

**Romans 4:1-5; 13-15**  
**Lent 2; March 12 & 13, 2017**

"Just go to the money machine to get more," the young girl said to her dad. That is what she thought whenever her dad would say: "I don't have enough money for that." The solution was very simple: *go get some more money*. She believed the ATM machine was the money creator. Whenever you need more, just go get more. She had no idea from where the money came.

Where does your money come from? It comes from hard work and discipline, right? If you want more money, you just work harder and longer hours. As someone works longer and harder, they also have to save more of what they make. We all understand that.

It isn't that hard to draw the same conclusion when it comes to our eternal "savings." This morning in our text, the Apostle Paul wants to teach us about something that is much more important than filling your savings account in the bank. He isn't going to talk about how we can be ready to retire. But he is going to talk to us about how we can retire from this life. It isn't done by hard work, it is done by faith.

Life in Haran was good for Abram. He really had no reason to leave. When his father died he had left him with a wealthy inheritance in Haran. Servants, armies, livestock, real estate, investments. Abram's only poverty was that he and his wife, Sarai, remained childless. They were not getting any younger. Abraham was already 75 years old when God told him: **"Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing."**

I would think that inside, Abram was thinking: *What? Why would I want to do that?* He had everything. He had a comfortable life. Someone could look at Abraham and say – *'look at how he has made it.'* Even though Abraham was 75 years old when he picked up everything and moved, God still had a few lessons to teach him. The Apostle Paul talks about that in our text for this morning: **"What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, discovered in this matter?"**

If there was anyone who could boast about how well he had done, it would have been Abraham. If living a good life is the way to heaven, Abraham could certainly brag about how he had lived. He was an upstanding member of the community. He was successful. To those around him, Abraham looked like a great guy. **"But not before God,"** Paul writes. When you hold Abraham's life up to human standards, he looks great. But when you hold his life up to God's standards, he is going to fall far short. When we hold our lives up to God's standards, we will all fall short - ALWAYS, no exceptions. The Bible is clear – you cannot work your way into heaven.

Paul continues: **"Now to the one who works, wages are not credited as a gift but as an obligation."** The Bible tells us that our salvation is a gift from God. Paul simply says that if our good works gets us to heaven, then salvation is no longer a gift. Think of it this way: *Do you look at the paycheck in your hand and think: what a great gift has been given to you.* Do you run home and tell your husband or wife: *Honey guess what! You are never going to believe it. They gave me money for working last week.* I think it is more likely that we think: *They had better pay me. I worked hard for that money.* Salvation is either a gift or an obligation. It can't be both. If we think that we can get to heaven by working hard at it, then what is the point about believing in Jesus?

**"For if those who depend on the law are heirs, faith means nothing and the promise is worthless."** In reality, Paul tells us that if this is all about us, then we really have no point to be here today or any other day. Trusting in ourselves effectively nullifies what God has done for us.

Abraham got it. Paul writes: **"What does Scripture say? 'Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness.'** God's command to Abraham requires a much bigger perspective. **"Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you."** It would require trust. It would require faith. Some of God's promises require us to have a larger perspective. We may need to stand back and look at the larger perspective of what God wants to do with us. When Abraham later would look back at God's whole plan for him, he could see what

God had been doing. He wanted to fill Abraham with something that was much greater than all the riches Abraham had. **“However, to the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness.”** That’s faith isn’t it? Faith is the hand that grasps what Jesus has already accomplished.

As many of you know, this past week past week we attended the funeral of my father-in-law in northern Wisconsin. As I sat there at the church, I sat there not as a pastor, but a son-in-law, I thought about what this life is all about. It’s not about the stuff or things in our lives, it’s about Jesus. It is about a God who justifies the ungodly. It’s all about heaven, isn’t it?

Over the next several weeks, we are going to talk about the challenges and opportunities that are before us in this congregation. As we do that, I want you to keep the picture of Abraham in mind. God had made Abraham some really big promises. He kept every single one of them. God has made you many promises. Trust him. Trust his promises. He has promised you protection, his presence, hope, the things you need in this life. God is so big. We are so small. Trust this big God in every aspect of your life. All the money in world cannot buy us heaven. Jesus paid it for us. Trust him. Give him thanks that he has included us in that plan. Amen.