### “Reckoned Righteous” Steve Finlan for The First Church, August 14, 2022

**Genesis 15:1–6; 12:1, 3**

1After these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, “Do not be afraid, Abram, I am your shield; your reward shall be very great.” 2But Abram said, “O Lord God, what will you give me, for I continue childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?” 3And Abram said, “You have given me no offspring, and so a slave born in my house is to be my heir.” 4But the word of the Lord came to him, “This man shall not be your heir; no one but your very own issue shall be your heir.” 5He brought him outside and said, “Look towards heaven and count the stars, if you are able to count them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your descendants be.” 6And he believed the Lord; and the Lord reckoned it to him as righteousness. . . 1 The Lord said to Abram . . . 3 “In you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

**Galatians 3:5–9**

5Does God supply you with the Spirit and work miracles among you by your doing the works of the *law*, or by your *believing* what you heard?

6 Just as Abraham “believed God, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness,” 7so, you see, those who believe are the descendants of Abraham. 8And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, declared the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, “All the Gentiles shall be blessed in you.” 9For this reason, those who believe are blessed with Abraham who believed.

We start out with the story of Abraham, as we did last week. This shows Abram, as he was still called then, complaining about having only Eliezer, a slave, as his heir. The promised son would need to be born to Abram and his wife, Sarah. He complains that he and Sarah have no child, but God promises that they will have a child. In fact, his offspring will be as numerous as the stars that Abram can see in the sky. Then Abram believes, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness, that he believed the promise. Furthermore, it is not just his own descendants who will be blessed, but all the families of the earth shall be blessed through him. So all the Gentiles will be blessed by Abraham’s descendants, the Hebrews. It’s not just a blessing to *his* descendants.

The Apostle Paul emphasizes that it was Abram’s act of faith that counts. He was reckoned righteous because he believed the promise. And that is Scripture’s way of foretelling that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, Paul says (3:8). In fact, the promise that all the Gentiles would be blessed through him is the gospel itself, in Paul’s view. “Those who believe are blessed with Abraham who believed” (3:9).

We are the successors and heirs of Abraham’s faith. We are reckoned righteous by faith, just as Abraham was (Rom 4:23–24).

Our salvation comes through faith, and although this is the new message being proclaimed by the apostles, it was always already present in Genesis, Paul insists. He is not changing the rules, he is just spelling out what was always the truth. It was always salvation by faith, by trusting. By trusting the promise, one is trusting the *person* who gave the promise. Fundamentally, faith means trusting God. It is a personal relationship. It is walking with God as Abraham did.

Faith is the first step. Faith is the key that opens the door to heavenly living. After faith come love, truth, goodness, and all the fruits of the Spirit. Faith is not the end of the story, but the first step.

Paul sees living the life of faith as being profoundly different from the life of someone scrupulously trying to follow every commandment in the Torah. Later in this chapter, he says “before faith came, we were imprisoned and guarded under the law until faith would be revealed” (3:23). The law was difficult and oppressive. Paul puts it this way: “the law was our disciplinarian until Christ came, so that we might be justified by faith” (3:24). So the law was temporary; we are not to live under it any more.

The law was a heavy yoke, and we needed to be freed from it. Faith unchained us from the heavy burden of the Torah. Faith opened the door to a new way of living, one that is free of fear and worry. Later in Galatians, he will say “For freedom Christ has set us free” (5:1). This freedom is not just a pleasant by-product of the new life, it is an essential and defining feature of the new life. It is as though we have been handed over to freedom, and we need to be grateful for it and worthy of it.

Stated psychologically, we might say that we are freed to no longer fear God or to feel guilty and unworthy all the time. Salvation is not a matter of being worthy or not being worthy. We are saved because God loves his children and wants to bestow life upon them.

Faith requires action. It needs to be experienced, tested, participated in, and shared. It is an invisible power than needs to have visible effects in our lives.