

ROMANS PT 4

Children of Abraham

SPEAKER	Matt Ryniker
DATE	Sunday, January 11, 2026
PASSAGES	Romans 3–4; Genesis 15; Romans 1
MESSAGE	Begins at 1:05:04 in the service

THE BIG IDEA

The promise God made to Abraham came before the law, before Sinai, before circumcision — and it was for every family on earth from the start. So no one has to be adopted into another people's culture to belong to Jesus. What God credited to Abraham as righteousness was faith that he could bring life out of a dead body, and that is what he credits to us.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- ◆ Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome in AD 49. For about a decade the church there was abruptly Gentile-only — and when Jewish believers came home, the question “what does it actually take to be a Christian?” became urgent enough to need two chapters of answer.
- ◆ When Paul writes “all have sinned,” the first thing he means is *both groups in that room* — Jew and Gentile. Read it as an accounting of two peoples before you read it as an accounting of yourself.
- ◆ Righteousness has to come as a gift. Wages are owed; grace that is earned is not grace at all.
- ◆ Circumcision came *after* Abraham was counted righteous, not before. Paul tells the story in strict chronological order on purpose, because the order is the argument.
- ◆ Abraham's faith was not vague goodwill toward God. It was specific: that God gives life to the dead and calls into existence things that do not exist.
- ◆ Ishmael is what Abraham produced by his own effort. Isaac is what God produced by promise. Paul is not being cruel about this — he is showing us which one the church is.

- ◆ A culture can be a fine home for the gospel and a terrible substitute for it. You can double down on the trappings until the actual promise is forgotten.

► 1:05:04

Romans 4 can read like Paul filling pages until he gets back to the good stuff. Matt opened by insisting this *is* the good stuff, and then handed the room the history that makes it obvious. Emperor Claudius expelled the Jews from Rome in AD 49; Paul writes in the 50s. For roughly a decade, every leadership seat in that church held by a Jewish believer sat empty, and Roman Gentiles led, reached their fellow Romans, and grew a congregation that became — in Matt’s word — “very gentiley.” Then the Jews were allowed back, and went home to their home church.

1. The question underneath the letter

► 1:08:14

Walk back into that room. Nobody is keeping the festivals. Nobody is circumcising their kids. Does anyone here even read the Torah? “What does it mean to be a Christian?” Matt asked, standing in their shoes. “How do you become a true authentic Christian? Is it more Christian to join into the tribe of Israel?” And Paul has to answer without telling Jewish believers that their heritage was nothing. His move is to retell Abraham’s story — reading it, as Matt kept putting it, “through Jesus glasses.” God never wanted to be God to Israel only. He also never stopped wanting to be God to Israel. So the Jews don’t have to become un-Jewish and the Gentiles don’t have to become Jewish, because the whole time it was for every tribe and every family.

2. “All” is a room, not a mirror

► 1:09:54

Paul starts bluntly: “Are we Jews any better off? No, not at all.” Matt’s question about that “we” is the interesting one — it is entirely possible some Roman Christians had begun identifying as Jewish in order to feel more authentically Christian. “Are you now a hundred percent more Christian? Are you like maybe an extra ten percent Christian?” We read the “all” of these chapters individualistically, each little person on the planet. Paul’s first meaning is the two groups sitting in front of him. Both are under sin. And the law was never the fix, because through the law comes knowledge of sin — a diagnosis, not a cure.

3. A gift, or wages

► 1:12:08

“The righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ for all who believe. For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”

ROMANS 3:22–24 ↗

► 1:14:27

How badly did people want to sort this out? Gentiles in the ancient world were getting circumcised to belong, and circumcised Jews were seeking surgery to reverse it. Both directions, both real. Meanwhile people were asking Jesus the same question — what must we do to be doing the works of God — and getting an answer that sounds scandalous and is simply true:

“This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.”

► 1:16:29

Then comes the fancy word: God put Jesus forward as a propitiation — “making things right between us and God by his blood, to be received by faith, not by law or circumcision.” Matt flagged the ambiguity in the Greek of verse 26: “the one who has faith in Jesus” could also be rendered “those of the faith of Jesus.” Both are in play, and the second points forward — those whose identity is defined by the faithfulness of Jesus himself. Which is exactly the parallel he is about to draw. Abraham’s faith produced a body of people who by all rights should not exist; Jesus’ faithful obedience did the same, on a scale beyond counting.

