

"Get It?" - Romans 4:1-12

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Luke

1. Luke likes to be organized
2. This week we went to Home Depot, and he went down the aisle that has the closet organizers
3. Took a piece of paper and a pencil and made a list of all the cabinets and organizers he wants in his closet
4. When we got home, were standing in the kitchen talking, and he got out his paper and added up the total
 - a. it came to \$400
 - b. and he said, "If you really love me, you'd buy this for me."
5. Lynn and I just stood there and started at him, then I asked, "What was your name again?"
 - a. he completely missed the joke
 - b. so I said it again, still he didn't get it
 - c. so I said it again, but still he didn't get it
 - d. so I said it again and then said, "Get it - you said we would do this if we loved you, and I asked, 'What's your name?'"
 - e. finally, he got it and we had a good laugh

B. Us

1. In a way, I think Paul might well be asking, "Get it?" as he writes Ch. 4 of Romans
2. Once again today, as for the last three weeks, we are going to see that the gospel is a message of salvation by *grace*, not of *works*
3. I realize that what we will look at today *seems* repetitive
4. Actually, it doesn't just *seem* repetitive—it is
5. The reason Paul hammers this over and over is because he knows how contrary to the mind and heart of man salvation by grace is
6. In Ch. 4 he gives us a specific example of grace

II. TEXT

A. V. 1

{1} What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh?

1. As we saw last week, chapter three is concerned with describing the *righteousness* a person needs to be accepted by God
2. The Jews considered their forefather Abraham to be the epitome of righteousness
3. After all, he was the very first Jew and a man the scriptures call "the friend of God."
4. So in their eyes, he exemplified goodness and what it took to be declared

- righteous
- a. in their Book of Jubilees it says that Abraham was so righteous, he never sinned
 - b. the prayer of Manasses says that he never needed to repent
 - c. the Mishnah said of Abraham that it was on the basis of his *perfection* that God declared him righteous
 - d. these things come as a great surprise to those of us who have actually read the book of Genesis because Abraham grieved several times
5. Paul looks to Abraham as the supreme example that salvation is by grace apart from works
 6. Let's see what Abraham's story teaches us . . .

B. V. 2

{2} For if Abraham was justified by works, he has *something* to boast about, but not before God.

1. Righteousness gained by works lays a foundation for pride and boasting
2. If I can get to heaven by what I do, then be assured I'm going to tell others what I a righteous person I was,
 - a. what I did that merited God's favor
 - b. and how wonderful I was
 - c. but I won't be the only one bragging,
 - d. so will everyone else in heaven
 - e. eternity will be one long bragging session
3. Of course, we could only boast to each other,
 - a. never to God,
 - b. because *His* perfection would always outshine ours
4. But no where in the scripture do we see that Abraham *boasted* of how he attained God's favor by his own goodness
5. Rather, the record is very clear . . .

C. V. 3

{3} For what does the Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness."

1. Paul quotes from Genesis 15 and a dark time in Abraham's life
2. Abraham was living in Canaan, and though God had promised him a son, the promise was yet unfilled
3. In desperation, he cried out to God to give him a child
4. God came to him and told him to look up and count the stars
5. Then He told him he would not only have a son, but that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars
6. In that moment, as his head was raised and he gazed into the night sky, the reality of the promise of God who cannot lie became so real to Abraham, that he placed implicit trust in God to fulfill his word
7. And when God saw Abraham's faith, he reckoned Abraham righteous
 - a. when Abraham turned from looking at his own inability
 - b. and looked to God's sufficiency to keep His promise
 - c. God declared that he was righteous

