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David betrayed by his own tribesmen. Abraham, the father of the circumcised and the uncircumcised faithful.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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Transcript

1 Samuel chapter 23. 2 Arise, go down to Keilah, for I will give the Philistines into your hand. 3 And David and his men went to Keilah and fought with the Philistines, and brought away their livestock and struck them with a great blow.

So David saved the inhabitants of Keilah. 4 When Abiathar the son of Ahimelech had fled to David to Keilah, he had come down with an ephod in his hand. 5 Now it was told Saul that David had come to Keilah.

And Saul said, God has given him into my hand, for he has shut himself in by entering a town that has gates and bars. 6 And Saul summoned all the people to war, to go down to Keilah to besiege David and his men. 7 David knew that Saul was plotting harm against him, and he said to Abiathar the priest, Bring the ephod here.

8 Then David said, O LORD, the God of Israel, your servant has surely heard that Saul seeks to come to Keilah to destroy the city on my account. Will the men of Keilah surrender me into his hand? Will Saul come down, as your servant has heard? 9 O LORD, the God of Israel, please tell your servant. And the LORD said, He will come down.

10 Then David said, Will the men of Keilah surrender me and my men into the hand of Saul? And the LORD said, They will surrender you. 11 Then David and his men, who were about six hundred, arose and departed from Keilah, and they went wherever they could go. 12 When Saul was told that David had escaped from Keilah, he gave up the expedition.

And David remained in the strongholds in the wilderness, in the hill country of the wilderness of Ziph. 13 And Saul sought him every day, but God did not give him into his hand. 14 David saw that Saul had come out to seek his life.

David was in the wilderness of Ziph at Horesh. And Jonathan, Saul's son, rose and went to David at Horesh, and strengthened his hand in God. 15 And he said to him, Do not fear, for the hand of Saul my father shall not find you.

You shall be king over Israel, and I shall be next to you. Saul my father also knows this. 16 And the two of them made a covenant before the LORD.

David remained at Horesh, and Jonathan went home. 17 Then the Ziphites went up to Saul at Gibeah, saying, Is not David hiding among us in the strongholds at Horesh, on the hill of Hekilah which is south of Jeshimon? 18 Now come down, O king, according to all your heart's desire to come down, and our part shall be to surrender him into the king's hand. 19 And Saul said, May you be blessed by the LORD, for you have had compassion on me.

Go, make yet more shore. Know and see the place where his foot is, and who has seen him there? For it is told me that he is very cunning. 20 See therefore and take note of all the lurking places where he hides, and come back to me with sure information.

Then I will go with you. And if he is in the land, I will search him out among all the thousands of Judah. 21 And they arose and went to Ziph ahead of Saul.

Now David and his men were in the wilderness of Maon, in the Araba, to the south of Jeshimon. And Saul and his men went to seek him. And David was told, So he went down to the rock and lived in the wilderness of Maon.

22 And when Saul heard that, he pursued after David in the wilderness of Maon. Saul went on one side of the mountain, and David and his men on the other side of the mountain. And David was hurrying to get away from Saul.

23 As Saul and his men were closing in on David and his men to capture them, a

messenger came to Saul, saying, Hurry and come, for the Philistines have made a raid against the land. So Saul returned from pursuing after David, and went against the Philistines. Therefore that place was called the Rock of Escape.

And David went up from there and lived in the strongholds of Engedi. In 1 Samuel chapter 23 we see David playing the part of a judge, similar to the judges in the book of Judges, in a number of respects. He begins by delivering the city of Keala.

Keala is a city in Judah, in David's own tribal region. The Philistines are fighting against it and robbing the threshing floors. We saw a similar situation in the book of Judges in the story of Gideon, where he had to thresh in secret in order to avoid the Midianites.

David inquires of the Lord whether he should go down or not, and the Lord instructs him to go down, to attack the Philistines and to save Keala. David here is taking on something of the mantle of the king. Saul's not coming to the aid of the city, and so he's going to do the job.

He's going to act on behalf of his own region. In delivering the city and in seeking the counsel of the Lord from the prophet, David is very much behaving as the king would behave, in ways that show up the absence of Saul. Abiathar had brought an ephod to David.

The ephod that we have described in the book of Exodus is a garment with a pouch which contains the urim and the thummim. There's a parallel between this garment and the Ark of the Covenant, and it's used for inquiring of the Lord. Why is it in Abiathar's hand? That isn't entirely clear.

Gideon, we may remember, after he's asked to become a king, refuses but also constructs an ephod for himself and causes Israel to sin with it. Perhaps there were different forms that the ephod could take. The ephod was related to the Ark of the Covenant in certain ways, and taking the ephod into battle and seeking counsel with it was perhaps akin to taking the Ark of the Covenant into battle, or at least seeking the advice of the Lord within it.

