



Let's continue our time of worship by opening our Bibles to Romans 4 (p. 885). Last Sunday I prefaced my sermon on Romans 4 by quoting Psalm 111:2: "Great are the works of the LORD, studied by all who delight in them." Truly there is no greater work of God than the redemption of lost humanity and the reconciliation of all things to himself through Jesus Christ his Son. For this reason we are told in Hebrews 2 not to "neglect such a great salvation" (Heb. 2:3) but to "pay much closer attention to what we have heard." The 20th century poet T.S. Eliot wrote,

*We shall not cease from exploration,
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
and know the place for the first time.*

In some sense this is true when it comes to the gospel. Christians on the path to maturity never move away from the gospel but only more deeply into it. The book of Romans helps us to do that. It's a systematic study of the gospel.

Paul introduces the "gospel of God" in the first sentence of his letter and explains the essence of it in verses 16-17, saying, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, for it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who believes, to the Jew first and also to the Greek. For in it the righteousness of God is revealed from faith for faith [faith from start to finish], as it is written, "The righteous shall live by faith." That is, God credits his righteousness to those who look to him alone for salvation, and God does not count their sins against them, because he counted their sins against Christ when he died on the cross as their substitute.

In chapter four, Paul shows that this way of salvation was not only foretold in the Old Testament but was also God's way of saving people back then also. Paul points to Abraham, the father of Israel, and David, Israel's greatest king, to show that they too were sinners who were justified by faith.

Now in the second half of Romans 4, Paul explores this principle even further. He extols Abraham's faith, not because Abraham is great but because God is great. That's why I have entitled our study of Romans 4, *The God of Abraham Praise*.

THE GOD OF ABRAHAM PRAISE
Part Two

Romans 4:13-25

Understanding the nature of Abraham's faith is absolutely critical, because he is "the father of all who believe" (4:11). As Tom Schreiner has correctly noted,

Not just any kind of faith qualifies one to be a child of Abraham. Abraham's faith had a specific profile that is reproduced in the life of his children. ... The outstanding feature of Abraham's faith is that it was God-centered.¹

Look at how Paul explains and illustrates this in Romans 4:13-25:

¹³ 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. ¹⁴ For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. ¹⁵ For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.

¹⁶ 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, ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ 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." ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, ²¹ fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. ²² That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness." ²³ But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone, ²⁴ but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, ²⁵ who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

***All true believers, like Abraham,
trust God no matter what.***

If the fulfillment of God's promise depends on our performance, we're doomed. But if it depends on God's grace, then it's guaranteed to all who trust in him.

That's Paul's emphasis as he explains the nature of Abraham's faith. First, he talks about ...

¹ Thomas R. Schreiner, *Romans*, second edition. Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament, editors Robert W. Yarbrough and Joshua W. Jipp (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018), p. 243.

**Our Failure:
Why God's promise did *not* come through the law
(vv. 13-15)**

In verse 13, Paul states, "For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world...." Let's pause to consider the magnitude of God's promise. The ultimate inheritance for Abraham and his descendants includes not only the land of Canaan but the whole world – the new heaven and new earth described in Revelation 21-22, the "better country" referred to in Hebrews 11. This is the eternal home God is preparing for Abraham and for all believers.

God's promise regarding this inheritance "did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith" (v. 13b). Paul is presenting a contrast. It would have been more parallel if Paul would have said that God's promise "did not come through *the righteousness of the law* but through the righteousness of faith." Why doesn't Paul use the expression "the righteousness of the law?" Because there is no such thing. Remember what Paul said back in chapter 2, verse 20?

For by works of the law no human being will be justified in [God's] sight,
since through the law comes knowledge of sin.

- Romans 2:20

The problem isn't the law, it's us. No one keeps the law; it only exposes our sin. That's why Paul says in verse 14, "For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. Our faith is pointless and God's promise is worthless if getting the blessing is contingent on keeping the law.

