

"Justified By Faith"
Genesis 15:6

Mililani Community Church
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Introduction: There was a young Jewish soldier named Alfred Dryfus who distinguished himself in such a way that in the year 1891 he was promoted to the General's staff of the French army. It was just three years later that he was charged with treason for selling military secrets to the Germans. And at his trial he was found guilty. As a result of the trial he was publicly disgraced, dismissed from the military and sent to a penal colony on Devil's Island. Dryfus had many close friends who could not believe the verdict of the trial. The public pressure was so great that in 1899 a second trial was held. He was once again found guilty of treason. Once again there was such an uprising from the people that the President of France decided to grant to Dryfus a pardon. With that pardon he was released from the penal colony and restored to his family and friends. But the stigma of being a traitor still hovered over his head. His friends were unsatisfied with the pardon that had been offered by the President, and under pressure, once again, in the year 1906 a third trial was held; and it was in this trial that Alfred Dryfus was vindicated of the charges of treason. He was restored to the military, promoted to the rank of Major and even enlisted in the Legion of Honor for the nation of France. In the vindication of Alfred Dryfus--the court was simply declaring to him and to his family --to France and to the world, that in their estimation, here was a man who was a righteous man. They completely vindicated him of the charges that had been against him.

That is precisely what God does when He justifies us. God is not just in the business of pardoning guilty sinners. God's dealings with guilty men and women goes one step beyond the pardoning stage, to the stage where he actually justifies people, and declares them to be absolutely righteous. That is the thrilling teaching of the biblical doctrine of justification.

As a result of our justification, the Bible teaches that we have:

- Peace with God --the very thing that had alienated us from God has been resolved--the issue of sin--now we are declared to be righteous. We have peace with God.
- Secondly, as a result of justification we are exalted to the rank and role of being a child of God -- within the very family of God Himself.
- Third, the Bible makes it clear that if we are justified we will never come under the condemnation of God. We are forever vindicated and declared to be righteous in the sight of God.

There is a striking contrast between what God does in our lives and what the President of France and that French court did for Alfred Dryfus. What France did for Alfred Dryfus, they did for an innocent man. It is not difficult to understand how a court can vindicate a man who is innocent. He was unjustly convicted. When the court finally vindicated him and declared him righteous, they were simply doing the right thing.

BUT the question is, how can God justify us--when we are NOT innocent--when we are guilty of sinning against God? But that is exactly what God does. He comes to a person who is guilty and who deserves the full penalty of God's Law--eternal death and banishment from the presence of God--and to that guilty person, God declares him to be absolutely righteous.

THE BIG QUESTION IS: How can a holy and righteous and just God declare a guilty sinner to be absolutely righteous?

This question can be broken down into two questions:

- How can a guilty sinner receive a declaration like this?
- How can God, who is holy and just make a declaration like this?

The answer to those questions is stated for the first time right here in Genesis 15. Because in this passage we have the first indication in the Bible of the doctrine of justification by faith. It is a doctrine that is gradually unfolded in the O.T. and comes to full bloom in the pages of the N.T. God only has one way of salvation in His dealings with mankind. And right here in Genesis 15:6 we discover how guilty sinners can gain the declaration from God that they are righteous. And we also discover how a holy and righteous God can justly make such a declaration to a guilty sinner. That is why this verse is considered to be the most important doctrinal verse in the whole Old Testament.

In this verse we have the answer to our two-part question:

The first part of the question is How can Abraham, as a sinner, gain from God a declaration that he is righteous? He needs to be declared righteous to have peace with God and to escape the condemnation of God. The first part of verse 6 answers that: "he believed God." The single human requirement for justification is belief. God requires faith.

Let's notice what was involved in Abraham's belief:

1. THE OBJECT OF ABRAHAM'S FAITH

The object of his faith is clearly given to us in verse 6: He believed the Lord. It is not FAITH that saves us. It is God who saves us!! We are not saved by faith, we are saved by God. Faith has to have a certain object before that faith is saving faith. Many people today might say, "I have faith." But the crucial thing is not your faith, but the object of your faith.