► 1:17:29

So boasting is excluded — there is no way to brag that you are a better kind of Christian, because the finish line was never reached by human effort. And then Paul does arithmetic: if you are a monotheist, if there is only one God, how could he be the God of one tribe only? “There’s no other gods left,” Matt said. “That’s bad luck for them.” He never wanted to be a tribal deity.

4. Before the law, a promise

► 1:19:11

Some were accusing Paul of nullifying the Old Testament. His answer:

“By no means. On the contrary, we uphold the law.” It is still true, still scripture, still real history — and it has a purpose that sits inside a larger story. Before Sinai, before Moses, before there was a nation

with ordinances, there was a Chaldean named Abram living in Ur, uncircumcised, who was told in Genesis 15 that his children would be like the stars and that in his seed all the families of the earth would be blessed.

► 1:21:54

Years passed and no child came. So Sarah offered her servant, and legally the child would count as theirs — a reasonable plan, Matt allowed, and “it’s not like we can judge. We’ve done way dumber things than that.” Ishmael was born. Years later God came back and specified: you *and Sarah*. Ishmael was the fruit of Abraham’s effort. Isaac was the fruit of God’s promise. Hold onto that, because the rest of the chapter runs on it.

5. What Abraham discovered

► 1:24:29

In Paul’s day the standard telling ran the other way: Abraham was counted righteous because he obeyed. So when Paul quotes “Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness” and pointedly leaves the obedience out, it is a dramatic omission — bothersome, if not quite fighting words. Matt also noted that the verb in verse 1 is closer to *discovered* than the ESV’s “gained”: what did Abraham find out according to the flesh? What his own hands produced was Ishmael, and to Ishmael came no land, no inheritance, no blessing for all the tribes of the world.

► 1:26:24

Then the wage-and-gift line: to the one who works, pay is not a gift but a due (Romans 4:4–5). Grace has to be free in order to be grace. And to make sure nobody thinks he is cherry-picking one patriarch, Paul brings in a second witness everybody respects — David on the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works.

6. The order of the story is the argument

► 1:27:59

Here Paul slows down and walks it chronologically, which was not how it was usually told. Was Abraham counted righteous before or after he was circumcised?

“He received the sign of circumcision as a seal of the righteousness that he had by faith while he was still uncircumcised. The purpose was to make him the father of all who believe without being circumcised, so that righteousness would be counted to them as well.”

ROMANS 4:11 ↗

Abraham is not Adam; he is not the ancestor of everyone everywhere. But Paul is describing a wider family than his bloodline — one, as Matt put it with a preacher’s grin at his own line, “defined by promise, not performance.” That family includes the circumcised too, so long as they also walk in the footsteps of the faith Abraham had before he was circumcised.

► 1:31:16

And the inheritance never came through the law, which had not yet been given (Romans 4:13–15). If only law-keepers are heirs, then faith is empty and the promise is void — “do you really want to go down that road? Does the Bible start at Mount Sinai?” Back in Romans 2 the Jews had the Torah and the Gentiles had conscience and creation; here the promise rests on grace precisely so that it can be guaranteed to all his offspring.

7. Faith in a God who raises the dead

► 1:32:27

“As it is written, ‘I have made you the father of many nations’ — in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.”

ROMANS 4:17 ↗

“It was not like a vague faith that God’s kind of out there,” Matt said. “He probably listens. He’s probably — I don’t know.” Abraham’s faith had content. It was that if God said it, he could have a child with Sarah.

► 1:33:34

Which explains “in hope he believed against hope.” It is not two hopes in him wrestling for the win. Look at what happens when God asks for Isaac back: Abraham tells his servants “we will come again to you.” Spared, or raised — he did not know which, and he said *we* either way. Life from the dead because of God’s promise and not human effort: Matt let the room hear the figure that casts the shadow, and reached back to Romans 1:5 — the obedience of faith among all nations, “including you.” He is talking to insecure Gentiles. All along, God wanted this.

