

Reckoning  
Romans 4:13-25  
February 28, 2021  
First Presbyterian, Luling

“Is it going to rain this week, ya reckon?” “I reckon HEB oughta have milk by now.” “You’re going to go on that trip, I reckon.” Does this sound familiar to you? This is the way people use “reckon” most frequently. I did a little internet research, and I am now informed that “reckon” used in this way, the way I think I’m most familiar with, is a southern U.S. phenomenon, and thus viewed as somewhat backward or uneducated. It also, however, is very much a British English phenomenon, where it does not have the same reputation—it’s considered perfectly proper grammar and usage. Immigration patterns explain much of this, as well as a tendency in the South to hold on to British usage longer than in the North, for whatever reason. That kind of thing is really interesting to me, but is not exactly the point of the sermon. This use of “reckon” makes it seem a little uncertain, like the speaker doesn’t want to make a declaration that HEB will have milk today, or that it’s definitely going to rain. The person using “reckon” like this is hedging their bets a little, just in case they’re mistaken.

The other way we use “reckon” in English is one I’ve heard multiple times in the last couple of weeks. Usually, in a sentence something like this “There will be a reckoning” for...ERCOT, electric providers, government entities of one sort or another. And the tone in which it is said makes it clear that the reckoning is not going to be positive, or pleasant. The reckoning is going to be negative, maybe even painful.

Neither of these two most common uses in English of “reckon” and “reckoning” is exactly the way Paul is using “reckoned” in this Romans passage. He is most definitely not uncertain of what he’s saying, nor is it a negative result. Let’s look at the verses where he uses it, and it’s not just here—Paul uses it pretty frequently. He’s talking about Abraham, who received promises from God that were kind of ridiculous and hard to believe. God promises Abraham, in the passage that Fred read, a son, and then that he himself will be the father of a great nation. That might have been a believable promise if Abraham and his wife Sarah had been young and robust. But they weren’t, far from it. They were old, well past the age of having babies and being parents.

Yet Abraham believed the promise, had faith in the God who had promised it, trusted that it would be fulfilled. Paul says he hoped against hope and was fully convinced that God was able to do what God had promised to do.

And it is that faith and trust and hope against hope, Paul says, that is “reckoned” to Abraham as righteousness. God counted the faith and trust and hope themselves as righteousness. God didn’t need sacrifices or actions or outward signs. God was able to see that trust and faith and hope inside Abraham’s heart, and God reckoned it to him as righteousness.

God reckoned it as righteousness. God figured it was righteousness. God counted it as righteousness. God decided it was righteousness. The Greek verb there on “reckoned” is related to the Greek noun which means “word.” So I want to play around with it a bit more and end up with something like “God called it righteousness” or even “God named it righteousness.”

God made the ridiculous promise to Abraham and Sarah. Abraham believed the promise and hoped against hope and trusted and had faith. And God saw the orientation of Abraham's soul and heart toward that promise, and God decided that Abraham's faith counted as holy, as good.

It wasn't wishy washy, like "I reckon it might rain this week," nor was it negative, like a day of reckoning for electric utilities. God's reckoning is certain and sure, as good as God is, and as eternal as God's love. God reckoned that Abraham's faith counted as righteousness.

And then Paul tells us that the same reckoning is for our sake. Our trust and faith in God's promises made known to us in Jesus Christ will be reckoned to us as righteousness, just as Abraham's faith in God's promises was for him.

I reckon that God's reckoning is beyond my understanding. But we can place our trust and faith in God's reckoning to be sure and certain, to be as rich in grace and goodness as God alone is.