What are YOU trusting in for your salvation? You don't depend upon your faith. You depend upon the Lord.

2. THE CONTENT OF ABRAHAM'S FAITH

What was it exactly that Abraham believed?

Two things:

He believed in a God of resurrection. He knew his body was as good as dead (Hebrews 11:12 tells us this). He also knew that Sarah's womb was dead. Romans 4:19-20: *"Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead--since he was about a hundred years old--and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised."* God came to him and said, "You shall have a son." Abraham believed God. He believed in a God who could bring life out of deadness.

The second thing Abraham believed was in a coming Messiah. Abraham's concern over the lack of an offspring was not because he wouldn't have an heir to inherit his material wealth. His concern over a lack of an offspring was because he realized that it was his seed, his offspring, that would ultimately produce the Messiah who would be the Savior of the world and bring blessing to all the families of the earth.

Galatians 3:8 says that God announced the Gospel in advance to Abraham: *"The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: 'All nations will be blessed through you.'"* God told him that through his line one would come to bring salvation to the earth. Galatians 3:16 says, *"The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his seed. The Scripture does not say 'and to seeds,' meaning many people, but 'and to your seed,' meaning one person, who is Christ."*

In John 8 Jesus was confronted by many skeptical Jews. In the midst of his confrontation with them, he stopped and said in verse 56, *"Your Father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad."* Jesus says here, Abraham saw that I was coming. He knew the Messiah was coming and he rejoiced. Abraham did not understand all the details about what Jesus would do but he saw Christ. He believed the Savior would come.

3. THE RESULT OF ABRAHAM'S FAITH

He was justified --believing this God of resurrection power who would ultimately give him an offspring who would be the Savior of the world. The entire argument of the Apostle Paul in Romans 4 and Galatians 3 is that Abraham's declaration of righteousness was based upon faith. In Paul's day many people thought that to be declared righteous before God you had to first attain a certain level of righteousness by keeping all the requirements of the Law. You had to perform all the rituals of the temple, offer the sacrifices, keep the holy days and so forth. And all this would make it possible for you to be declared righteous with God.

People today have this same attitude. If I asked the average person how can a guilty person be declared righteous with God and escape the judgement of his sin --the average person would say that it is gained by attaining a certain moral, ethical or spiritual standard.

But Paul is very clear in telling us how Abraham was justified. Even before the Law was given--even before the 10 commandments Abraham was justified. How? By faith.

Abraham believed God and was justified by faith--before the rituals of the Jewish law were established.

Romans 4:1-5, 23-24: *"What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter? If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about--but not before God. What does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness." Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness."*

You can be declared righteous and become a child of God in the same way Abraham was--by faith. Romans 4:23: *"The words, 'it was credited to him' were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness--for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead."*

Why does Paul take Abraham's faith in Genesis 15 as the basis of his justification rather than the record of his initial faith in Genesis 12? Because in Genesis 15 his faith is directly connected with the promised seed. God wants us to realize that justification is inseparably connected with faith in Jesus Christ. That is the message of the whole Bible--Justification is inseparably connected with faith in Jesus Christ.

MARTIN LUTHER ignited the fires of the Reformation, and he did it with this text. The great battle cry of the Reformation was JUSTIFICATION IS BY FAITH ALONE.

Martin Luther pointed out that there are two kinds of faith:

- One kind of faith is simply believing all there is to know about Jesus Christ. Believing that he lived, died, rose again, lives in heaven today. And practicing his teachings. But that faith is not saving faith. That is intellectual knowledge, but even the Devils have that kind of faith.
- Second there is the faith that is a trusting faith. It is a faith in which a person commits himself to Jesus Christ and trusts him and him alone for salvation. That is saving faith!

John Payton, the great missionary to the New Hebrides sat at his desk translating the Bible into the language of these people in the South Seas. When he came to the word faith or believing, he came to a word that apparently had no counterpart in the language of these people. He prayed to God, asking for a word that would clearly convey to them the significance of this word "belief" or "faith." One day as he was in his home, of his native helpers came into his home and quickly stretched out on a couch, lifted his hands behind his head and said, "I am so tired I feel like just STRETCHING MYSELF OUT UPON this couch for the rest of the evening." In his heart Payton said, "Thank you Lord, that is the word I am looking for; and he turned to Genesis 15:6 and translated it: "Abraham stretched himself out on the Lord. . . ."

