

Ministry of Grace Church

Romans 4:16-25 - Sermon Notes



Background

Before we get started with today's study, let's take a look at an event that Paul has highlighted here in Romans chapter 4. Paul uses this event to focus on the fact that we, like Abraham, are declared righteous by the grace of God, when we believe what He tells us. This is recorded in Genesis chapter 15. Abraham had just returned from defeating King Chedorlaomer and the armies with him who had attacked Sodom and carried off the people and their goods. Upon Abraham's victorious return from the battle, Yahweh came to him in a vision saying, "Do not fear, Abram, I am a shield to you; Your reward shall be very great."

But remember, this was not the first promise Yahweh had made to Abraham. Back in chapter 12 of Genesis, He had promised Abraham:

And I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing; And I will bless those who bless you, And the one who curses you I will curse. And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed." (Genesis 12:2-3)

And, in chapter 13, Yahweh had promised him:

And I will make your seed as the dust of the earth, so that if anyone can number the dust of the earth, then your seed can also be numbered. (Genesis 13:16)

This now brings us to the events of chapter 15. It had been about 15 years since Yahweh promised Abraham that he would make a great nation from him, and yet he still had no children. That's why Abraham complained to Yahweh,

And Abram said, "Since You have given no seed to me, behold, one born in my house is my heir." (Genesis 15:3)

So Yahweh took him outside and told him:

"Now look toward the heavens, and number the stars, if you are able to number them." And He said to him, "So shall your seed be." (Genesis 15:5)

And then we are told that Abraham believed Yahweh and it was counted to him as righteousness. In the past I have pointed out that there is, in fact, a gospel in the stars, that the constellations tell the story of mankind's fall and the coming of a Messiah who will free us from the condemnation that we deserve. Here, in the 4th chapter of Romans, the Apostle Paul makes a clear point that this was not the only promise made to Abraham. Yahweh also promised him that he would be the father of many nations and that his descendants would be as numerous as the dust of the earth and as numerous as the stars in the sky. Because Abraham believed Yahweh's promises, he was declared to be righteous, that is, legally innocent of any sin. With this background in mind, let's see what Paul says about these promises.

Romans 4:16-18

For this reason it is by faith, in order that it may be according to grace, so that the promise will be guaranteed to all the seed, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all— as it is written, “A father of many nations have I made you”—in the presence of Him whom he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist. In hope against hope he believed, so that he might become a father of many nations according to that which had been spoken, “So shall your seed be.”

These verses start off with a connecting clause, “For this reason it is by faith, ...” The natural question is, “What is by faith?” By backtracking a bit, we see that this clause refers to the previous 3 verses, which read:

For the promise to Abraham or to his seed that he would be heir of the world was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith has been made empty and the promise has been abolished; for the Law brings about wrath, but where there is no law, there also is no trespass. (Romans 4:13-15)

Paul is saying that the promises, and his resulting righteousness, were received as a result of faith, according to God's gracious gift and not the result of works. God's declaration of Abraham's righteousness occurred a number of years before Abraham obediently circumcised himself and his household. Therefore, it couldn't have been the result of works of obedience, it must be the result of faith.

Now, Paul reiterates the statement that he has made in the past couple of verses, that since Abraham was declared righteous as a result of faith, he has become the father to all who believe. The promise was made sure to all Abraham's seed, whether they are children of his flesh or children through his faith. The promise was not partial, it was not conditional, and it was not questionable. It was complete, absolute, and sure.

If we look at the physical descendants of Abraham, we see that he is the father of the Jews through Isaac (from his wife Sarah), the father of the Arabs through Ishmael (from Sarah's handmaid Hagar), and the father of other tribes through the six sons with his second wife, Keturah. However, the Apostle Paul understood the promise as referring, not just to the physical descendants of Abraham, but also to the spiritual descendants (all those who believe in God's message).

The next phrase, “in the presence of Him” refers back to the first part of the previous verse, where he said, “it is by faith.” You see, saving faith is demonstrated in the presence of God. It's not just some ethereal “Yeah, I believe in God” type of experience. Rather, it is a belief in what God says, **in His presence**, so that there is no doubt either in what is believed or in the reality of that belief.

Paul then says of God that He both has the ability to give life and to call things which do not yet exist as if they already did exist. In other words, this God of ours neither has any bounds on his power nor is he bound by time. He is without limit in both time and power.

Paul now makes a very dramatic statement regarding the type of faith that Abraham showed when he believed God's promise that he would be the father of many nations. He says, "In hope against hope ..." meaning that it was beyond reason for him to expect it. And yet, "... he believed ..." That is, Abraham had complete trust in the fact that this thing would happen without a doubt!

The thing that he believed was that he would be the father of many nations just as God had told him. So why should this be considered beyond expectation? Because, when this promise was made, Abraham was about 80 years old and Sarah was about 70. They were both beyond child producing years, and yet Abraham fully believed that not only could God do it, he believed without a doubt that God would do it. Now that's faith! (see [Daniel 3:16-18](#))

Romans 4:19-22

And without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb; yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to do. Therefore it was also counted to him as righteousness.