The Ark of the Covenant contained the two tablets of stone. The ephod contained the two stones of the urim and the thummim. It seems that the urim and thummim gave yes and no answers, and sometimes maybe answers.

There has been much speculation about what was exactly involved here. Maybe there were two stones that were rolled and they had one colour on one side, another colour on another, and if they both came up with one colour it was a yes answer, while if they both came up with another colour it was a no answer, and if they both came up with different colours it was a refusal of God to give counsel on that matter. What exactly it was we can only speculate.

However, the important thing to notice here is that this story depends a lot upon different sources. Saul has his sources, but David is directly informed by the Lord as he seeks the Lord's counsel. Saul never seems to do that.

Saul relies upon traitors as his informants, perhaps people who are acting out of fear, whereas David is guided by the Lord. Saul discovers that David has come to Keilah and believes that he can trap him there. This might remind us of the story of Samson in the city of Gaza.

Lightheart remarks upon the repeated use of the word hand in these chapters. The hand stands for power. David has things given into his hand, but things slip out of Saul's hand.

Saul grips the spear in his hand, while David has the lyre in his hand and later has his hand filled with bread and with Goliath's sword. Similar to the Judahites who tried to bind Samson in chapter 15 of the book of Judges, the men of Keilah, given the chance, would have bound the man who had saved them, their own tribesman David, and would have delivered him into the hands of his enemy, a man who wanted to kill him. David had defended Keilah from the Philistines, but now Saul is going to attack Keilah on account of David.

The willingness of the Judahites to give up David, as they were willing to give up Samson, should be noted. Saul had 600 men back in Gibeah in chapter 13, and now David appears as a new Saul as he has 600 people with him. This should probably be connected to the end of Judges again, when there are only 600 left of Benjamin.

We might also think of Gideon's 300. At this point, Jonathan comes out to meet David. Jonathan is able to find David, unlike his father, and Jonathan makes a covenant with David, declaring that he will inherit the throne, and that Jonathan will be second to him.

Jonathan willingly gives up his birthright to David, and we should think here again of the story of Esau and Jacob. There have been numerous themes of the story of Esau and Jacob in the background of these stories to this point, and there will be many more to come. And in Jonathan, we should recognise a positive version of Esau, someone who willingly surrenders his birthright to the son who should have it, standing in the very sharpest of contrasts with his father.

The Ziphites now proactively try to betray David. Once again, David's own countrymen turn against him and seek to hand him over to his enemy. And this is a much closer call.

The Lord ultimately saves David only by bringing in an attack of the Philistines, so that Saul has to call off his pursuit just as he is about to capture David. A question to consider. What are some of the parallels that we have seen between David and specific judges to this point in the narrative? Romans chapter 4 Just as David also speaks of the blessing of the one to whom God counts righteousness apart from works.

Is this blessing then only for the circumcised, or also for the uncircumcised? For we say that faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness. How then was it counted to him? Was it before or after he had been circumcised? It was not after, but before 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, and to make him the father of the circumcised who are not merely circumcised, but who also walk in the footsteps of the faith that our father Abraham had before he was circumcised. For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void.

For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression. That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring, not only to the adherent of the law, but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all. 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.

In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations. As he had been told, so shall your offspring be. 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. That is why his faith was counted to him as righteousness. But the words it was counted to him were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also.

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. In Romans chapter 4 Paul turns to the example and the character of Abraham. There has been some debate in the last couple of decades about the translation and meaning of the opening statement of Romans chapter 4. Richard Hayes, N.T. Wright, Stanley Stowers, Douglas Campbell and a number of others have argued for translations along the lines of, what then shall we say? Have we found Abraham to be our forefather or to become our forefather according to the flesh? And there are various suggestions which are all slightly different.

They have in common though their emphasis upon the character of Abraham's paternity, whether that be considered as his paternity of the Jews, that the Jews have discovered Abraham to be their forefather according to the flesh, or have not as the case may be, or of believing Gentiles, or some have considered it as a reference to the way in which he

obtained paternity. Did Abraham become our forefather through the flesh, through works and this sort of thing? Typically the verse has been taken along the lines in which it is interpreted in the ESV. What then shall we say was gained by Abraham our forefather according to the flesh? Or maybe, what then shall we say that Abraham our forefather according to the flesh has found in this matter? In this way of phrasing it there may be an illusion to the Old Testament expression, so and so found favour in the eyes of the Lord.

The strength of the more recently proposed readings is found in the way that they frame the chapter less as principally an exploration of the question of how individuals are saved, with Abraham as a selected example from the Old Testament, and much more as an investigation of the character of the family of Abraham. Abraham isn't just a typical believer, but he is the father of the family of the people of God. Romans 4 then is much more concerned with the question of the shape and the constitution of this family than it is with questions of personal salvation abstracted from that.

