

## Through Faith Alone – Romans 4:5-17

- 1) God is the object of our faith
- 2) God blesses us through faith

In October of 1517, Martin Luther nailed the 95 Theses on the door of the Castle Church in Wittenberg, Germany to question the Catholic Church's teaching about forgiveness and indulgences. 4 years later in the city of Worms, pronounced something like Worms in German, Emperor Charles V summoned Luther to appear before him. Now Luther had created some major divisions in the empire with his writings based on Scripture. Charles wanted his people unified so they could face foreign threats, so he called for a diet, an official governmental meeting. And when Luther came to the Diet of Worms, he saw a table piled high with his books. Charles V had one question for Luther – do you recant what you've written? The emperor wanted Luther to say yes, to take back all he had written so that there wouldn't be any division. But Luther, rather than abandon what God's Word said, didn't give the answer that Charles expected. Instead he responded with three qualifying answers and a speech on top of it. I encourage you to look up Luther's complete answer at the Diet of Worms when you get back home.

But if you want to summarize his answer, listen to Luther's closing statement. **“Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason...I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. May God help me. Amen”** (*Martin Luther*, Martin Brecht). Even if it would cost him his life, Luther would not recant. What inspired Luther to take such a dangerous stand? It was because of Luther's faith in the Word of God.

We hear a lot of times that it's important to have faith. That if you just have faith, you'll overcome whatever's troubling you. But what truly makes a person's faith strong? It's the object in which it trusts. For example, imagine you had found a great deal on plane tickets out of Phoenix. The only thing you need to do is drive up there. But there's a problem, your car can barely make it to work let alone all the way to Phoenix. It doesn't matter if your faith in your beater car is so high that you're 100% sure you'll make it or so little that you have the tow truck's number pre-programmed into your phone, your faith is only as good as the object it trusts in. It's the same idea if you have a reliable car. Whether your trust is big or little in

the reliable car, it will get you to the airport. Because faith is only as good as its object.

When times get tough or life doesn't go as you expect, where do you go for help? It's natural to turn to ourselves. We give up sleep to work extra hours or finish the project. We lean on our education or skills to get our foot in the door. We log into our bank's website to make sure our emergency fund is ready to be tapped if needed. While these are all good things to do, don't let them be the object for your faith. Because they are as trustworthy as a beater car getting to Phoenix. They will fail you eventually. And when they do, you'll suffer for it big time. Rather, let the object of your faith be in someone that will never be shaken. Let it be in God.

It's important to remind ourselves that God is to be the only object of our faith. The Apostle Paul goes to great lengths in Romans chapter 4 to remind the Christians in Rome this very same thing. When we read through these verses earlier, did you notice that Paul goes on at length about circumcision? Paul did this because those of Jewish background were quick to trust in their circumcision. That because they were descended from Abraham, they were automatically saved from hell. But as we read in the first lesson, Abraham's faith wasn't credited as righteousness because he was circumcised. It's the other way around. First Abraham's faith was credited as righteousness. Then circumcision followed as a sign to seal the covenant that God made to Abraham. If circumcision were the cart and Abraham's faith were the horse, then the Jewish people were mistakenly putting the cart before the horse. Their faith had the wrong object.

This past week at Vacation Bible School, the kids have learned who the right object is. It's Jesus the Rock upon whom we build. He's the sure foundation for our faith that no storms or rains can ever tear down. The Apostle Paul tells us that **"the one who...trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness"** (Romans 4:5). Those who trust in God and have their faith in him alone will be saved. But when we place our faith in something other than God, we are essentially telling God off. If you think you get offended when someone ignores your suggestions, how much more do we insult God when we hear what he says and place our trust in something else instead? And yet God continues to tell us how Jesus is the Rock of our faith. He's the one who never once misplaced his trust. He's the one who never missed an opportunity to tell others about the rock solid foundation that is found in God's Word. But you know what the best part is? In spite of who we are, our faith is credited as righteousness. And it's all because

of Jesus since he is the object of saving faith. He died the death that we ungodly deserve. He suffered the punishment for all those who have a misplaced faith. But he also rose from the dead to prove that he is the one we are to place our faith in. And because he has risen from the dead, we build on the Rock that is Christ.

Through this faith that rests entirely on Jesus, God blesses us. But not always in ways that we may expect God to bless us. What comes to mind when you think of someone who's been blessed? Maybe a life that's free from worry. The stress from work or health problems is gone, people get along, and there's no need to penny pinch because there's enough money. While these are indeed blessings, they're not the chief blessing that God gives through faith. Rather, listen to how mighty King David describes what God's greatest blessing is – **“Blessed are those whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the one whose sin the Lord will never count against them”** (Psalm 32:1-2; Romans 4:7-8).

Why does King David single out this blessing of forgiveness over everything else? He was one of the greatest kings the nation of Israel ever had. He had riches beyond our wildest imaginations. The Lord even promised to send his Son through David's family line. But David knew that God's greatest blessing wasn't all the things he had in this world. It's the forgiveness of sins. No matter where we stand in society or how long our faith has been built on the Rock that is Christ, each and every one of us sins. And if God were to take them into account, we would be lost. But God doesn't count our sins against us. For he has covered them up with Christ's righteousness and washed them away with the blood of Jesus. And because Christ is the object of our faith, we are blessed. Most importantly with the forgiveness of sin from which all of God's other blessings flow. And the way this all happens? It's through faith and faith alone.

King David knew this. You need only skim David's life in the Old Testament to see that God had every right to abandon him because of his many sins. But time and time again, God renewed his promises to David and David believed him. And so David was forgiven of all his countless and destructive sins through faith alone.

Martin Luther knew how important faith is. When standing before Emperor Charles V at the Diet of Worms, Luther had to make a choice. Would he obey the emperor and so put his faith in danger? Or would he obey God and so put his life in danger? Luther correctly chose God for Luther valued his faith over his own life. It wasn't because he was naïve about the seriousness of the situation. It was

because Luther knew how important faith in God is. For it is only through faith we receive God's blessings.

Do you know how important your faith is? It's the instrument through which you receive God's chief blessing – the forgiveness of sins. If we depend on ourselves or build our faith on any other rock than Jesus Christ, we are not declared righteous. As Paul tells us, **“For if those who depend on the law are heirs, faith means nothing and the promise is worthless, because the law brings wrath”** (Romans 4:14-15a) It is through faith and faith alone that God's promise of salvation is given to us.

So make every effort to feed your faith and always built on the Rock that is Jesus Christ. Come to him in his Word in a daily devotional. Treasure the waters of your baptism when God brought you into his family. Regularly come to the Lord's Supper to receive his forgiveness yet again. These are the means of grace through which the Holy Spirit works to strengthen our faith. Teach the little ones among you about their Savior on a regular basis even when there isn't a Vacation Bible School being offered. For the more you get into God's Word and apply to it your heart, the stronger your faith will become. And when you have to decide between the world or your faith in God, you'll be all the more equipped to say with Martin Luther who said at the Diet of Worms **“Unless I am convinced by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason...I am bound by the Scriptures I have quoted and my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, since it is neither safe nor right to go against conscience. May God help me. Amen”** (*Martin Luther*, Martin Brecht).