

Justified by faith

In today's message, we have the example of Abraham, explaining how we can be justified by faith and which comes first in faith and in the law. I pray that God will give us new insights.

Please look at verses 1-3. "What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh discovered in this matter? If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works, he had something to boast about – but not before God. What does Scripture say? "Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness."

What is remarkable about these verses is that Abraham was justified by his faith, not by his deeds. The phrase "credited," is repeated 6 times through verse 12. The phrase "credited," here is "logizomai," a Greek commercial term meaning "to count, reckon, or regard". It means that through the purchase of the cross of Jesus Christ, He paid the "price of death" that sinners must pay.

To be "justified by faith, faith is credited" means "(1) to be forgiven of all the sins you will commit in your entire life, past, present, and future. (2) A declaration of acquittal from the final judgment. (3) Becoming God's children and heirs of the Kingdom of God. (4) Receiving the Holy Spirit. (5) To be sanctified to the likeness of Jesus Christ in love and freedom. (6) Become the glorified image of God at the consummation of the Kingdom of God" All of these are included in "justified by faith, faith is credited, becoming righteous. In John 13:10, Jesus plainly teaches the way of life of the saints who have been forgiven of their sins and have been justified. "Jesus answered. "Those who have had a bath need only to wash feet; his whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." From these words, by believing in Jesus, we are forgiven of all our past, present, and future sins, and because we have washed our bodies, our whole bodies are clean. This is the concept of being "justified. And while the washing of feet refers to the process of repenting and becoming sanctified each time we sin while going into this world, being "justified" at the same time as believing in Jesus represents the Holy Spirit living in us, beginning our sanctification, and making us holy.

Now let us consider Abraham. He is a man greatly respected by the Jews and by us Christians as well. He is mentioned in Genesis 11, beginning with the genealogy of Shem, Noah's son. Abraham's previous name was 'Abram', an ordinary name meaning

‘respected father’. In Japanese, it would be like ‘Kazuo or Hideo’. Abram himself would have wished to be an ordinary father. However, his small dream did not come true. He and his wife Sarai did not have any heir child even at his age of 75. They looked miserable, for in those days, being childless was considered a sign of unhappiness or even a curse from God.

Abram had no hope for the future. In such a desperate time, God suddenly came into Abram's life. Don't you still wonder how you were invited to the church while you were still unbelievers? All of us were invited to church one day, all of a sudden, right? It is an amazing grace because God came to visit us. This happened in Abraham's life 4,000 years ago. It was when Abram was 75 years old. Abram did not know the true God and was a craftsman who made idols with his father Terah in the Ur region of the Chaldeans. The Ur is now the area around Iraq. Because Abram's family environment was ordinary and he was engaged in the business of making idols, which God hates, he could not possibly have been chosen by God from a human standpoint.

However, God comes to Abram. **Genesis 12:1-4, "The LORD had said to Abram, "Go from your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you(1). I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will a blessing (2). I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse you; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you (3). So Abram went, as the LORD had told him; and Lot went with him. Abram was 75 years old when he set out from Harran (4)."** God promised that Abram, a poor, childless man, would be the source of blessing for all mankind. Here Abram obeyed God's word and left Ur. This was a small decision of faith. God saw Abram's faith and led him to become the father of all people according to God's plan. In this way, we also made a small decision when we first believed in God, didn't we? We may have thought, "I want to know more about God," "I want to go to church," "I want to join to Bible study," and so on. God would have been pleased with this small decision as faith.

However, although Abram made a decision to believe in God, he made many mistakes. When Abram moved to Egypt, he feared for his life and lied to Pharaoh about his wife Sarai, saying that she was his sister (Genesis 12:13). He was weak and lived with his way not by God's way. However, God took Abram's side. Abram also fought against the surrounding nations to rescue his nephew Lot from Sodom and Gomorrah and won a great victory. After that, Abram became a very wealthy man through God's

blessing (Genesis14).