Abraham is indeed an example of faith, but for Paul he is a very great deal more than this. However, there is no need to play these things off against each other. For Paul's argument, Abraham is both father of the faithful and an example of faith, and he is the latter precisely because he is the former.

As exemplar of faith, he is especially significant because he is the father of the faithful, and the principle of like father like son applies. I'm not persuaded of the more recently proposed readings, although I do appreciate the way that they make the reader more attentive to the fact that Abraham's importance to Paul's argument is not as a random example of a man of faith in the Old Testament, but as the father of the family of the people of God. The works of the law are things that chiefly mark out Jews from Gentiles, things like circumcision and the dietary requirements.

However, Paul's concern is not restricted to things like circumcision. He is concerned about anything that would suggest that Abraham or anyone else receives the gifts of God's grace on the basis of something about them. Although it would come under the same strictures and condemnation, Paul's concern probably is not about people trying to earn their salvation.

What he is challenging seems to be more subtle than that. It may be instructive to reflect upon Paul's enumeration of the things that marked him out as a Jew in Philippians 3, verses 4-6. If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more.

Circumcised on the eighth day of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of the Hebrews, as to the law, a Pharisee, as to zeal, a persecutor of the church, as to righteousness under the law, blameless. We should observe that many of the things that Paul lists here aren't about anything that Paul himself did. Rather, they concern Paul's

Jewish status and ancestry.

These are things that he once believed set him apart from Gentiles as an especially fitting recipient of God's grace. The pre-conversion Paul, like Jews of that time more generally, could have spoken at length about the greatness of God's grace. It wasn't that they lacked a theology of divine grace, believing that salvation was to be earned or merited.

Rather, it was because they believed that God's grace was somehow more appropriately given to certain persons. God is indeed profoundly gracious, but there was something about Abraham that made him a fitting recipient of grace. Being an observant Jew does not earn you God's grace, but it does mark you out from Gentiles, tax collectors, sinners, and the rest, as someone to whom God's grace will more appropriately come.

We should also note, looking at ourselves, that most of our claims about our superiority and worth, our beliefs that we are somehow greater than or marked out from others, are based as much upon unearned factors of identity, rather than things that we have done. It may be our family, it may be our class, our nationality, our wealthy background, our race, our neighbourhood, our physical appearance, or something else like that. All of these things can sustain a sense of entitlement, even to things that we would readily acknowledge to be gracious gifts.

Such things can also lead to some sense of greater entitlement to God's grace than others, to a belief that we are set apart from others by virtue of some factor of our identity. However, Paul rules out the possibility of any such boast before God. God's grace is not received according to anything that marks us out from others.

On the contrary, it is received entirely apart from any worth in the recipient. We all stand on the same level ground of utter unworthiness before God. Paul turns to the Scripture itself to substantiate his point.

He goes back to Genesis chapter 15, where God makes a covenant with Abraham and promises him a multitude of offspring. In verse 6 of that chapter, we are told that Abraham believed God and was considered to be in good standing with God on that basis, as one who believed God's promise. He then proceeds to unpack a term that introduces Genesis chapter 15, where God announces that Abraham's reward shall be very great.

Now the term reward can be used in the sense of pay, but Paul shows that such a meaning cannot be sustained in this instance. Such pay is received as the earned recompense for the work that someone has undertaken. It is not a gift, but something to which the worker has a claim.

Yet the person who has done nothing to earn pay through labour, but simply believes in

the one who justifies the ungodly, by the very faith by which he believes the promise of God, he is reckoned to be in right standing with God. The whole logic of work and reward breaks down. God simply does not operate on such a basis when considering or declaring people to be in good standing with him.

The expression, him who justifies the ungodly, here is an astonishing one. We should recall texts like Exodus chapter 23 verse 7, I will not acquit the wicked. The claim that God justifies the ungodly, that he vindicates unrighteous persons or declares them to be in good standing with himself, is nothing short of scandalous.

Although part of the meaning of the term ungodly might be a reference to those outside of the covenant of Israel, that simply cannot be the entire meaning, as we see from what follows. Paul now brings forward another witness, King David. In Psalm 32 verses 1-2, David writes as one, whose lawless deeds are forgiven.

The Lord does not count David's genuine lawlessness against him, but graciously considers him to be someone in good standing with himself. David had violated the law. The law gave him no standing for an appeal before God, because the law clearly stood in condemnation over him.

He acknowledged himself that his deeds were lawless. David's standing before God boiled down to the sheer grace of God in not counting his sin against him. He was justified apart from works, declared to be in good standing with God apart from any worth on his part.

Paul looks more closely at the example of Abraham, paying a special attention to the chronology. The reckoning righteous of Abraham that Paul has referenced, God's reckoning Abraham to be in good standing with himself, occurred back in Genesis chapter 15. However, Abraham did not receive the sign of circumcision until chapter 17.

