

Sermon outline and notes prepared by:

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Romans 4:13-25 “Abraham: An Example of Faith”

Intro. In v.13 Paul makes reference to God’s promise that Abraham “would be the heir of the world....” What a great promise! How would you like to inherit the whole world some day? Genesis 15:7-8 focuses upon God’s promise that Abraham would inherit “the land” some day (cf. Hebrews 11:8). How does Paul go from that statement, to his statement that Abraham would inherit the world? Well God also promised Abraham that he would not only have a child, but he would be the father of many nations. His descendants would inherit the land of many nations (cf. Genesis 28:4). I believe that promise is tied to one of the descendants of Abraham, the Messiah. Abraham saw beyond Isaac to a Redeemer. Our Lord Jesus confirms that in John 8:56 (cf. Gal. 3:8-9, 16, 29). Eventually, through the Messiah, Abraham & his descendants who believe would have world-wide dominion. In Romans 8:17 Paul says that we are “heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ...” When you consider that God owns everything, that means that we will inherit the world. Jesus said, “the meek ... shall inherit the earth” (Mt. 5:4). Jesus also said in Matthew 19:29 that we can inherit eternal life. What promises! We can inherit the world, and we can enjoy that inheritance forever!

Tim Russert was at the height of his career as a journalist. He had fame. I’m sure he made a lot of money. But at the young age of 58 he left it all behind as he died suddenly from a heart condition. We all could die suddenly, and leave everything behind. When death calls for you, will you enter into eternal life, and then some day inherit the world? Or is this short life on earth all you can hope for?

Well the good news for you and me is the fact that you do not have to be a physical descendant of Abraham to inherit the world & eternal life. Paul says in v.16 that these promises were obtained by faith in the gracious promises of God “that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law [i.e. Jews], but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.” Then in v.17 he quotes Scripture to justify his claim that Gentiles may inherit these promises as well, “as it is written, ‘I have made you a father of many nations’.” God said in Genesis 22:18 that “all the nations of the earth shall be blessed” through the seed of Abraham.

Now how do these blessings come to us? Paul continues to make the point in vv.9-15 that we are not made right with God and inherit the blessings of God through rituals or works, such as keeping the law. I will not focus on that truth in my message today.

How, then, are we made right with God? How can we inherit the eternal blessings of God? Well Paul clearly teaches that you can inherit the promises made to Abraham if you “are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.” On this Father’s Day, I want to talk about Abraham, our spiritual father. A son is to be like his father. And if you have the same kind of faith that Abraham had, you can inherit the promises made to Abraham. Furthermore, in v.22 Paul once again affirms something else God did for Abraham. Because Abraham believed God, “it was accounted to him for righteousness.” Though Abraham was a sinner, he became right with God the moment he believed. And Paul clearly says in vv.23-24 that if we believe like Abraham did, we can receive righteousness & the promises of God as well.

So what kind of faith did Abraham have? What kind of faith saves us, makes us right with God, and brings eternal blessing? Well, from Abraham's example, we see that:

I. SAVING FAITH BELIEVES IN THE PROMISES OF GOD

There are 5 references to the promises of God in this text (vv.13-14, 16, 20-21). For example, we know from the Genesis account that God promised Abraham & Sarah a son, even though they were old and Sarah was barren. In v.17 we see that he received the promise that God would make him "a father of many nations." Abraham was told he would produce multitudes of people at a time when he was the father of no one! God also promised to give him the land that he would show him. In fact, we see in v.13 that he received "the promise that he would be the heir of the world." Yet at the time the promises were given, he had no seed and no land; all he had was faith in a promise.

One great example of the faith of Abraham is the fact that he accepted the new name that God gave him. When God first called him, he was called Abram. Then God gave him a new name: Abraham, which means father of many. When Abraham arrived at the land of promise, he would be forced to identify himself. Can you imagine what would happen when people heard his name? They might say, "Oh, Father of many! Congratulations! And how many sons do you have?" And the answer was so humiliating to Abraham: "None." And, many a time there must have been the half concealed snort of humor at the incongruity of the name. He had a multitude of cattle and many servants, but—he had no children. The fact that Abram used the name Abraham was indicative of his faith. He happily referred to himself as Abraham because he believed the promise of God.