There is a subtlety in this section that you may not have seen before. We just talked about Abraham's absolute certainty that God would fulfill His promise to him. And we just learned that he was about 80 years old when God promised him that he would have descendants as the dust of the earth. (see [Genesis 13:16](#).)

We are told here that Abraham was not weak in his faith, which was proven by the fact that he didn't even consider the fact that his own body was already dead, meaning that his body was past the point of fathering children. Remember, Abraham was almost 100 years old when he defeated the 5 kings.

But wait a minute! Didn't we just say that Abraham was about 80 when the promise was made? That means Abraham's faith was still strong even after his having waited for about 20 years. Think about this! Abraham was 80 when the promise was made, and he was probably already past child producing years, yet 20 years later he still believed that God would give him a son. Now, that's a faith that doesn't give up!

Paul now uses a bit of a play on words here. He could have said, "And having a strong faith ..." Instead, he says that Abraham was not "weak in faith." The word translated "weak" is normally used to describe a physical condition, but Paul applies it to Abraham's faith. Here's what Paul is saying: Abraham may have had a body that was weak, even dead, with regard to fathering children, but his faith was not weak like his body was.

What is even more amazing is this, Abraham was about 100 years old when Isaac was born (Sarah was about 90) and Sarah died when she was 127, which means that Abraham was about 137 (see [Genesis 23:1,2](#)). After Sarah died, Abraham married a woman named Keturah ([Genesis 25:1,2](#)), and he fathered at least six more children with her! Abraham's faith was so strong that he didn't consider the fact that he was too old to father children; and neither did God!

And - in spite of his having to wait for 20 years, Abraham did not “waver in unbelief.” His faith was so sure and so strong that it did not weaken over time, and he apparently never doubted God once he accepted and believed the promise God made to him regarding his descendants.

I also find the next phrase quite interesting. Paul says, “but (he) grew strong in faith, giving glory to God.” If we look at Abraham’s life, we see that he had many direct interactions with God. In each case he learned a little bit more about God, and each situation served to reaffirm his belief in God and in His promises. So, instead of Abraham’s faith getting weaker over the course of time as he waited for God to fulfill His promises, his faith was not just unwavering, it actually was strengthened. As a result of his strengthening faith, Abraham gave glory to God. Do you see what that says? Abraham’s strong, unwavering faith actually enabled him to give glory to God while he waited. In a similar way, when we believe God’s promise and act on faith, we give honor to God. Also, as we learn to depend on God’s promises, which we must accept by faith alone, we become a testimony to his greatness.

Paul now adds some further definition to that faith which Abraham had. The first thing that he says here is that Abraham was fully assured. This is another way of saying that he had no doubts at all. This may sound like a repetition of what was just said, but there is a subtle difference. Not only was Abraham’s faith not wavering, he was “fully assured.” The Greek, here, indicates that it was as fully filled-up as it could possibly be.

According to the text, the thing that Abraham was fully assured about was that God **is** able to do what He had promised (that Abraham would be the father of many nations). You will notice that I said, “is able to do” not “was able to do.” The form of this verb in the Greek indicates current action (He **is** able to do). So, what’s the significance of this? It is as significant as what Jesus said when He was discussing with the Jews about what it really means to be a son of Abraham. When the Jews asked Him if He was greater than Abraham, what did He say? He said:

Truly, truly, I say to you, Before Abraham was, **I am!** (John 8:58)

He did not say “before Abraham was, I was” because Jesus, being God, is eternal. He never ceases to exist, and in fact, He exists simultaneously at all points in time past, present, and future. Jesus was proclaiming Himself to be the great I AM. Likewise, the Apostle Paul says, “what God had promised, He (is) also able to do.”

Abraham completely believed God. And, because he had a firm conviction that God would do what He promised He would do (make Abraham the father of many nations), God credited that faith to him as righteousness. That is, it was marked in God’s record book next to Abraham’s name giving him credit for being righteous. He didn’t earn it; it was simply credited to him as a gift.

This is the crux of what we call salvation. God tells us that we are sinners. So, first, each of us has to believe that we are a sinner. Next, we have to believe that we are going to be judged for our sins and that the punishment for our sins is eternity in hell. We can only be saved from this punishment by believing that Jesus died on the cross to pay our penalty for us. But how do we know these things? We know them because that’s what God tells us in the Bible. If we don’t believe the Bible is God’s Word, then we don’t believe what God tells us in the Bible and there’s no reason to believe in the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ.

However, if we believe that we are sinners who deserve hell, then we must believe that Jesus, the Son of God, died on the cross to pay the penalty for our sins. Again, how do we know this? Because God tells us in His message to mankind, the Bible. When we believe that we are sinners and that Jesus’ blood was

shed on the cross as payment for our sins, as a result of our faith, God declares us to be without sin. In other words, we are saved by faith, just like Abraham was!

Romans 4:23-25

Now not for his sake only was it written that it was counted to him, but for our sake also, to whom it will be counted, as those who believe upon Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, He who was delivered over on account of our transgressions, and was raised on account of our justification.