This suggests that circumcision was never the basis of Abraham's good standing with God. Rather, circumcision referenced something more basic. Abraham already had good standing with God, by the faith through which he received the gracious promise of God given to him apart from worth.

Circumcision functioned as a seal of that standing, a standing that he already enjoyed by faith. It was like the ring that symbolizes and seals a couple's loving union. It isn't the basis for the loving union, but is a sign and a seal of it.

This foundational narrative of Israel actually undercuts supposed Jewish exceptionalism in relationship to God. The Abraham of Genesis 15 is actually the paradigm of the Gentile believer, more than the Jewish believer. Although the Abraham of Genesis 17, who is a man of faith marked out by circumcision, is the paradigm of the Jewish believer.

And so Abraham stands for both the Jewish and the Gentile parts of his family. Paul now

develops this point. Abraham was promised that all peoples would be blessed through him, that he would be the heir of the world.

However, this could never be fulfilled within the Jewish exclusivism of the bounds of the law. Indeed, if things had happened that way, it would have nullified the promise originally given to Abraham. It would have made the blessing exclusive to one people, confining the riches of God intended for the entire world to a single nation.

It would also have given Jews a ground for boasting in their worth over other peoples. What is more, the law is powerless to bring about the promise. Even worse, the law in many respects exacerbates the problem.

By placing a lot of commandments before Israel, commandments which they broke, it served to multiply transgressions of which other peoples outside of the law weren't guilty. Rather than granting Israel a special good standing with the Lord, the law actually had the opposite effect. It singled them out for particular judgement on account of their closeness to him.

As the Lord declares to Israel in Amos chapter 3 verse 2, The law clearly can't be the basis upon which the promise is fulfilled, not merely because of its exclusionary character, but also because of its wrath-bringing character. For this reason then, faith must be the basis, because it is faith that appropriately corresponds to promise, which is of grace, guaranteeing the blessing to all of its designed recipients, all of those circumcised or uncircumcised who share the faith of believing Abraham. The means by which the promise is put into effect is by God's giving of life to the dead, raising up belief in Israel, and calling into existence things that are nonexistent, making Gentiles, who were formerly not a people, members of the people of God.

Once again, Abraham is an example of this. The specific promise that Abraham believed concerned God's raising up of seed for him. However, he was old and his body was dead, as far as fleshly fruitfulness might be considered.

More particularly, Sarah's womb was barren. Yet faced with this situation, he was steadfast in faith in God's promise and did not waver. He was confident that God would fulfil his word.

It was precisely God's power and promise to act in the situation of Abraham's utter powerlessness and incapacity that he trusted in, and it was by this trust that he enjoyed good standing with God. We should observe the way that Paul expresses all of this. He has described Abraham's faith in the Lord's promise of a son in a way that strongly invites the reader's recognition that Abraham's faith is precisely a resurrection faith.

God will raise up the promised seed from the deadness of Sarah's womb and Abraham's body. In the type of the raising up of the son from the deadness of the womb, Abraham

might also be seen to be believing, not only in the God who would raise Jesus from the dead, but also, under a figure, in the resurrection itself. Moving into his conclusion, Paul presses the analogy between our father Abraham's resurrection faith and our faith in the resurrected Lord, Abraham's promised seed.

Scripture records that Abraham's faith was counted to him as good standing or righteousness with God. Paul claims that this statement wasn't just written for Abraham's sake alone. Paul might be saying more than just that Abraham is an example of faith to all of us and that we will also be accounted righteous as we show the same sort of faith.

He's definitely not saying less than this. Rather, Paul might be implying that Abraham, as the father of the faithful, enjoyed a graciously given standing before God by faith and that Abraham's standing is one that all of his children participate in. Children who are distinguished by the fact that, whether they are circumcised or uncircumcised, they exhibit the likeness of their father Abraham, walking by faith and enjoying Abraham's blessing with him.

The chapter ends with the statement that Jesus our Lord was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification. We might, throughout this chapter, have wondered how God could be just and still not count people's trespasses against them and how God's grace, given entirely without respect to the worth of its recipients, might itself be justified. In a deeply pregnant statement, which will be partially unpacked in the coming chapters, we discover that it is through Christ that this occurs.

Abraham's resurrection faith was a faith in God's power to act to bring about his promise in the deadness of his own immediate situation. Our faith is in the God who raised Jesus from the dead. However, if Abraham's example applies to us, his children, our faith isn't just in the fact of the resurrection of Christ in the 1st century AD, but also in the power of the resurrecting God graciously acting on the basis of his son's work in the deadness of our own situations.

A question to consider. How might we deepen our sense of our being children of Abraham? What might we gain from a greater awareness of this fact?