It would be like me promising you \$100 if you could jump from where you are and touch the sanctuary ceiling. (I'll even let you stand on the pew.) My promise is worthless and your believing it is pointless if it depends on your ability to meet an impossible standard. The same would be true if God's promise depended on our ability to keep the law. We lack the capacity to do it on account of our sin.

Instead of bringing a blessing, the law brings wrath – God's judgment on our sin. When Paul says, "where there is no law there is no transgression," he does not mean that sin would be non-existent if there were no written law, for earlier in this same letter (2:12), Paul refers to "all who have sinned without the law" as well as "all who have sinned under the law." Here Paul uses the word "transgression," which is a violation of a revealed command. So when the law says, "Honor your father and your mother," and you disrespect them, you have committed a transgression. You have violated a revealed command.

Of course we're all guilty of breaking God's commands, which is why the law brings wrath. It exposes our sin and subjects us to God's righteous wrath.

Thankfully, God's promise did *not* come through the law. That's good news!

**God's Faithfulness:
Why God's promise is received through faith
(vv. 16-25)**

Paul's transitional statement in verse 16 should be read with a sigh of relief, or even a shout of joy! He says, "That is why it depends on *faith*, in order that the promise may rest on *grace* and be *guaranteed*...." Just as you wouldn't attempt to cross Irondequoit Bay Bridge if it were made out of Legos, so no Christian would ever dare to depend on his own religious efforts to get to heaven. His collapse into hell would be certain, and he knows that.

Whereas works depend on human performance, faith depends on God's promise. And Scripture assures us that those who trust in the Lord will not be disappointed (Rom. 9:33; 10:11; 1 Peter 2:6; cf. Isaiah 28:16).

Throughout the remainder of chapter 4, Paul shows how this principle played out in the life of Abraham, and how this same principle applies to us.

Admiration (vv. 16-22)

In verses 16-22, Paul extols the kind of faith that clings to God's promises even when circumstances say, "It will never happen!" Abraham believed in the God "who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist" (v. 17b). Continuing on in verses 18-22, Paul writes,

¹⁸ 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." ¹⁹ 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. ²⁰ No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, ²¹ fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. ²² That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness."

Paul rehearses Abraham's response to the promise God made to him in Gen. 17. Imagine what it was like for Abram to go so many years without having a child. Do you know what Abram's name means? "Exalted Father." Since Abram lived along a major trade route, he would entertain strangers who needed a place to rest or have a meal before continuing their journey.

Imagine what it was like for him to meet people passing through:

"Hi, what's your name?"

"Abram."

"Oh, 'Exalted Father.' How wonderful! How many children do you have?"

"None."

This was the case for years. Then, when Abram is almost a hundred years old and his wife Sarai is ninety, God comes to Abram and says, “I’m changing your name. No longer will you be called Abram, ‘exalted father.’” Abram must have thought, “Whew. It’s about time.” Then God says, “From now on you’ll be called Abraham, ‘father of a multitude.’” *What?!*

But what does the text say? “In hope [Abraham] believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told....” Two things are readily apparent about Abraham’s response:

1. Abraham considered his predicament.

Verse 19 says, “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.” The word “considered” (*katanoeō*) means “to observe; to contemplate.” It’s the same word that Jesus used in Luke 12 when he told his disciples not to worry about what they’ll eat or wear. Jesus said, “Consider the ravens: They do not sow or reap, they have no storeroom or barn; yet God feeds them. And how much more valuable are you than birds!” (Luke 12:24). Then a few verses later Jesus used the same word again, saying, “Consider how the wild flowers grow. They do not labor or spin. Yet I tell you, not even Solomon in all his splendor was dressed like one of these” (v. 27). Jesus wants his followers to *consider* the birds and the flowers. *Observe* them. *Contemplate* them.

That’s what Abraham did: “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.” Now some manuscripts say that Abraham did *not* consider his own body or the barrenness of Sarah’s womb. But no matter which way you translate it, it’s still essentially saying the same thing. After all, Abraham had to consider what he wasn’t going to consider. “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” (vv. 20-21).