8. In other words, faith was the condition of being right before God
9. Abraham had faith, not in himself or his own strength, but in God,
 - a. he believed that God was able to perform that which He said
 - b. his eyes were moved from himself to God
 - c. and this simply turning of the heart to God became the avenue of his movement into right standing before Him
10. The word "accounted" here in v. 3 is a semi-technical term used in both *accounting & law*
 - a. in *accounting*, it meant to credit someone's account
 - 1) as when you buy something on credit
 - 2) and then every month you get you bill in the mail
 - 3) write out a check and send it in
 - 4) they receive it and enter that amount on your account
 - 5) we have a debt of sin owed to God
 - 6) but when we believe in Christ, not only does God account our debt as paid in full,
 - 7) He also adds a credit to our balance
 - 8) this week, got a call from local paper - we have a \$50 credit
 - a) wanted to sell us another ad for \$97
 - b) put us in debt to them by owing another \$47
 - c) \$50 credit - wow!
 - 9) how much does God credit our account?
 - 10) He credits us with the unsearchable riches of grace in Christ Jesus
 - b. in *law*, the phrase "accounted for righteousness" means to declare someone *legally not guilty*
 - 1) it means that they have done nothing which is contrary to the law
 - 2) they are cleared of *all* charges
 - 3) in spiritual terms it means that we stand before the bench of God as Judge of the universe
 - a) Satan, the accuser, brings a list of charges against us
 - b) he even brings forth piles of evidence
 - c) once the prosecutor finishes his case against us,
 - d) our defense attorney, Jesus Christ, rises and simply says to the Judge
 - e) "Father, while all these charges are true, I have already paid for their crimes."
 - f) we, by faith, stand behind Jesus and nod our whole-hearted agreement
 - g) God listens to all the evidence, looks at us, the devil, and the rest of the court, then says, "Not guilty. I direct the court to dismiss the charges and to seal the records so that no one will every bring up these things again."
 - h) "Furthermore, it is the decision of this court to never entertain accusations against this person ever again."
 - i) Romans 8:1 - There is therefore now no condemnation to those whoa re in Christ Jesus

D. V. 4-8

{4} Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt.

{5} But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness,

1. When God accounted Abraham righteous, it was an act of grace
2. God did not "pay" Abraham for work he performed
3. If righteous is obtained by works, then because Abraham had *worked* righteousness, God would have been *obliged* to declare him righteous
 - a. just as when you go to work and labor for one or two weeks, your employer is obligated to pay you
 - b. they *owe* you a debt of wages
4. But that is not the way we are made righteous
 - a. righteousness comes by faith
 - b. it is the gift of God, received only by those who look beyond themselves to God
5. If salvation were of works, then it would be a wage due those who worker
 - a. therefore God would become a debtor to man
 - b. God would be robbed of glory
 - c. the genius of grace is that it glorifies God who gives, not man who works
6. Think about it: What is the primary purpose of the gospel?
 - a. most would say it is to save men and women from sin, but that's not quite right
 - b. salvation is the *means* of the gospel, not the purpose
 - c. to find out what the purpose of the gospel is, we need to ask what the primary purpose of man is
 - d. man's purpose is to glorify God
 - e. therefore, the primary purpose of the gospel is to glorify God
 - f. this is why salvation *must* be by grace through faith alone apart from works

{6} just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works:

{7} "Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, And whose sins are covered;

{8} Blessed is the man to whom the LORD shall not impute sin."

7. Paul quotes David and the words of Psalm 32
8. Well did David know the terrible weight of sin and the joyous release when it is forgiven
9. "Blessed are those whose sins are covered!" he said.
 - a. the great English preacher Charles Haddon Spurgeon told of a man who had been sentenced to death by a Spanish court.
 - b. because he was an American citizen but also of English birth, the consuls of both countries decided to intervene.
 - c. they declared that the authorities of Spain had no right to take his life, but their protests went unheeded.
 - d. finally, they deliberately wrapped the prisoner in their flags -- the Stars

- and Stripes and the Union Jack.
 - e. defying the executioner, they issued this warning: "Fire if you dare! But if you do, you will bring the powers of two great nations upon you!"
 - f. there stood the condemned. But the rifleman would not shoot.
 - g. covered by those flags and the governments they represented, the man was invulnerable.
10. We who believe in Christ are covered by the righteousness of Christ

E. Vs. 9-12

{9} Does this blessedness then come upon the circumcised *only*, or upon the uncircumcised also? For we say that faith was accounted to Abraham for righteousness.