Do you have the kind of faith that believes in the promise of God? God has promised eternal life to those who believe in Him. Do you believe that promise? Our salvation is based on wonderful promises. You must have the kind of faith that believes in the promises of God. God promised in Romans 10:13, "Whoever calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved." Have you believed & claimed that promise?

Now let's look at a second feature of Abraham's faith:

II. SAVING FAITH HOPES WHEN ALL SEEMS HOPELESS

Paul said in v.18, "who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations...." Why did the fulfillment of the promise seem hopeless? Well we read in v.19, "he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb." Most authorities agree that the word "not" in the 2nd clause should not be in the text with "consider," since it is a late and inferior reading. The thought would be that although Abraham was fully aware of his own procreative inability and the deadness of Sarah's womb. The word "considered" is *katanoeo* which means, "to fix your mind on." Abraham thought about the fact that he was "now dead" in respect to having children. That is a perfect participle in the Greek and it means that he was in a state of deadness. So, Abraham fixed his mind on the reality that he would never be able to produce his son himself. Yet even though humanly speaking he had no hope for children, by faith he was able to hope. Hope & faith are very similar. Hope is the desire & expectation that something is going to happen. Faith is the confidence that it will happen. And it was twenty-five years of hoping and waiting from

the time that he received the original promise of a son until that son came. Faith and hope work together. They both rested upon the same foundation, the promises of God.

Christian, have you prayed and prayed for something, and now you have lost hope that it will ever come to pass? You wonder why God hasn't responded to your prayers. Well consider Abraham. He maintained hope for the promised child for twenty-five years. So the next time you begin to lose hope, remember that we should have the kind of faith that continues to hope, even when things seem hopeless. As long as there is a God, there is hope.

Another feature of Abraham's faith is this:

III. SAVING FAITH DOES NOT WAVER, BUT IS STRONG

Paul says in v.20 that "He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief." The word "waver" is the Greek word *diakrino*, which means, "to judge between two things." Abraham didn't waver between two opinions. He was not one who usually had part of him doubt that the promise would be fulfilled, and part of him believed.

But I don't think that Paul intended to say that Abraham *never* wavered in faith. V.20 follows v.19, which is a reference to the culmination of Abraham's faith right before the birth of Isaac. Prior to that, he did waver or struggle in his faith. Genesis 17:15-17 says that when Abraham heard the promise that he would have a child, he "fell upon his face, and laughed, and said in his heart, Shall a child be born unto him that is an hundred years old? And shall Sarah, that is ninety years old, bear?" So Abraham says, "God, Ishmael is Your only option" (v.18). I would say that his faith was wavering at that point.

Abraham's faith was wavering, but all faith works through some struggle. However, the ultimate end of Abraham's struggle was that he remained confident. When he had to have faith, he exercised firm faith without wavering at that point.

Furthermore, Abraham's faith was not weak, according to v.19. Instead, his faith was strong. Notice in the last of v.20 that Paul said that Abraham "was strengthened in faith." He could have reasoned, "That's it. Now I'm old and impotent. Sarah certainly can't bear children. The promise can't be fulfilled." But he did not. He remained strong in faith. So Abraham, fully aware of his and Sarah's physical disabilities, looked away from himself and focused his attention upon the promise of God. He concluded that the certainty of the divine promise outweighed every natural improbability.

Do you sometimes struggle with your faith? Do you sometimes waver in your faith? Is your faith weak at times? Wouldn't you like to have faith like Abraham had? He had a faith in the promises of God that gave him hope when things seemed hopeless. His faith was strong, without wavering. How do you develop that kind of faith? It's not by concentrating on building your faith. Don't focus on *your* faith, but shift your focus to the worthy object of your faith. I believe faith in the attributes of God is the foundation for the kind of faith that Abraham was able to have. So let's look at other aspects of the faith of Abraham:

IV. SAVING FAITH BELIEVES IN THE TRUTHFULNESS OF GOD

This is not stated specifically in the text, but this truth is implied by the fact that Paul refers to the promises of God several times in our text. That is what Abraham's faith was focused upon. Abraham believed that "those things which do not exist" are pre-determined by

God and it is as though they already had come to pass. God's promise was for Abraham as good as fulfillment.