I imagine Abraham getting ready for bed and looks at his one hundred-year-old body. He sees his wife Sarah getting ready for bed and looks at her ninety-year-old body. Then he gives her a flirtatious look and says, “Are you thinking what I’m thinking?...”

Abraham considered his predicament. Yet ...

2. Abraham was convinced of God’s power.

“Fully convinced,” the text says. What kind of faith glorifies God? The kind that believes that God will overcome any predicament in order to keep his promises. Such was the nature of Abraham’s faith – and Sarah’s too. For we read in Hebrews 11,

By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.

- Hebrews 11:11-12

Abraham believed in this Almighty, trustworthy God. “That is why his faith was ‘counted to him as righteousness’ (v. 22). This doesn’t mean that Abraham’s faith was flawless. At times he doubted God and tried to solve problems his way rather than God’s way. But the disposition of Abraham’s heart – what characterized him as a whole – was a consistent faith in the power and promises of God.

What God did for Abraham was great. But that’s not the main point of the text. The main point is that what God did for Abraham, he will do for *us*.

In the final few verses of Romans 4, Paul moves from *admiration* to *application*. This is my *favorite* part of the text!

Application (vv. 23-25)

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.

- Romans 4:23-25

Abraham’s real-life experience illustrates and points to a far greater reality – the righteousness that we obtain through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. Therein we find a far greater miracle.

Isaac’s birth was miraculous: he was conceived when his parents were super old, well beyond child-bearing years. But Jesus’ birth was far more miraculous, for he was born of a virgin; he was conceived by the Holy Spirit!

When Isaac was conceived, Abraham’s body was “as good as dead.” But after Jesus suffered on the cross, his body really was dead. Yet he was raised to life by the power of God.

Jesus was “delivered up *for* [because of] our transgressions.” Jesus was then “raised *for* [for the sake of] our justification.” Jesus’ resurrection authenticates and confirms that our justification has been secured.² If Jesus had stayed dead, we would have never known that we were justified by his death. But since Jesus was raised, we know that his sacrifice was acceptable to God the Father. It has been said “The resurrection is God’s ‘amen!’ to Jesus’ declaration, ‘It is finished!’”

² Ibid., 252.

Jesus' payment for sin will be credited to everyone who, like Abraham, "believes God." Believe that Christ died for your sins, just as Scripture says, that he was buried, and that he was raised again the third day, just as Scripture says – and you will be saved. Every believer, like Abraham, believes in the God "who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist." For "even when we were dead in our trespasses, [God] made us alive together with Christ – by grace you have been saved" (Eph. 2:5).

It was this gospel truth, illustrated by the life experience of Abraham, that inspired Charles Wesley to write his hymn, *Father of Jesus Christ, My Lord*.

Father of Jesus Christ, my Lord,
My Saviour, and my Head,
I trust in thee, whose powerful word
Hath raised him from the dead.

Thou know'st for my offence he died,
And rose again for me,
Fully and freely justified,
That I might live to thee.

Eternal life to all mankind
Thou hast in Jesus given;
And all who seek, in him shall find
The happiness of heaven.

O God! thy record I believe,
In Abraham's footsteps tread;
And wait, expecting to receive,
The Christ, the promised seed.

In hope, against all human hope,
Self-desperate, I believe;
Thy quickening word shall raise me up,
Thou shalt thy Spirit give.

The thing surpasses all my thought,
But faithful is my Lord;
Through unbelief I stagger not,
For God hath spoke the word.

Faith, mighty faith, the promise sees,
And looks to that alone;
Laughs at impossibilities,
And cries, It shall be done!³

³ To read the entire hymn, visit [https://www.invubu.com/music/show/song/Charles-Wesley/Father-Of-Jesus-Christ%252C-My-Lord-\(360\).html](https://www.invubu.com/music/show/song/Charles-Wesley/Father-Of-Jesus-Christ%252C-My-Lord-(360).html).