1. In v.9, Paul returns to something he had brought up before
 - a. the Jews thought God owed them salvation because they were circumcised
 - b. they mistakenly equated the *sign* of the covenant with the *covenant* itself
2. So Paul asks, does the blessedness of forgiveness from sin apply only to the Jews, or to all?
3. Is salvation by grace through faith only for those who are good enough, like Abraham?

{10} How then was it accounted? While he was circumcised, or uncircumcised? Not while circumcised, but while uncircumcised.

{11} And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which *he had while still* uncircumcised, that he might be the father of all those who believe, though they are uncircumcised, that righteousness might be imputed to them also,

{12} and the father of circumcision to those who not only *are* of the circumcision, but who also walk in the steps of the faith which our father Abraham *had while still* uncircumcised.

4. It's very clear from scripture, that God declared Abraham righteous on the basis of his faith, *before* he received the sign of circumcision!
5. If, as the Jews thought, circumcision is what made a Jew a Jew, then Abraham was declared righteous by God when he was still a Gentile
6. It was *14 years* later that Abraham was circumcised!
7. Therefore, Abraham isn't merely the father of the Jews, he is also the spiritual father of all those who look to God with the same kind of faith he had
 - a. a faith that looks not at what we have done for God
 - b. but what He has done for us
 - c. a faith that puts its confidence, not in one's self
 - d. but in God alone

III. CONCLUSION

A. Circumcision No Longer As Important

1. While it is still a socially important rite, religious Jews no longer think of circumcision as a saving act
2. Still, countless millions of people trust in some form of religious ceremony or activity to make them right with God
3. That is why the Holy Spirit moved Paul to press this point so well in these opening chapters of Romans
4. Do we get it?
 - a. do we really understand that God accepts us on the basis of what Christ has done?
 - b. and understanding it, do we live it?
 - c. do we think of God as somehow varying in His opinion of us based on how good we've been
 - 1) how many religious hoops we've jumped through
 - 2) how devoted we've been
5. You see, it is part of the fallen human nature to *want* to be able to make it before God based on our works
6. Pride drives us to work for our own salvation
7. This is why so many cults and groups are able to gain such a large following
 - a. they tap into this human desire for a righteousness based on works
 - b. they want to be able to say, "See, I'm saved because I go door to door and sell *Awake* magazines
 - c. or, "I am on a two year mission to promote the message of Mormon."
8. One of the holiest days on the Hindu calendar comes every 12 years
 - a. it's called Maha Kumbh Mela
 - b. millions of people will gather at the convergence of the Ganges and Yamuna Rivers in India
 - c. all social and caste distinctions are set aside as people come to offer sacrifices to their gods
 - d. people afflict themselves with all kinds of pains and torments, just so they can attain to heaven
 - e. they lie on beds of nails, walk on hot coals, and broken glass
 - f. some even thrust long knives through their tongues,
 - g. others stare at the sun
 - h. the Hindu holy books promise salvation to those who bath there during Maha Kumbh Mela
 - i. they shave themselves and throw the hair into the water
 - j. every hair, not matter how small is supposed to earn them 1 million years in heaven
9. We hear of stories like this and shake our heads at the foolishness of believing such things
10. But wait a minute; what are we trusting in for heaven?

B. An Appeal

1. The preaching of grace causes some religious people to raise an objection
2. They think preaching grace is dangerous

- a. they say that if you don't talk about a person's *duty* to obey God, people will go off and do whatever they want
- b. they say grace gives people a *license* to sin
3. And I suppose for some it does
 - a. there are those whose hearts are so dark and so hard
 - b. no matter *what* they hear, they will make it an excuse to sin
4. But the problem is not with the *message* of grace
5. Rather, for those who listen with *true* hearts, grace is the greatest motivation to holiness there is
6. When I realize that God loves me so much, He took all my sin and forgave it forever,
 - a. I want to fall on my face in worship
 - b. I want to lift up my voice in thanks
 - c. I want to spend my every waking moment in devotion to Him
7. I don't work to be saved, I work because I am saved
8. No friends, the message of grace is not dangerous, it is the most empowering thing there is to a life of holy obedience