

## Boastings and Blessings – Romans 4:1-12

Paul has been writing a letter to the Roman church – both Jew and Gentile – explaining the gospel that comes by grace. Paul ends chapter 3, and starts chapter 4 talking about boasting.

Paul is writing, anticipating the Jew to respond – ‘...but Abraham though?’, ‘surely this doesn’t apply to Abraham’. Paul is aware that the Gospel of Grace will bring to mind the great leaders and forefathers of the Jewish identity

### 1) In What Do You Boast?

In the context of when this letter was written, boasting was intended to intimidate the enemy in a battle. Boasting about their great warriors, their great victories – to scare their opponents. This was where they obtained their confidence. This was how they faced opportunity, and Paul is challenging this response of boasting in their Jewish identity.

Our boast manifests differently. It’s not a British thing to boast about our victories, and how great we are. However, we still hold on to things to make our identity. Whether that is likes on our Facebook Posts, successful careers or the size of our bank account, we can be tempted to cling on to these things to find our identity and stand out.

**Q. What temptations do you face in finding your identity? How can we boast in the wrong things? At work? With the family? Our roles in the church?**

**Q. What makes you stand out? How would you feel if that part of you were to disappear?**

### 2) What about Abraham?

Abraham was a great Jewish leader – someone to look up to. He left his homeland; followed everything God said; the father of the Israelites – surely something to boast in. Paul responds by referencing Genesis 15.

**Read Genesis 15:1-6**

Abram (who God later renamed Abraham) has been given a promise from God. Previously he has been told he would be a great nation. Now God again promises to look after Abram and to provide a son. God does not rebuke Abram for doubting (vs2-3) but instead casts vision and inspires Abram.

*‘Abram believed the Lord, and he credited it to him as righteousness’* (v6) This credit came before the works boasted by the Jews; it came before circumcision. Abram was credited because he believed.

**Q. What stops us from believing God’s promises? What doubts do we face with the promises God has made?**

**Q. How do God’s promises reassure us in our Christian identity before we see the fruit?**

### 3) How am I to know?

However, there was still some doubt as Abram sought assurance (v8) to which God responds in a dramatic fashion.

**Read Genesis 14:9-17**

God makes a covenant with the animal sacrifice. This is a record of an ancient ritual whereby animals are cut into halves and the individuals making the covenant or oath, swear to it by standing between the pieces – thereby stating that if they break the covenant being made they are accepting upon themselves the very same fate as the animals. The covenant that was made between Abraham and God was a promise of descendants greater than the stars in the sky and sands of the shore, if Abraham and his descendants walk blamelessly before the Lord (v17). Whilst Abraham walked faithfully with God his descendants didn’t, rejecting him time and time again, worshipping false gods. The covenant was broken.

However, God’s promise was sealed by God Himself, as he passed between the sacrificed animals. The covenant was broken and the price was paid by God himself – through His Son, Jesus Christ. We can know He will be faithful as we know the completion of this covenant on the Cross.

**Q. What requirements do we set for ourselves to live up to God’s covenant? Knowing the covenant was secured by God alone, what ‘boasting’ is now useless?**

**Q. How does the sacrifice and covenant of God help secure our identity and our boast in the Cross?**

***“If you seek first to please God and are satisfied with that you have but one to please instead of multitudes. And a multitude of masters are harder to please than one”*** Richard Baxter