Since the Apostle Paul wrote this letter to the predominantly Jewish Christians in Rome, they certainly were familiar with their ancestor, the patriarch Abraham. Paul has been demonstrating in a series of logical arguments that justification does not come from obeying a bunch of laws or church ordinances. Rather, justification comes as a result of God's free will gift to those who believe the promise(s) made by God as recorded in the Bible.

In Abraham's case God promised that he would be the father of many nations, that he would have descendants as the sand of the sea or as the stars of heaven, and that the Messiah would come from him. Abraham believed God, and this belief occurred even when Abraham was past child producing years, and he held firm to this belief for more than 20 years after that, even as his body was getting older and older, and less and less able to produce children.

Having taken each of these verses, slowly dissecting them one at a time as we have, we may also have lost a little of the impact that these verses would have had on the predominantly Jewish Christians in Rome. You see, Paul has been very carefully showing these believers in the Law that it is not obedience to the Law or their being Jewish that has saved them. Rather, it is their faith. He has just proven to them that they did not earn their salvation in any way. Instead, he has shown them that their salvation, that is, their righteousness, came about only because God chose to declare them righteous when they believed in the resurrection of Jesus. This is the irrefutable argument that Paul has been delivering. Salvation is completely God's doing!

But wait! There's more! According to **Ephesians 1:13,14** Paul told the believers at Ephesus that when we believed (and were declared righteous by God), we were sealed with the Holy Spirit as a guarantee of our salvation. Here's what it says:

“after listening to the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation—having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance”

This is a significant point. Think about it. If God is the one who declared us righteous and as a result sealed us with the Holy Spirit who has been given to us as a guarantee, then we can never lose our salvation because He can never take the Holy Spirit back from us. It's like earnest money that you put down when you offer to purchase a house; if you decide to remove your purchase offer, you don't get your earnest money back because that was your guarantee. The Holy Spirit is our guarantee that God will complete our salvation as He promised. If He were to take back your righteousness (which He won't), He couldn't take back His Holy Spirit because that's our guarantee! This means no matter what you do, you ... can't ... lose ... your ... salvation.

Abraham believed that God would raise up a son from the deadness of his own body and the deadness of Sarah's womb. In the same way we are to believe that God raised Jesus from the dead and that he will raise us from the dead unto eternal life. Though it is different subject matter in each case, it is still faith that God responds to with His declaration of righteousness.

And – we do not believe in just anything. It’s not just blind faith in “a deity” or simply believing that there is a God. In order for us to be declared righteous by God, we have to believe in what He tells us about ourselves and about Jesus. We are sinners, and we deserve the punishment of Hell for our sins; therefore, we need salvation, which we can’t provide for ourselves. And – consider this, the worst part of the punishment of Hell is not the torment of the fire; rather, it is the separation from God, the inability to fellowship with Him, the fact that He has sentenced us to a place of intense darkness, loneliness, and emptiness. That’s the real agony Hell induces.

Jesus was delivered because of our offenses. Jesus took on our offenses and suffered our punishment for us. While Jesus was hanging on the cross, there was darkness for three hours. Toward the end of this time of darkness, Jesus cried out, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46). Why? It was during these three hours that Jesus was separated from God the Father for the only time ever. It was during this time that Jesus suffered the loneliness of Hell for us. It was during this time that He suffered in our place and paid the penalty for our sins!

We are justified because Jesus was raised from the dead by the power of God. This is according to His promise just as Isaac was raised from the deadness of Abraham and the deadness of Sarah’s womb. Because we believe in the resurrection of Christ and believe God’s promise that He will raise us up to eternal life, He has credited righteousness to us and has given us the seal of the Holy Spirit to keep until He fulfills His promise.

So What?

Where are you putting your assurance of salvation? Are you still trying to keep all the rules and ordinances of the church in order to please God? Or, do you trust in God’s promises for your eternal future? In order to trust in the promises, you have to know what those promises are, and in order to know what those promises are you have to read the Bible, repeatedly and consistently.

Let me encourage you, once again, to set aside fifteen minutes every day whether at the beginning of the day, in the middle of the day, or at the end of the day. It doesn’t matter when it is, as long as you are consistent about it. Then, after reading your Bible, pray about what you just read. The more you read your Bible, the better you will understand God’s message for you and His promises to you. If you believe the promise that your sins are paid for through the blood of Jesus Christ, then God has declared you as righteous and you are a son or daughter of Abraham through faith.

Have you been waiting for God to answer your prayers? Are you willing to wait for 20 years? Are you willing to wait for the rest of your life? Or, perhaps, right now you may be going through a time of testing. Does God seem to be ignoring your prayers? If you remain firm in your faith and wait patiently for God, your faith will be strengthened and in time you will be able to praise God and give Him glory. Time won’t make your faith weaker; it will make it stronger!

God’s ability to perform his promise to Abraham, and His ability to fulfill the promises that He makes to us today through his Word, never ceases to exist. He is always able to fulfill them. In other words, His power and His commitment to us are eternal and they never change.

If you are a born again Christian then you have been declared righteous by God. You didn’t do anything to earn it in the first place, and you can’t lose it no matter what you do! It’s by the grace of God! It’s secure! And it’s eternal! Hallelujah!

Let’s pray.