

## Reckoned as Righteous

Sister Collins gathered her few bills and put a rubber band around them. She knew she was antiquated to still be sending them through the mail, but there were only a few she put in the envelope.

She only had two more years to pay on her mortgage, and she would be done! But her taxes had increased by \$75, and her pension had remained the same. Groceries and utilities were also on the rise. Every time she went to the grocery store, the bill was higher. She had to find a way to cut her costs or earn more money. She could work part-time in the church's office. Or could she see about other work?

Sister Collins didn't want to be a burden to her children. She had been an independent soul all her life. And frankly, her children were struggling to make ends meet themselves.

She went into the kitchen to fix herself some lunch. She was not going to get herself riled up about money! After 69 years, Sister Collins knew one thing. The Lord would take good care of her. She had strived to put the Lord first and trusted in the Word that when she did, God would take care of her. She remembered Matthew 6:33: "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (KJV).

It wasn't that she was expecting tit for tat from God. The Lord was a man of His Word. He was a good, good Father. It's just who He was. He took good care of His children, and He wasn't going to stop now.

- 1.** *What promises have you kept that you are proud to say you did?*
- 2.** *What are some promises you still need to fulfill?*
- 3.** *Why is God the one to trust for keeping promises?*

## Righteousness Is Apart from the Law

*Romans 4:13-15, KJV*

13 For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.

14 For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect:

15 Because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression.

*Romans 4:13-15, NIV*

<sup>13</sup>It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. <sup>14</sup>For if those who depend on the law are heirs, faith means nothing and the promise is worthless, <sup>15</sup>because the law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression.

Paul argued that God's promise to Abraham and his descendants did not come by keeping the law but because of the righteousness that was accounted to him by his faith. If the fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham and his descendants came by keeping the law, then faith in the Lord would be meaningless and the promises ineffectual. But such is not the case, because it is impossible for anyone, even Abraham, to keep the law.

Paul went on to argue that the law was never designed to make a person righteous. It is the agent that brings God's wrath on people. The law took away all excuses because it clearly declared God's standard. Its purpose would be to point people to Jesus.

Whether in Abraham's day or ours, righteousness before God comes by faith.

**4.** *How was God's promise not received by Abraham and his descendants?*

**5.** *How, then, was God's promise received by Abraham and his descendants?*

**6.** *What does the law bring?*

## Righteousness Is by Grace

*Romans 4:16-19, KJV*

16 Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all,

17 (As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were.

18 Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be.

19 And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb.

*Romans 4:16-19, NIV*

<sup>16</sup>Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. <sup>17</sup>As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not.

<sup>18</sup>Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be." <sup>19</sup>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.

As the apostle continued his argument, he introduced God's grace. Whereas the law could bring only God's wrath upon sinners, grace brings His mercy upon all who come to Him in faith. The Greek for grace, *charis*, means favor or a gift liberally bestowed upon a person who does not deserve it. Through no merit of their own, sinners can receive God's favor. By His grace God provided salvation,

and it is by faith that we must receive His gift.

Because salvation from sin is by God's grace through faith, everyone who comes to Jesus can be saved. Not only the Jews, but also Gentiles can receive God's gift of salvation. The latter are said to have the faith of Abraham, who believed God's promise that Sarah would bear the child of promise. Because God said it would happen, Abraham believed, and became "the father of many nations."

We can trust that the Lord will keep all His promises. Before there was the universe, there was God, and in Genesis 1, He spoke things into existence. If God's power as Creator is not enough for us, then consider His life-giving ability. He created plants, sea life, birds of the air, and all land-dwelling life, including people. Considering all we know about our Creator, we too have "hope as an anchor for the soul, firm and secure" (Heb. 6:19). Though not fathers of nations, those who come to God by faith in His Son will be adopted into His family.

**7.** *What is grace?*

**8.** *Who are recipients of God's grace?*

**9.** *How did Abraham become "the father of many nations"?*

## **Righteousness Is Reckoned by God**

*Romans 4:20-25, KJV*

20 He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God;

21 And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.

22 And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness.

23 Now it was not written for

*Romans 4:20-25, NIV*

<sup>20</sup>Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, <sup>21</sup>being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. <sup>22</sup>This is why "it was credited to him as righteousness." <sup>23</sup>The words

his sake alone, that it was imputed to him;

24 But for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead;

25 Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.