However, he still had no son to succeed him, and when he saw himself without a son, he became anxious and afraid of revenge from the enemy even though he had won the victory. He wanted to walk in faith, but he was still weak. It is at this point that God reminds Abram once again of the promise He gave him before. **Genesis 15:1, "After this, the word of the LORD came to Abram in a vision: He said, "Do not be afraid, Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward."**Abram, however, was not happy. **"But Abram said, Sovereign LORD, what can you give me since I remain childless and the one who will inherit my estate is Eliezer of Damascus? (2) And Abram said, "You have given me no children; so a servant in my household will be my heir."** (3) Abram began a life of faith in God, but he was going through various trials in his life and was sulking with God because God would not give him the son His promises. We may also sulk at God when our prayers are not answered, don't we?

However, God treats Abram with patience and love. He said, **"Then the word of the LORD came to him: This man will not be your heir, but a son who is your own flesh and blood will be your heir. (v. 4)** Here, 'he who is born from you' is singular, indicating that it cannot be any descendant of Abram, but must be Isaac. It is also a messianic prophecy that in the future, His Son Jesus Christ, a descendant of Abram, will be born to complete salvation. God had promised Abram this grand plan of salvation, but he could never believe it.

At this point, I would have said, "Enough! I'm going to change my plans to someone else." But God did not give up on Abram. God tells Abram, from Abram's perspective, in a way that is easy for Abram to understand. **"He took him outside and said, "Look up at the sky and count the stars - if indeed you can count them."**(v5a) Imagine the stars shining in the pitch-black night sky. Now, let's count them together. One star, two stars, three stars, ten stars, ninety-nine stars, stars too numerous to count. At this time, God says, **"So shall your offspring be."**(v5b) Tears came to Abram's eyes when he heard these words. He said, "God! Is it true? I don't know how I can have so many descendants. I don't have any children now. And yet?" Abram was moved to tears by God's promise. He prayed to God. 'If God will let me be like that, I really want to be like that.' Verse 6, **"Abram believed the Lord. And He credited it to him as righteousness."**

This is an inspiring scene. This is the first time the Bible clearly states that Abram believed God. God credited Abram's faith as righteousness. He said, "You are the Son of

God!" He was justified by his faith alone, believing God's Word in a situation where he had nothing to boast about. What does the Bible say, "Abraham believed God. And it was credited to him as righteousness." This is the historical beginning of "a sinner justified by faith." This was a time when there was no law at all, such as circumcision. Therefore, "faith" preceded the law. This history of Abraham, whom the Jews revere, makes it clear. That God "justifies those who believe" is not a new idea in Jesus' time. Faith has this much historical basis. Therefore, we too should have confidence that we can be saved by 'faith'.

But how did Abram's life change after he believed? Did he dramatically change into a stronger and better person of character after this historic event? No. Abram was like the same person he was before he believed. Abram did many unbelievable things, just as he had done before he believed. 86 years old and still childless, Abram lost faith in God's promised word and bore a son named Ishmael from Hagar, a female slave. (Genesis 16:16) This was a huge failure, destroying family peace and creating conflicts with Islam even to this day.

However, God did not give up hope for Abram, whom He had credited and accepted as righteous. God was deeply involved in Abram's life until he was transformed into the glorious image of a child of God. Finally, when Abram was 99 years old, God changed his name from Abram to "Abraham. This is a manifestation of God's firm intention to raise him from an ordinary father to Abraham, who would be respected by all mankind (Genesis 17:5). He also performed the ritual of circumcision (Genesis 17:10). So circumcision comes later than faith.

Look at verses 9-10. "Is this blessing only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? We have been saying that Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness (9). Under what circumstances was it credited? Was it after he was circumcised, or before? It was not after, but before. (10)"

Abraham's faith certainly preceded his circumcision. Therefore, "justified by faith" extended even to uncircumcised Gentiles; see verses 11-12. "And he received the circumcision as a sign, a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. So then, he is the father of all who believe but have not been circumcised, in order that righteousness might be credited to them (11). And he is then also the father of the circumcised who not only are circumcised but who also follow in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised (v. 12)."

Abraham, however, makes the same mistake again. He becomes afraid of the pressure of the surrounding nations and lies again about his wife Sarai being his sister (Genesis 20:2). Oh, people don't change so quickly, do they? It may be the same for us. We are finally ready to believe in Jesus and walk with Him, but then we fail in many ways. We are disappointed in ourselves when we do that. However, God leads Abraham with hope even after he repeats the same mistakes.

