul quotes from Psalm 32?

Sin leaves its 'stain' on our lives: how can we be truly and fully *cleansed* from that 'stain' of sin?

Paul quotes from one of the psalms of David: which psalms have helped you at different points in your life?

Prayer: How great You are, my Lord and King, and how worthy of praise! Thank You for the instruction of Your Word. May Your truth be a light to my path through today.

5) Friday 22nd March – blessed

Read [Romans 4.7-8](#)

".. whose sin the Lord will never count against them .." (Rom.4.8)

Your transgressions forgiven. Your sins covered – and never now counted against you. What would you not give for that? David discovered that this was in truth God's gift to him: the ultimate in blessing – the slate wiped clean by the sheer grace of God.

How would you describe to a friend what the 'blessedness' is of having all your sins forgiven?

How can God be true to His righteous character while not counting our sin against us?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, how grateful I am that there is now no condemnation that I need dread. Thank You that You have covered my sin and clothed me in righteousness!

6) Saturday 23rd March – unconditional

Read [Romans 4.9-10](#)

“.. Is this blessedness only for the circumcised? ..” (Rom.4.9)

It sounds too good to be true! There must be a catch, some ‘work’ that Abraham had to do which gained him the necessary ‘brownie points’ – like the fact that he was circumcised? But no! No works, no conditions. The free gift of God received by faith.

Read [Gal.2.11-14](#): what might be the equivalent in our context of the ‘Jewish customs’ to which Paul refers here and which Peter sought to ‘force Gentiles to follow’?

There can be ‘influential’ people in a fellowship and in the wider Christian community: how can we get the balance right between rightly respecting others while not be wrongly afraid of them?

Are there helpful ‘rituals’ in your life (like reading the Bible or taking time to pray) which are in danger of becoming ‘good works’?

How can you guard yourself against such a tendency?

Prayer: You have dealt so graciously with me, my Lord and God: help me to take the initiative in showing a similar grace to others today, whatever their circumstances are.

7) Sunday 24th March – relationship

Read [Romans 4.11-12](#)

“.. a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith ..” (Rom.4.11)

Far from being a ‘good work’ earning him favour with God, circumcision was only ever the seal of what God had already graciously promised – a righteousness *credited* to Abraham on the basis of a ‘payment’ which would be made a lot later by Christ.

If God’s promise to Abraham and His people was prior to, and not dependent on, circumcision, why was so much stress laid on the need for circumcision?

Relationship with Jesus is far more important than the ‘rituals’ of church life: why are such rituals nonetheless important?

Prayer: It is good to praise You, Lord, to make music today to Your Name. For You make me glad by Your deeds, and I will sing for joy at hat Your hands have done ([Ps.92.1-4](#))