



**Monday 20 June 2022 to Sunday 26 June 2022**



Monday 20 June 2022

## Faith – confidence in God’s help

by Norma Koehne

**Jesus said to Jairus, ‘Don’t be afraid, just believe and she will be healed’ (Luke 8:50).**

Read Luke 8:40–56

Many of you may be able to empathise with the gut-wrenching heartache of Jairus as he watched his daughter suffering and close to death. As a parent, there is nothing worse than the feeling of helplessness in such a situation. Remember that Jairus did not have the medical care we rely on today.

I have never forgotten waking up at night in Papua New Guinea to hear my three-year-old struggling to breathe with croup and bronchitis. With just a lantern, we got our *doktaboi*, who managed to get him breathing again after he choked up altogether at one stage. The worst time of my life. Can you imagine how those grieving parents feel in Uvalde, Texas? Jairus was a man of strong faith, and he believed that Jesus would have compassion and help him. He trusted even when the people told him not to bother Jesus because his daughter had died. They mocked and laughed when Jesus talked about her death as just being asleep. His hand of healing was able to revive her and restore her to her family.

When faced with a similar situation ourselves or in the lives of our loved ones, we have the certain confidence that whatever happens, Jesus will be there with us. His loving hands will never let go of us. And, if we do not recover from illness, his loving hands will lead us through death into eternal life. ‘For I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord’ (Romans 8:38,39).

***Lord, we trust that you will never leave us, and you will walk beside us every day of our life because your promises have been fulfilled in the life, death and resurrection of your Son. Help us walk beside those suffering or grieving and share this confidence with them. Amen.***

Tuesday 21 June 2022

## In credit with God?

by Norma Koehne

**Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness (Romans 4:3).**

Read Romans 4:1–12

In chapter three of Romans, Paul spells out clearly that God comes to sinners, and through Christ, they are made right, justified, in his sight, by faith and not the works of the law. So why, then, does he begin chapter four by asking, 'What then shall we say that Abraham ... discovered in this matter?' The reason is that over the years, to make sense of why God chose Abraham, Jewish rabbis had surmised that Abraham had kept the law so well that God was pleased with him and blessed him. If the rabbis were correct, then Abraham was saved by works and not by faith alone.

One of those supposed works was that Abraham obeyed God and was circumcised. However, Paul shows that circumcision happened many years after God made a covenant with Abraham (Genesis 15). God promised him that his descendants would be as many as the stars in the sky. Abraham believed, and it was 'credited to him as righteousness'. It was a true gift of grace, and with an open heart, Abraham accepted the gift and believed.

Paul's other example of salvation by faith alone is King David, the penitent sinner, who had nothing to offer God but his many and heinous wrongs. He repented and believed that he had been freely forgiven and that God would not count, or credit, his sins against him.

What does our balance sheet of credit and debit look like? Praise God that through his word and sacraments, we too believe in Christ's full atonement for our sins. The debt is gone, and God credits us with righteousness. We are covered with the righteousness of Christ so that when God the Father looks at us, he can say, 'Welcome, my beloved sons and daughters, into my family as descendants of my friend Abraham, that man of faith'.

***Father, we thank and praise you for the free gift of faith that you have put into our open hands and hearts through the work of your Spirit. Amen.***

Wednesday 22 June 2022

## In credit with God through Christ

by Norma Koehne

**The words 'it was credited to him' were not written for him alone but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness – for us who believe in him (Romans 4:23,24).**

Read Romans 4:13–24

When we think of something being 'credited', we can think of a gift being paid anonymously into our bank account, or we can think in terms of paying a debt. Paul alludes to the latter idea when he talks about the law only bringing God's wrath. The law convicts us of sin. It is salutary to read Martin Luther's explanation of the Ten Commandments at intervals and ponder on them. We are led to realise that we are not only convicted by our wrong actions but also by failing to do positive deeds for love to our neighbour. When God credits righteousness to us, it is a gift of grace and love.