► 1:37:20

One last look at the Greek, which Matt promised twice would be the last: the word for “as good as dead” is one you use of corpses, not of the elderly.

“He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah’s womb. No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.”

ROMANS 4:19–21 ↗

Impossible plus impossible. And the counting was never only about him:

“It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.”

ROMANS 4:22–25 ↗

So Roman Christians do not merely imitate Abraham’s faith. They are participating in it, as his children by promise. The birth of Isaac and the birth of the church work the same way.

8. So what does it mean to be a Christian?

► 1:41:05

Here the message came home, and Matt was cheerfully willing to make the room squirm. If Jesus and the promises of God are for all tribes, what would it look like for Saudis to belong to Jesus as Saudis — Arabic, Saudi music, Saudi clothing? Do they have to swap the clothes for jeans? Do they have to start listening to K-LOVE and watching *The Chosen*? “That’s how we do it. That’s just how we do it.”

► 1:42:43

He kept widening it past ethnicity — Swifties taking down the poster, New Yorkers with beanies and kombucha, South Dakota guys with the hats and the trucks and Morgan Wallen — and then turned it on the room’s own checklist. Plaid, boots, loose-fit jeans, K-LOVE, *The Chosen*, voted the right way, therefore Christian. “Don’t drink, don’t chew, don’t go with girls who do.” The point is not that any of it is wrong. The point is what happens when it becomes the definition: you can double down on the cultural apparatus to the point that the actual promise is forgotten or confused. Even a building. “I put my body in a car, and then I get out of my car and I get in this building for an hour and a half on Sundays. So I’m a Christian.”

► 1:45:52

Yes, the gospel takes many cultural expressions among many peoples — and yes, it is important to know what it is underneath them. God's promise for all people is through the work of Jesus Christ, and trusting him for salvation and forgiveness. After that, boots or no boots, hat or no hat. The question is whether there is an actual relationship there.

Where it landed

► 1:47:24

The call, Matt said, is for you and for your neighbors of whatever culture: believe in Jesus, and see the people who look and act and dress differently than you as people God jealously wants. He wants them. He closed by admitting he never quite knows how to end a sermon, so he prayed instead — that we would get fresh vision and fresh energy, and grace to see the people around us the way God does.

FOR FURTHER STUDY**SCRIPTURE IN THIS MESSAGE**

- Romans 3:9
- Romans 3:19–20
- Romans 3:22–24
- John 6:28–29
- Romans 3:25–26
- Romans 3:27–30
- Romans 3:31
- Genesis 15
- Romans 4:1–3
- Romans 4:4–5
- Romans 4:6–8
- Romans 4:11
- Romans 4:12
- Romans 4:13–15
- Romans 2:14–15
- Romans 4:16
- Romans 4:17
- Genesis 22:5
- Romans 1:5
- Romans 4:19–21
- Romans 4:22–25

FOR YOUR HOPE GROUP

1. Matt read “all have sinned” as first of all a statement about two groups in one room rather than about individuals. What changes when you hear it that way?
2. Where in your own life are you producing an Ishmael — helping God’s promise along by your own effort — and what would waiting on Isaac look like instead?
3. Abraham’s faith was specific: God gives life to the dead. What is the specific thing you are trusting God for right now, and how would you say it out loud?
4. Name a piece of your own Christian culture — music, clothes, politics, habits — that you have quietly let stand in for the promise. How would you tell the difference?
5. Who in your week looks, dresses, or votes least like you, and what is one thing you will do differently toward them because God jealously wants them?

ABOUT THE SPEAKER

Matt Ryniker is Hope Chapel's senior pastor — his own description of the job — and reports to the church's governing board, who he cheerfully calls his boss. He and his wife Mandy have been held up from Hope's own pulpit as an example to the congregation. He spent a stretch of his working life as a public school teacher, and he still teaches the parent dedication classes where families commit to raising their children to follow Jesus — a theme that runs straight into this message.

Watch the full message:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rxdXxCqpavo&t=3904s>

These notes summarise a message preached at Hope Chapel in Austin, Texas. They are a reader's aid, not a transcript — scripture references link to the full passage so you can read it in context.