Why did Abraham have such confidence in the promises of God? Surely it is because Abraham believed that God is truthful. Titus 1:2 says, "in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began." When God makes a promise He keeps it, for He is truthful.

That is exactly what happened for Abraham. God gave Abraham & Sarah a son even in their old age. Abraham became the father of many nations. God kept His promises for Abraham, and He will keep His promises to you.

The next time your faith wavers, just remember that God is absolutely truthful. He will keep His Word. He will keep His promises. He is a person of integrity. The more you believe in the truthfulness of God, the more your faith will grow.

By the way, as children of God, we should be truthful. We should keep our promises. We should be true to our word. We should be men & women of integrity.

V. SAVING FAITH BELIEVES IN THE POWER OF GOD

This truth is stated in v.21, "and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform." God is able to do what He promises. The word translated "able" is from *dunatos*, from which we get our word dynamite. God possesses dynamic power. He is omnipotent; all powerful.

Now let's look at a specific example of Abraham's faith in the power of God. In the last of v.17 we see that Abraham "he believed God, who gives life to the dead..." No one knew that better than Abraham. In v.19 we see that he was well aware that "his own body [was] already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. From a human point of view, the fulfillment of God's promise was indeed as impossible as raising the dead. The allusion is obviously to the birth of Isaac, the child of promise. Paul also says that God "calls those things which do not exist as though they did." That speaks of God's creative power. He brings things into existence. Abraham knew that God had the power to create within their bodies the reproductive material needed to bring about conception.

Heb. 11:19 tells us of another example of Abraham's faith in the power of God to raise the dead. Years later he was willing to sacrifice the child the Lord gave them because he believed in his heart that God was able to raise him from the dead.

Now Paul makes a direct application to us today in v.24. There Paul says that righteousness is imputed "to those who believe upon him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead." Paul saw the rejuvenation of Abraham's body as a picture of the resurrection of Christ. Remember, Paul informed us in v.17 that Abraham's faith was directed to a God who could bring life out of deadness. That's the same kind of faith that we have when we believe that God raised Jesus from the dead according to the promise of prophecy.

Do you believe that God has raised Jesus from the dead? Remember, once someone is truly dead, it is impossible to raise them back to life. But if you believe that God raised Jesus from the dead, you believe that God has done the impossible! That is the same kind of faith that Abraham had. And Paul says in v.16 that if you have the kind of faith Abraham had, you will receive righteousness from God the same as Abraham. In fact, faith in the resurrection of Christ is one of the requirements of salvation. Romans 10:9 says, "that if you confess with your mouth

the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved.” It’s that simple. It is taking God at His Word.

I want to apply this wonderful truth of faith in God’s power beyond the issue of salvation. What do you do when you face a big problem? Sometimes problems overwhelm us like a flood. Do you focus your attention on the problem, or do you put your faith in a God who can do the impossible? He is greater than any problem you face. As long as you have a promise from God that applies to your situation, you can believe that God will do great things to overcome the problem you are facing. All we have to do is receive God’s promises by faith.

VI. SAVING FAITH BELIEVES IN THE GRACE OF GOD

God is good, gracious, & loving. Paul says in v.16 that the fulfillment of the promises of God is “according to grace.” Abraham did not deserve any of these promises. He did not earn them. They were granted according to the grace & goodness of God. Saving faith does not rely upon the works we may do, but believes that God is good, and accepts the gifts of His grace by faith.

