

• *The way of salvation – the same in Old and New Testaments*

• *Abraham was justified before God called him to holiness of life*

• *Paul wants us to see the difference between working for something and receiving it as a gift*

David's Story

• *Similar to that of Abraham*

1. *Salvation is a matter of what is 'reckoned'*

2. *David's salvation was 'without works'*

3. *David is able to stand before God despite his sin*

4. *His standing before God is a matter of faith*

5. *David is enjoying the experience of*

Romans 4:1–8 confirms and backs up what Paul has already said in Romans 1:2 and Romans 3:21. The gospel was predicted in the Old Testament. Paul is reminding us that the way of salvation that he has described in 3:21–31 is in fact the same gospel that was known by Abraham¹ and David².

Abraham's story shows the way of salvation. The case of Abraham confirms that salvation comes by our being given a righteousness that is not our own. Abraham receives this 'reckoned' righteousness simply by believing God. Abraham was not specially godly. He was not even asked to show any godliness before Genesis 17. He was 'justified' before God called him to holiness of life. Paul has argued that we are justified exclusively by the blood and righteousness of Christ and not at all by how well we are doing in obedience. The case of Abraham proves the point.

The next two verses put the point very sharply. ⁴*Now to the one who works, the reward is not reckoned according to grace but according to debt, ⁵but to the one who does not work but believes upon the one who justifies the ungodly, that person's faith is reckoned as righteousness.* The person is ungodly, does not do anything, believes – and he or she is right with God! Paul actually says we are saved by doing nothing! Paul wants us to see the difference between working for something and receiving it as a gift. It is not **optional** to give wages but a matter of obligation. If salvation is by works, then it comes into the realm of wages. It is a matter of duty, obligation. It would be entirely outside of the realm of grace. But Abraham was saved by doing nothing.

David's story shows the way of salvation. Before Paul develops his argument concerning Abraham, he spends a few sentences arguing that the case of David is similar. David also was 'declared righteous' without works:

⁶*Just as also David speaks of the blessedness of the person to whom God reckons righteousness without works,*

⁷*Blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. ⁸Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not reckon'*

Paul is quoting from Psalm 32 which (as the title of the psalm tells us) was a psalm of David. It was written at a time when David had committed some sin. 'I acknowledged my sin to you', says David.

1. **Salvation is a matter of what is 'reckoned'**. The reason Paul quotes this psalm is because it has the word 'reckon' in it. David is sinful in himself. Apparently he had recently fallen into sin. Yet he knows that he has been forgiven. The basis upon which he has been forgiven is that God will 'reckon' something other than what he is in and of himself. This is precisely Paul's teaching. God 'reckons' us righteous when we trust in Jesus. We may not be righteous in ourselves, but God justifies even the ungodly!

2. **David's salvation was 'without works'**. David was clearly not righteous in himself. He makes no claim to be worthy. He admits his sinfulness in this psalm. He speaks of transgressions and sins but he does not speak of anything good he has done. He is not looking to his own good works.

3. **David is able to stand before God despite his sin.** He has sinned, yet he still has contact with God. How is this? He is standing in a God-given righteousness. Despite all the sin that David has to confess he is still saved. He is able to come into the presence of God in prayer.

4. **His standing before God is a matter of faith.** The law existed in David's day but David is not quoting it or referring to it at all. His praying is by faith. David has turned to the Lord, and is trusting him no matter what he has done. He finds his refuge against sin and guilt in God. 'You are my hiding place', he says¹.

5. **David is enjoying the experience of being forgiven.** Forgiveness is negative. Justification is positive. But they are closely related. The point is that he was forgiven without works. He knows that people are blessed if their

1 4:1-5

2 4:6-8

1 Psalm 32:7

being forgiven

'transgressions are forgiven' and their 'sins are covered' because he can say about himself, 'Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not reckon.' Forgiveness is a wonderful thing. What relief of conscience has come to David. Being 'righteous without the law' brings us peace of conscience.

How is it that Paul can quote a psalm speaking of forgiveness, when his precise concern is justification? It is because there is no forgiveness without justification. Forgiveness is not a once-for-ever matter. Forgiveness has to be received again and again. If we confess our sins, God forgives us.

Forgiveness for us

But the question is: how can we be forgiven? Paul's answer is: David knew that there was a righteousness available from God. David knew that forgiveness came to him by his resting in the righteousness of another, of God himself.

To understand that we are forgiven by being covered by God's righteousness is a wonderful thing.

1. It brings peace of conscience

1. It brings peace of conscience. We do not have to be wondering whether God accepts us. David knew about righteousness being reckoned. He had a long battle to confess he was a sinner at all, but when finally he rested in God's 'reckoning' him righteous, blessedness came into his life.

2. No need to struggle with feelings of what we deserve

2. There is no need to struggle with feelings of what we deserve or what we do not deserve. It is very humbling but we look away from ourselves altogether.

3. Assurance of forgiveness for us

3. There is assurance of forgiveness for us. If our forgiveness depends on our own deeds, would we ever feel strong enough or good enough or repentant enough to feel safe? But if we are resting in the righteousness of God himself we can have immediate assurance.

4. Forgiveness despite great sins

4. There is forgiveness despite great sins. We do not know what David had done, but by the sound of his description in Psalm 32 it was something serious. All manner of sins and wickedness can be forgiven by the blood of Jesus Christ.

• David writing as a mature man, as a king and a leader

What is of particular interest in this psalm is that David is writing of a time long after he had first come to know God. David knew God as a young boy, looking after the sheep in the fields of Bethlehem. But now he is writing as a mature man, as a king and leader of Israel.

• We never outgrow justification by faith

This is an important point. We never outgrow justification by faith. When we have been Christians for half a century we shall still be standing before God in the righteousness he gave us as much as we were on the day we first came to know him. We shall never stand before God in any other way than the way we discovered at first. We can never outgrow the righteousness of Christ.



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