“it was credited to him” were written not for him alone, <sup>24</sup>but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. <sup>25</sup>He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

Righteousness is not something a person can attain in his or her own strength. There is nothing that a sinner can present to God to obtain righteousness. God’s standard is perfection, so imperfect human beings have nothing to offer. Thankfully, God knows this and loves us enough to provide the way for us to become righteous, and Abraham is our example.

When God promised Abraham that his descendants would be as innumerable as the stars, he believed that promise (Gen. 15:1-6). Abraham’s faith was contagious, because though his wife was skeptical at first (18:12), “by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise” (Heb. 11:11). It is important to trust that the Lord is faithful to keep His promises.

With faith, Abraham was persuaded that God could and would keep His promise. Therefore, God credited righteousness to him. People today can also be reckoned as righteous by faith in the Gospel (see 1 Cor. 15:1-4). Our Lord was delivered to the Cross for our sins, but three days later, He was raised from the dead for our justification. Now, because Jesus lives, those who are in Him by faith stand in His righteousness, justified in God’s sight.

**10.** *How is Abraham’s faith described?*

**11.** *What did God do because of Abraham’s faith?*

**12.** *How do people obtain righteousness today?*

## Faith Does

For months, Cynthia was frustrated with her job. Her manager constantly belittled everything she did. Cynthia needed a new job, but also needed to pay her bills.

One evening Cynthia was reading her Bible before bed. As she meditated on James 2:14-19, Cynthia realized that “faith does.” If she had faith in God to provide for her, she needed to demonstrate it. Cynthia went to work the next day and submitted her two weeks’ notice.

For two months, Cynthia filled out job applications. She even had a couple of interviews but no offers. Cynthia became anxious as she saw her bank account dwindling below her monthly expenses. Every night she would pray and ask God what she should do next. Often, she felt as if God wasn’t listening, but then someone would bless her with exactly what she needed to make it another week.

Her family and friends supported her faith and helped her during this time. One of her friends filled her car up with gas. Her family invited her to dinner and gave her a package of food to last for the next few days. She even received gift cards in the mail that she used for necessities.

At what seemed like the last minute to Cynthia, she received an email inviting her to an interview. After almost a month process, Cynthia received the offer to her dream job. She knew that she would have never had this opportunity if she hadn’t put her faith to action and quit her previous job.

It was a difficult time, but God fulfilled His promises. He used others to help her when things got tough. God had shown Himself to be trustworthy.

**13.** *What does “faith isn’t faith without works” mean?*

**14.** *What role does knowing God’s promises play when putting faith in action?*

**15.** *Have you ever stepped out in faith and done something that others would think unreasonable? Explain.*

## Standing on God's Promises

We demonstrated our faith in God and His promises by how we live daily. The fifth stanza of the hymn "Standing on the Promises" by Russell Kelso Carter reminds us that we have a good God who keeps His promises: "Standing on the promises, I cannot fall/ Listening every moment to the Spirit's call/ Resting in my Savior as my all in all/ Standing on the promises of God."

► *Are you willing to daily trust God and His promises, even if nothing is going according to your plan? If so, list some promises here you can stand on as you live your life for Him.*

### KEY VERSES

He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.

—Romans 4:20-21, KJV

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.

—Romans 4:20-21, NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

#### Week of May 13 through May 19

(See *The Quiet Hour* and *Cross* devotionals on these passages.)

**Mon.** Isaiah 26:1-11—Trusting in God Brings Perfect Peace.

**Tues.** Isaiah 40:1-11—The Penalty Has Been Paid.

**Wed.** Acts 2:1-4, 14, 16-24, 36—God's Spirit Poured upon All Flesh.

**Thurs.** Acts 2:37-47—The Firstfruits of Reconciliation.

**Fri.** Genesis 33:1-15—Brothers at Long Last Reconciled.

**Sat.** Psalm 29—May God Bless Us with Peace.

**Sun.** Romans 5:1-11—Peace with God through Jesus Christ.