God never gives up on Abraham, whom He credited and justified as righteous by faith. He had failure a lot, but eventually God's promise was fulfilled. At the age of 100, Abraham's promised son Isaac finally was born (Genesis 21:2). And Abraham became a man of faith so complete that he was ready to offer his only son Isaac as a burnt offering to God (Genesis 22:10).

What did you all learn from Abraham's life? What kind of God who justifies us by faith? Our God Father who raised 75-year-old Abram with patience and love for 25 years until he was 100 years old. Our God who never gave up on Abraham in spite of his many failures, but guided him with hope. **James 2:23, "And the scripture was fulfilled that says, 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness and he was called God's friend (23).'"** What a surprise, God made Abram to be Abraham and raised Abraham to the level of a friend of God. A friend is different from a child. Abraham came to have a deep relationship of trust with God until he became God's coworker. Wow! This is amazing. Imagine us becoming God's friends. Parents discuss many things with their children as they grow and mature, they also consult with their parents about their problems and concerns. This relationship of equal love and trust between parents and children is wonderful. It is amazing that God justified us as righteous and wants us to grow up to be perfect like Him. That's way too high! What are we going to do with such high expectations of God, these expectations that are too much for us. But from the moment God credited us as righteous, He decided to make us so to his precious expectation. .

We looked the example of Abraham, but God led the life of David, whom He "credited and justified as righteous," in the same way. Despite David's failure to commit adultery with Bathsheba and to kill his loyal general Uriah intentionally, but God eventually raised him up as a king of peace (Psalm 32:6-8). And also the apostle Peter denied Jesus Christ three times (John 21), but grew him to become the foundation of the church as Jesus promised, and even gave him the keys to heaven (Matt 16:19).

See verse 4-5 **"Now to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as**

an obligation (4). However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness." We know that we are not like those who work in God's company and receive a salary. When we were unbelievers, but we believed in God who justified us. By having the faith, we received the grace of salvation without works or effort. In Jesus' parable, there is the owner of the vineyard who gives the same wage to the laborer who comes at 9:00 AM and the laborer who comes at 5:00 PM. Like this master, God accepts us as righteous and saves us just by believing in Him, even though we have done nothing (Matthew 20:16). It is great grace.

I would also like to mention to you that when we look at the issue of the cult, Kyu toitsu kyoukai, which is talked about every day in Japan, they emphasize "guilt" to their followers. This is the same technique used by other cults to control people spiritually. But God the Creator and Father teaches us not to feel guilty. The book of Romans is persistent in teaching us about what is sin. And as saints, we are encouraged to live holy lives without sin. But this is quite different from having a guilty conscience. The parable of the talents in Matthew 25:14 is a good example. When the master went abroad, he gave his servants five talents, two talents, and one talent. But the one who received one talent did not do any business because he was afraid of God, and returned the talent to his master. God was not pleased with the servant. God wanted to have a relationship of love and trust with him, but he felt guilty that God would judge him. If guilt exists in a parent-child relationship, it is not a healthy relationship.

For a long time, I was going through my own divorce and many things were going wrong and I was not able to live openly and publicly. I was also troubled with shame and guilt as a Christian. However, through today's words, I realized that those who believe in Jesus have been justified as righteous by God, so they should put aside their guilt and live with confidence as God's children. When we live in this world, we make mistakes and fail. But we can fail without worry because God will change us until we are glorified no matter what.

This faith can be applied when we look at our family, our friends, our brothers and sisters in the church, our co-workers, etc. We can look at people with God's sight. In fact, I have a lot of conflict with my own children. However, starting today, I will look at my children with the sight of God who has justified them as righteous.

Eventually, Jesus Christ will come again to this world and this world will be completely restored. Until that time, let us not yield to any trials, but let us walk with faith that the God who "has been justified" is now at work and will transform us into a

glorious image.

Let's pray.

Beloved Heavenly Father. Thank you for justifying us as righteous in our weakness. Thank you so much for your plan and expectation to transform us into your glorious image. Please continue to guide us as you have in the past. Please have compassion on our brothers and sisters who are struggling with difficult illnesses, relationships, and financial problems. Give them healing, hope, peace, and happiness. We pray in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.