

“Abraham’s Faith”
Romans 4:16-21
(Preached at Trinity, January 27, 2008)

I’m supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord’s Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I’ll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Paul has been arguing that salvation comes only through faith in God’s promise to save men through the death of His Son. The works of the Law will do nothing to merit God’s approval. There is nothing we can do earn salvation. Salvation is God’s work; it is not our work. Only He can justify.
2. Last week we saw in **Verse 16** some consequences of seeking salvation by faith alone.
 - A. It establishes grace
Verse 16 – “Therefore *it is* of faith, that *it might be* by grace”
 1. Faith and grace go naturally together.
 2. When you think of works of the Law you do not think of grace – you only think of merit. You are earning something through your actions and you receive your wages. There is no grace in it.
 3. When you think of faith you can only think of grace.
This is because faith tells us we have nothing to offer. Faith is resting on a merit that is not our own.
 - B. It gives confidence in salvation
Verse 16 – “to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed”
 1. The Law can never give confidence because you can never be sure you have been obedient enough or that you will be able to continue in obedience.
 2. If your salvation is based on what Christ has done then it is finished. It is accomplished. We *have been* justified. He will keep us.
 - C. It opens salvation to all
Verse 16 – “not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all”
 1. This speaks of the comprehensive nature of salvation – it is for all.
 2. Abraham is the father of all who believe. All who receive the promise by faith.
3. In **Verses 17-18** Paul describes Abraham’s faith. God told Abraham to look up and count the stars. Of course the stars are innumerable. God told Abraham that such would his seed be, that he would be the father of many nations.
 - A. God was talking to a childless couple. Abraham was now 99 years old and Sarah was 90.
 - B. God spoke as if it was accomplished – **Verse 17**.
“I have made thee a father of many nations”
“God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were.”

- C. Everyone knows that 99 year old men do not father children. Even more, 90 year old women are long past the age of bearing children. We would even say it is impossible for a 90 year old woman to conceive. We have no record in modern history of such a thing ever happening.
- D. Yet, God declares it as being done. God's ways are not our ways.
Isaiah 55:8 – “For my thoughts *are* not your thoughts, neither *are* your ways my ways, saith the LORD. ⁹ For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.”
- 4. God is all powerful. Nothing is impossible for Him. He speaks and things come into being.
Genesis 1:3 – “And God said, Let there be light: and there was light.”
Isaiah 46:9-10 – “Remember the former things of old: for I *am* God, and *there is* none else; I *am* God, and *there is* none like me, ¹⁰ Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times *the things* that are not *yet* done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure:”
- 5. In eternity past God elected a multitude of people and determined that Christ would die for them. Their salvation was sure because the atonement was decreed. It was as sure as done.
Revelation 13:8 – “And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.”
- 6. God declares it all done. He declares those things that will be as if they have already happened.
Romans 8:29-30 – “For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate *to be* conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. ³⁰ Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.”
 - 1. We are still on the earth. We have not yet been glorified, yet God declares it accomplished.
 - 2. God sees us as already seated with Christ in heaven.
Ephesians 2:5-6 – “Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) ⁶ And hath raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus:”
- 7. Faith demands that we have the mind of God – that if God has declares it it will happen.
 - A. Faith is believing in God's Word. This is the essence. Notice **Verse 18**
Romans 4:18 – “Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken” Abraham believed the Word of God.
 - B. This morning I want us to delve deeper into the nature of Abraham's faith. His faith is our faith – **Verse 16** – “Abraham; who is the father of us all”
 - C. If we are justified by faith it is essential that we understand what this faith is. What were the things that characterized this faith that Abraham had? What were the things that faith enabled Abraham to do?
- I. Faith enabled Abraham to believe the promise of God's Word alone.
Romans 4:18 – “Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be.”