God's gracious promise of free salvation and the gift of righteousness comes to us through faith. Look at the promise to Abraham that he would be the father of many nations. He and his wife Sarah were old, and all common sense and human reasoning would say this would never happen. But Abraham did not waver in having faith in God's ability to do what he said and was 'strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God'. We are blessed to have the full revelation of God's power and love. He 'raised Jesus our Lord from the dead'. Why? For you and for me so that our sins were paid for in full, and we are justified and have life forever with God our Father through Jesus' resurrection.

Every day as we pray in repentance for God's forgiveness through Christ, we are in credit with God. What an amazing gift of love!

***Loving Father, it is often hard to comprehend the extent of your great love for us, that you would sacrifice your Son to pay our debt in full and cover us with his righteousness. Our feeble thanks we offer for this overwhelming gift. Amen.***

Thursday 23 June 2022

## **Saved by faith through grace**

by Norma Koehne

**If you declare with your mouth 'Jesus is Lord' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead you will be saved (Romans 10:9).**

Read Romans 10:1–13

Paul grieves for his fellow Jews, who, with zeal to please God, try to cover themselves with their own righteousness. They were still attempting to obey the law perfectly rather than accept the free gift of Christ's righteousness. It is the contrast between the 'do' of the law and 'It is finished' of the cross and resurrection.

It must grieve God that, in our sinful, fallen state, even Christians, who know of Christ's free forgiveness, still feel they have to do something to earn their salvation and God's favour. We need to be still and let God come near us with his love, and then that love will flow into lives filled with love for our neighbour.

Paul echoes the words of Moses in Deuteronomy 30:10–14 as he farewells the Israelites. He urges them, 'turn unto the Lord with all your heart and with all your soul' (verse 10) and assures them that God is not a distant God, far off in heaven, but a God who is near to them, with them every minute of their lives. We do not have to work to find God, go up into heaven and drag him down, or somehow go down into the deep to raise Christ up from the dead. All this has been accomplished. Christ has come down from heaven, leaving behind his power and glory, to share our humanity. He lived a life without sin and suffered and died for our sins, going down into the deep to conquer Satan, and then was raised from the dead. The 'do' of the law is done, replaced by the 'It is finished' of the cross and resurrection.

With open hearts, we accept this free salvation, and with our mouths, praise our gracious God and, through the power of the Holy Spirit, confess that Jesus is Lord. It is sometimes hard to accept that we can do nothing to earn our salvation in a world obsessed with achievement and 'doing'. Whatever we do in thanks and praise and love is through the power of the Holy Spirit.

***Father, Son and Holy Spirit, you have worked powerfully to bring us to faith. Fill our hearts with joy, praise and eagerness to confess your great love to the world around us. Amen.***

Friday 24 June 2022

# All are welcomed into God's family

by Norma Koehne

**Christ redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we may receive the promise of the Spirit (Galatians 3:14).**

Read Galatians 3:6–14

One of the curses of our modern sinful world is 'tribalism'. It has been a curse throughout the ages. This is where one group of people considers themselves superior to another group. It can lead to the other group being demonised and somehow regarded as less than human. The most terrible examples in modern times have been the Holocaust and the dreadful tribal massacres in Rwanda. The basis may be cultural, religious or political.

Paul shows us clearly here that as Christians, we are brothers and sisters with people of every tribe and culture, all part of God's family. For the Jews in Paul's day, this was hard to comprehend, as they had been God's chosen people for centuries. To reassure them that the gospel was for all people, Paul goes back to the father of Israel, to Abraham, and to God's promise to him that 'All nations will be blessed through you'. From the beginning of time, God loved all his children and planned to bring them into his family through the salvatory work of Christ.

In our multicultural nations of Australia and New Zealand, we thank God for the many peoples of different cultures and languages who are becoming part of our church family. Let us welcome them sincerely as brothers and sisters in Christ, listening to them, learning from them, and together praising God that he has brought us all to faith in Christ.

This spirit of siblinghood is God's will for his believing people. As Paul says, 'He redeemed us in order that the blessing given to Abraham might come to the Gentiles through Christ Jesus, so that by faith we may receive the promise of the Spirit'.