THAT IS WHAT IT MEANS TO BELIEVE IN JESUS CHRIST! It means to commit yourself entirely and completely to Him for your salvation. Payton translated John 3:16,

*"For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that **whosoever stretches himself out on him** shall not perish but have everlasting life."* Whoever trusts Him, commits themselves to Him, rests in Him. . . . shall not perish but have everlasting life.

Let me ask you. . . .What are you resting in? What is it that you have placed your trust in for your salvation? It is faith in Christ and Christ alone that brings justification with God.

You have probably had the experience of receiving a bill in the mail, and then writing a check for the amount you owe and sending it to the company. They see your check and stamp your bill "PAID IN FULL." Now you have a receipt that guarantees no further payment will be demanded.

When the Lord Jesus Christ 2000 years ago went to the cross, He went to the place where the account would be settled between God and man. As he died on the cross, he paid in full for your sin and mine. There on that cross He bore our sin in his own body on the tree and he died for your sin.

The question is: Was his death adequate to pay your bill--the bill God demands for all of your sin? YES. God has taken his stamp and declared that the account was paid. His stamp on the bill was the resurrection. When he raised Jesus from the dead, God said, I am satisfied with the price that has been paid. I am satisfied with Jesus' death on the cross, the account is settled.

When we come to God and realize that Jesus Christ has settled our account and when we commit ourselves to Christ for our salvation--we are justified. God declares us righteous. We have peace with God. We are delivered from condemnation. We become a child of God.

From Genesis 15:6 all the way through the Bible we learn that the only prerequisite for being declared righteous with God is that you place your faith in Jesus Christ alone. When you place your faith in Christ alone for your salvation, God then puts to your account His very own righteousness and thereby declares you righteous.

What God does is like what we do when we take money from a Savings account and have it credited to our checking account so that we can pay our bills. God takes his own righteousness and credits it to your account and declares you righteous. Not because of your own righteousness but because He puts to your credit HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS.

When Dr. Donald Gray Barnhouse, former pastor of the renowned Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia, was a 15 year old boy, he was very confused about his salvation. He was not sure whether he was really saved or not. One day he went to a church service where a well experienced pastor was preaching the Gospel. He listened and thought to himself: "That man has a confidence and assurance and peace that I do not have. I'm not sure that I'm saved." So after the service he talked to this pastor and asked him how he could know for sure that he was a child of God. The man took his left hand and turned it palm up. He said, "Now think of that left hand as being you." Then the man took a hymn

book and placed it on that hand. "Now consider that book to be your sin. Because God is a holy God, a God who hates sin, the wrath of God is bearing down on you because of your sin. The reason you do not have peace with God this morning is because the wrath of God is bearing down upon you because of your sin. Then the man reached for his other hand. "Consider this hand to be Jesus Christ. He is God's beloved Son. He is the innocent Son of God who knew no sin. Who did not sin. "I saw myself and God's Son as the innocent, sinless one." At that moment the pastor put his hand under the left hand of this teenager and with a sweeping stroke went like that (put the book into the right palm from the left hand). And said, "That is exactly what happened when God sent his son to die on the cross. God placed upon His Son your sin. He bore your sin in His body on the tree. And when you place your faith in Jesus Christ and trust Him alone as your Savior then you become righteous with the righteousness of Jesus Christ."

QUOTE: I Corinthians 5:21

Samuel Rutherford said: "When I think of my guilt, I see that my salvation is one of the greatest miracles the Savior ever performed." He would like to perform that miracle in your life this morning. He will put to your account His very own righteousness. but you must place your faith in Jesus Christ alone. Turn to Him and say, "Lord Jesus, thank you for dying for my sin. I realize it is only through you and your finished work upon the cross that I can ever have the forgiveness of my sin and a personal relationship with you. At this very moment I receive you as my Savior."

Will you do that? If you will he will justify you and you will become a child of God.

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