



Lenten Series Week5  
**The Righteous Live by Faith**  
*Romans 4:1 - 5:5 | April 7, 2019*

***What does the scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness." (Romans 4:30)***

**Introduction:** As we've seen, Paul's letter to the Romans begins with an assessment of the human condition and the diagnosis couldn't be worse. It's as if the doctor's entered the examining room and told us that we're in the late stages of a cancer called sin, that it's metastasized—and there is no treatment. Our sin is literally killing us.

Consider this: there is no sin in heaven. A good and holy God does not tolerate sin. And that's a very good thing—unless you're sinful, full of sin. Because if you're sinful, as the Bible declares, then there is no place for you in heaven. Or for me. That's a very bad thing. As long as sin clings to us, we will be consumed ("The wages of sin is death..." Romans 6:23).

John Stott puts Paul's assessment this way: "All human beings, of every race and rank, of every creed and culture, Jews and Gentiles, the immoral and the moralizing, the religious and the irreligious, are without any exception sinful, guilty, inexcusable and speechless before God...There is no ray of light, no flicker of hope, no prospect of rescue. (Romans 1:18 - 3:20)

And then Paul's argument takes a sudden turn. In Romans 3:21 he begins with two words, "But now...!" and everything changes. Paul declares that God has stepped into this bleak and hopeless world to do what He alone can do. Like an oncologist who is hell-bent on destroying cancer cells, so the Great Physician comes to do battle with sin.

"But now!" As Gene Peterson translates it: "God did it for us! Out of sheer generosity, He put us in right standing with Himself. A pure gift. He got us out of the mess we're in and restored us to where He always wanted us to be. And He did it by means of Jesus Christ (Romans 3:24).

Jesus comes into our lives, and offers to take our cancer upon Himself. He tells us that He's come to absorb our sin into Himself, to remove it from us, to free us, and make us cancer-free (I have come that you might have life and have it abundantly! John 10:10).

This all comes to us as a gift. And, like any gift-giver, God invites the receiver to welcome it. In fact, not to embrace this gift is to forfeit the blessing. God's great act of love in Jesus Christ brings healing—for all who receive it and embrace it. This is how we "are put right" (justified—"just-as-if-I'd-never-sinned!"). And it is singularly activated by faith—that is, by our taking Jesus at His word, by trusting Him, and by welcoming Him into our lives to do this work.

In Romans 4:1-5:5, Paul focuses on the crucial nature of this response. He points to the Bible and takes Abraham and David as examples. Trusting God, says Paul, has always been the way that opens the door to God's blessing.

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**Pray:** God of Abraham and Sarah, Who makes and keeps your promises. Out of your love You call us by name, offering us a life filled with promise and every good blessing. You invite us to receive what you alone can give. Good Lord, forgive our hesitancy, our reluctance, our foolish dismissals of your offer of grace. Grant us the good sense to open wide our hearts and lives, to welcome You in, and to trust you to put us right, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

**Read:** Romans 4:1 - 5:5

**Discussion:**

Paul strives here to convince the reader that God's healing work in Jesus is not somehow purchased by our "good works." Read Romans 4:1-8 and consider these questions:

1. Paul doesn't want the reader to think that he is "making this stuff up as he goes along." He points to the Bible as if what it says is relevant and authoritative for his own time and place. What would you say to someone who said, "The Bible is an ancient work that is hopelessly out of date. It is a primitive religious document that has nothing to say to the modern world?"
2. Talk about the Bible's authority in your life. How has it clarified life and faith for you? Has it, in any way, shown itself to be trustworthy to you?
3. Read Genesis 15:1-6, Habakkuk 2:4, and Romans 4:3. How does Abraham's story bolster Paul's argument that our right standing before God is somehow activated by our trust in Him? Try to put it in simple language.

**Application:** Read Romans 5:1-5

To be "put right" (justified) with God, draws us into His shalom, His peace. How has this happened to you? Can you think of areas in your life that are "at peace" now because of your trust in the Lord Jesus Christ? Paul talks about his sufferings in a way that suggests that he's at peace about them. What view of the world enables him to speak this way?

Are there areas of your life that are not at peace? How would your life be different if you were to trust Him wholly to do what He alone can do? Do you think we can pray that God will increase our ability to take Him at His word? Have you ever done that?

**Pray:** Lord Jesus, thank you for gifting us with your healing grace. Cause us to lean on you alone for our salvation, trusting your work as all-sufficient. Amen.