***God, give us your wisdom and understanding as we live together as your family. Give us tolerance and patience as we work together as your family to build your kingdom and share your love among each other and in our communities. Amen.***

Saturday 25 June 2022

## The blessings for the faithful

by Norma Koehne

**You will make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand (Psalm 16:11).**

### Read Psalm 16

In the past week, we have been looking at God's free gifts to those who have faith. We saw how the tormented demonic came to faith, the faith of Jairus, and the faith of Abraham in God's promises when all seemed impossible. Paul's closely worked arguments showed us again and again that God credits us with righteousness through faith, not because of anything we have done. In Psalm 16, now we see the blessings that God gives to those who have faith.

God cares for us and keeps us safe. He provides security and a place of refuge for us. We all know and remember those times when we are buffeted by anxiety and the storms of life. When we feel abandoned and that no-one can help us, God stands beside us to assure us that he will never leave us or forsake us. He remains constant as our loving Father. As our loving Father, he gives us all good things – peace, love, joy. What blessings these are! When things around us in the world are chaotic and worrying, we can have peace knowing that God is in control and his love wraps around us. Amazingly, as we turn to God and trust him in stressful times, we can have joy in sorrow and despair.

We have these assurances because God has given us his word to counsel and instruct us. And standing by our side as our teacher and guide, we have the Holy Spirit to lead us through this word into stronger faith and greater trust. Jesus told his disciples that he would not leave them alone but give them the gift of the Spirit. We received this gift at our baptism and are led along the 'path of life' by the Spirit.

Finally, we receive the greatest blessing of all, our inheritance. We will have the ultimate joy of being in God's presence with eternal pleasures at his right hand. An amazing, undeserved and freely given inheritance.

***Thank you, God, that you shower me with so many blessings every day of my life. We particularly thank you for the blessings of faith and the Holy Spirit we received in our baptism. May we live in our baptism joy until we finally see our inheritance, being in your presence forever. Amen.***

Sunday 26 June 2022

## Jesus set his face towards Jerusalem

by Pastor Tim Castle-Schmidt

**On their way they entered a village of the Samaritans to make ready for him; but they did not receive him, because his face was set toward Jerusalem (Luke 9:52b,53).**

Read Luke 9:51–62

I find it interesting that Luke comments that the Samaritans didn't receive Jesus because his face was set towards Jerusalem. Now, you might think that it seems strange that Luke is suggesting that the Samaritans might dismiss Jesus because he was on his way to Jerusalem, but if that's the case, you may just be missing a literary cue in Luke's writing. When Luke refers to Jerusalem – especially in the chapters of his account leading to Jesus' crucifixion – typically, he means the cross and Jesus setting his face (and path) towards his betrayal and crucifixion.

When Luke comments that the Samaritans didn't receive Jesus because he had set his face towards the cross, he implies that the Samaritans wouldn't welcome Jesus because he is committed to being a failed Messiah, one who dies rather than brings wealth and prosperity to the people of Israel.

Is this also true of you and me? Do we not also find it hard to identify with a suffering Messiah? And yet, that is precisely who Jesus is, the Son of God who suffers with all creation.

So, as you reflect on our times of climate change, wars in Europe, Africa and many other parts of the world, and any other examples of suffering, be assured that this is not a sign that Jesus is absent; rather, he is fully present in all suffering. Through that suffering, he has made all things new, and he will renew us in the last days. Jesus sets his face towards Jerusalem to enter into our suffering now, to join us for life now. In Jesus, God is not absent but fully present for all time.

***Lord Jesus, thank you that you set your face towards Jerusalem. Help us to see you in the midst of our own Jerusalems and times of trial. Reassure us that you are near and present in all the suffering of this world ... and you have overcome it. Amen.***

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*Tim Castle-Schmidt is the pastor of Onkaparinga Lutheran Parish in the Adelaide Hills. After spending many years as a teacher in Lutheran schools, he says he finally listened to God's call to pastoral ministry. Tim is passionate about social justice and engaging the church with contemporary society. Tim shares his life with Fiona, daughter Miranda, a Jack Russell called Otto and 10 chooks.*