- A. There are many things that a man might look to for assurance and confidence
1. Paul has been talking about the uselessness of works
 2. It is natural for us to look to tangible, external things.
 3. When Jesus was upon the earth people were continually looking for signs and miracles to prove that He was God's anointed.
 - a. Jesus denied their request
Mark 8:11-12 – "And the Pharisees came forth, and began to question with him, seeking of him a sign from heaven, tempting him. ¹² And he sighed deeply in his spirit, and saith, Why doth this generation seek after a sign? verily I say unto you, There shall no sign be given unto this generation."
Matthew 12:39 – "An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign. . ."
 - b. Many followed Him when they saw His miracles but He wasn't interested in such to follow Him.
John 2:23-24 – "Now when he was in Jerusalem at the passover, in the feast *day*, many believed in his name, when they saw the miracles which he did. ²⁴ But Jesus did not commit himself unto them, because he knew all *men*,"
 4. Faith demands trusting in the promise of God's Word alone
- B. What was the promise Abraham believed?
1. "So shall thy seed be."
 2. Abraham believed the promise of God's Word. It is all summed up in that one phrase.
 3. The word "promise" has been prominent in this chapter.
Verses 13, 14, 16, 20
 God promised Abraham's that his seed would be as innumerable as the stars
- C. But God's promise to Abraham extended beyond a multitude of physical seed
1. It was a spiritual promise of a spiritual seed – a multitude that would flow from his true seed – Jesus Christ.
 2. Paul makes this clear in Gal. 3
Galatians 3:16 – "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ."
 3. Out of Abraham's loins would come the Savior, the Deliverer – And Abraham believed this promise.
 Multitudes err today when they confine God's promise to Israel – a physical seed and a physical land.
 4. Abraham did not see it clearly, not as clear as we see it – but he did see it. Jesus told the Jews - **John 8:56** – "Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day: and he saw *it*, and was glad."
 Abraham saw it and believed. He believed the promise of God.
- D. This is the essence of our faith
1. God says if you trust my Son and His merit you will be saved
 2. Biblical faith rests in Christ – He is the focus, the source. We are saved because of what He has done.

- E. Abraham had nothing upon which to place confidence
1. God promises him that he might be the father of a great multitude
 2. He couldn't look to the fruitfulness of his offspring – At that time he was childless. His confidence was in the Word of God alone.
 3. In our salvation we must look to God's promise in Christ alone
- II. Second, faith enabled Abraham to believe the Word of God in spite of appearances to the contrary.
- A. Not only did Abraham not have anything upon which to put his confidence, he actually had everything working against him.
- “Against all hope”
1. Abraham was almost 100 years old or that Sarah was 90
 2. Humanly speaking it was hopeless for Sarah to conceive
“Who against hope believed in hope”
 3. **Verses 19-20** sum it all up
Romans 4:19 – “And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sara's womb: He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God;”
 4. Again, we read about it in Hebrews 11
Hebrews 11:11 – “Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised.”
- B. In terms of our reconciliation with God everything is working against us
1. Satan has our eyes blinded
 2. Our sin has such a grip on us that nothing can release us from its power
 3. All of our actions are defiled
 4. We have to forsake everything
 5. Yet, God overcomes every obstacle by granting unto us saving faith – He enables us to believe in spite of the impossible
- III. Third, faith enabled Abraham to believe the Word of God with confidence and assurance
- Romans 4:19** – “And being not weak in faith”
- Romans 4:20** – “He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith”
- Romans 4:21** – “And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.”
- ESV – “fully convinced”
- NAS – “and being fully assured”
- A. True faith brings assurance
1. This doesn't mean we never have doubts – Abraham had lots of doubts. He was 100 years old. Yet, he trusted God.
 2. We may have doubts, but we are fully assured in Christ – that He is able

3. Lloyd Jones – “Some of the greatest saints that the Church has ever known have testified to the fact that they have been attacked and assailed by doubts to the end of their lives. But they were not weakened, they did not give in; they mastered their doubts, they conquered them, they overcame them.” True faith considers the difficulties and overcomes them trusting in Christ.

Romans 4:20 – “He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith”

- B. True faith doesn’t look to ourselves or our circumstances but to God
 1. Faith grounded in ourselves is always a weak faith
 2. Faith grounded in Christ creates confidence

IV. Fourth, faith enabled Abraham to believe the Word of God and act upon it

- A. Faith not only believes, it acts
 1. Abraham knew that no matter what, God would be true to His promise. This was demonstrated clearly when he was called upon to sacrifice his only son. He knew that God would still be able to fulfill His promise even if it meant raising Isaac from the dead.
Hebrews 11:17-19 – “By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten *son*, ¹⁸ Of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called: ¹⁹ Accounting that God *was* able to raise *him* up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.”
 2. True faith is not just a subjective feeling, it is an objective trusting
Abraham’s faith resulted in outward obedience
- B. Faith leads us to trust Christ. Faith leads us to deny ourselves giving ourselves over completely to Christ.
 1. We are saved by faith alone but saving faith never comes alone
 2. Following Christ is never easy, but faith leads us to follow Him.

Conclusion:

1. Have you trusted Christ? Do you trust His Word? Does your faith bring you to follow Him?
2. How do you view this world? Does your faith cause you to look beyond this world?
Hebrews 11:13 – “These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of *them*, and embraced *them*, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.”