One of the good things about the grace of God is this: When God deals with us according to His grace, He does not give us what we deserve, but what we need. We have seen so far in the book of Romans that we need forgiveness, for we are all sinners, condemned to eternal death by our sin. We need a right standing with God. And what we should not earn by our works, God provided by His grace. Look down at v.25 & see what God has done for us by His grace. There we read that Jesus “was delivered up because of our offenses.” The language appears to be based on Isaiah 53. The verb “delivered up” in this sense (*paradidomi*) occurs twice in that chapter in the Greek translation of the Old Testament (LXX). This use of the verb in relation to Jesus’ being handed over to death suggests not so much the betrayal by Judas but rather to the action of God the Father, who gave up His Son to die on the cross. Notice in both clauses an action took place “because of” (*dia* with accusative case) something. Christ was “delivered up” because that was the only way to atone for His people’s sins. Oh, what love, what grace, that God would deliver up His Son to die for our sins on the cross. He knew that was the only way we sinners could be made right with God.

And how do we know that it is now possible to have our sins forgiven, and become right with God? Well Paul goes on to say that Christ “was raised because of our justification.” The resurrection of Christ is the proof that God accepted His Son’s sacrifice. God raised Jesus from the dead to show that sin had been conquered. It also demonstrated that God was pleased with what Christ did. Our faith that we can become right with God is not blind faith. It has clearly been demonstrated by the resurrection of Christ.

So we have seen that the key to faith is to gain a good grasp of the attributes of God. Let me show you why faith in God is so important. We have seen in previous messages that salvation by works would lead to boasting in ourselves. But in the last of v.20 we see that the principle of faith gives “glory to God.” The grandeur of faith consists in this that it gives all the glory to God. How? Abraham affirmed that God is trustworthy, able, and gracious. That says something good about God. On the other hand, if God says, “I’m going to give you a son,” but you say, “I don’t believe You,” then you are not honoring God. 1 John 5:10 says, “...he who does not believe God has made Him a liar...” Faith honors God; unbelief dishonors God.

Several years ago I went with the Youth to Student Life Camp at Ridgecrest. During recreation time, one of the activities was called "Trust Fall." One person would get up on a

platform, stand straight, and fall back into the arms of 6-8 people. Well, my group wanted me to do it! Could I trust Kevin Davis, Tory & Brittany Doughty, Brittany Burton, Justin Hailey, and 2 other youth to catch me? Surely they wouldn't let the pastor fall & break his back or neck! I also had to consider if 7 youth were strong enough to catch me? Were they trustworthy? Were they able? I decided I could trust them. So I got up there and put my trust in them as I fell backwards into their arms. Sure enough, they caught me just enough to break my fall. Even though I ended up on the ground, I was not hurt! [Illus.#C-993].

Now if I could trust some of our youth, how much more can I trust in a God who is truthful, omnipotent, and gracious?

Conclusion: God has made some wonderful promises that apply to you and to me. He promises that if we believe in His Son Jesus, and what He did for us on the cross, He will grant forgiveness of all of our sins. He promises to give us His Holy Spirit to guide us, and enable us to live for Him. He promises to provide for our needs. He promises to give eternal life. He will also give an inheritance beyond what we can even imagine.

How can we obtain these promises? There is only one way. It is not by works, but by the kind of faith Abraham had. So put your faith in the promises of God. Trust God who can give hope even when things seem hopeless. Don't waver in your faith, but be strong in your faith. How? By focusing on the object of your faith. God is true to His promises. He is able to do whatever He promises. After all, He raised Christ from the dead. And don't worry about where you deserve anything from God. He is gracious & loving. Trust in the goodness of God. If you have not made a faith commitment in Jesus as your Savior, I invite you to do that right now.

Sources: F.F. Bruce, *Tyndale New Testament Commentaries: The Epistle of Paul to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963); Bruce Corley & Curtis Vaughan, *Romans: A Study Guide Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976); John MacArthur, Jr., *Justified by Faith: Study Notes on Romans 3:20-4:25* (Panorama City, CA: Word of Grace Communications, 1984); John Murray, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament: The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1965); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [CD-ROM] (Ontario: Timnathserah Inc., 1996); Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Right: Romans* (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1977). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).