

Romans II | The Faith of Abraham (Part 2), Romans 4:13-25

August 9, 2020 | Matthew McNutt

Thank Ryan and Katy, intro myself.

Over the last year we have been working through pieces of the book of Romans; we'll spend a month or two tackling a few chapters, then move on to another series before returning back to Romans for the next section. Today is technically part two of a two week focus on Romans 4; on March 8th, the Sunday before we all started quarantining, Pastor Nate shared part one. Five months and one day later, buckle up for part two.

You may remember part one; Nate brought some of his trophies – some sort of subtle brag to introduce the theme. But here's the thing, Nate's not the only one with trophies. I, too, have triumphed in the face of challenging opposition. I won this monster leading a horde of sweaty adolescents to victory at a 2002 winter retreat. They would dump a bucket of green slime on the losing youth pastor, so I was highly motivated. This is 2002 me; to be clear, I won, I was not slimed – but the losing youth pastor threw some at me. Not cool.

Why the trophies? Romans 4 zeroes in on one of THE MVP's of the faith, the guy with the biggest trophy. So much so, that Jews, Muslims, and Christians all consider him to be the father of the faith. Abraham. You know the one; had a kid at 100, God told him to sacrifice the kid, Isaac, and he said ok, then God gave him a ram to sacrifice instead. Isaac fathered the twelve men who whose families would become the twelve tribes of Israel. Abraham is the perfect test case to prove that salvation has nothing to do with what we do – it's not our works, our good behavior, we don't earn it – it's a gift from God. As Nate recapped from Romans 1-3 last week, those big words; justification, redemption, propitiation – what it boils down to is that when it comes to salvation, God brings everything to the table – we bring nothing.

The challenge was, and continues to be, too many people put their trust in themselves. For the ancient Jews, they put their trust in following the law. Today, many put their trust in being good enough, family history – my parents are Christians, I just don't think a God of love could send anyone to punishment, etc. But here's the thing, if it's true of Abraham that he did not earn his righteousness, then it's definitely true that none of these ancient Jews, or any of us today, are somehow earning salvation.

For Paul, it all went back to **Genesis 15:6**:

Genesis 15:6 (NIV) Abram believed the Lord, and he [God] credited it to him as righteousness.

Over the first half of Romans 4, Paul drives home the point that it was Abraham's belief, his faith, that brought salvation from God. It's right there. More importantly, this

was before the introduction of the religious laws they knew and practiced – it was years before he was even circumcised. Even Abraham, the father of our faith, could not and did not earn his salvation. It wasn't based on the law, it wasn't because of the sacrifices, it wasn't because he was good enough, he didn't have a family tradition, he simply believed and God gave him righteousness.

Romans 4:13-25 (NIV) ¹³ It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the *promise* that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. ¹⁴ For if those who depend on the law are heirs, faith means nothing and the *promise* is worthless, ¹⁵ because the law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression.

I highlighted promise; that's a word that we will see appear five times in this passage. That's a lot; that's God's way of telling us – “HEY! Pay attention! I'm using the same word over and over because it's IMPORTANT.” The concept of “promise” is central to the story of Abraham¹; God made and kept His promises. And what promise is Paul focusing on here in Romans 4? The promise of salvation. That incredibly precious gift from God.

There are three points to this promise that we are going to discuss;

- 1. The Promise is Based on Faith (not the law)**
- 2. The Promise Unites Believers into One People of God**
- 3. Abrahams Faith in God's Promise was Strong**

Let's get back to the passage; verses 13-15 really drill into this point that the promise of salvation is based on faith, not the law.

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There is a lot going on here. Faith means nothing if you're depending on works? The promise is worthless? Paul is saying, hey, if you cannot accept God's word about the nature of salvation, then it's meaningless! You want to earn your salvation? Go ahead, you will fail like everyone before you – and since you've tied yourself to the law – to trying to be good enough - you've tied yourself to wrath. If your goal is to “be good enough,” to try and follow the standards of perfection – the law, then there is no way you'll succeed. No one has. Why would you opt for judgement when you can simply receive the gift?

¹ Douglas J. Moo, *Romans (The NIV Application Commentary)* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000), 156.

Paul was coming at a common dangerous belief; many of the Jewish leaders of the day taught that Abraham's status and role was tied to his obedience to the law of Moses², which honestly, is a weird connection to make given that the law of Moses – and Moses – didn't show up until 430 years later according to Galatians 3:17!

I like being a Baptist. I've been one pretty much my whole life. In seminary, I was fascinated to learn about the **Landmark Movement**³; basically, in the 1850's, three men came up with a theory that actually caught some momentum for a little while. Essentially, they taught that Jesus was actually a Baptist and that they could trace a succession of Baptists from Jesus to their movement ... even if for most of those centuries the word "Baptist" was never used, and some of the centuries they hadn't identified the people yet. They also believed because of that succession they were the only true church. Now, people loved the idea that they could trace their church practice directly to Jesus – but when you take a step back from it, it's pretty clear you can't rewrite history and pretend something is there that isn't.

Which is Paul's point to the Roman Jewish believers! You cannot claim Abraham was saved because he followed the laws of Moses ... centuries before they existed! That's rewriting history. That's retconning the Bible. **As Genesis revealed, the promise is based on faith, not the law.** This has been the case from the beginning.

¹⁶ Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. ¹⁷ As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not.

Paul moves on to the second point in his explanation around the promise; **The Promise Unites Believers into One People of God.** Back in Genesis, God promised Abraham that he would bless the world through him, but over time, the Jewish people had really understood that promise as just to themselves. Paul shifts the meaning of this word "offspring" from a physical, genetic connection to a spiritual significance, saying Abraham is the father of all believers. Writing to the Roman church, it would be clear that he was saying Abraham was not just the father to the Jewish Christians, he was the father to the Gentile Christians as well.

Now, it's two thousand years later, and words like Gentile don't carry much impact today because it's not part of our everyday language. But back then there were very real ethnic tensions around these relationships. Jewish believers were okay with people outside their ethnicity becoming believers ... as long as they knew their place.

² Ibid.

³ http://www.thearda.com/timeline/movements/movement_18.asp

As long as they followed their rules. As long as they knew who the superior believers were. This superiority is part of what Paul called out in the second half of Romans 2.

He's driving home to them the point that regardless of family heritage, regardless of ethnic heritage, regardless of past beliefs, **The Promise Unites Believers into One People of God**. He's taking Abraham, the hero of their faith, and saying these Gentile believers – they are your brothers, your sisters.

In other words, until the day comes that we are as genuinely upset on the behalf of all our fellow believers who are mistreated, put down, misrepresented, silenced – until we are willing to sacrifice our comfort in the same way that we would for a literal family member, then we have not allowed faith to deliver on the promise of uniting us into one people of God.

The promise removes all of the ways we separate and categorize ourselves. In God's eyes, we are one people, HIS people. I look forward to the day when we reflect that.

¹⁸ Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be." ¹⁹ Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah's womb was also dead. ²⁰ Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God,

"Yet he did not waver." Now, we can find examples in scripture where Abraham was not perfect, but Paul's point here is that overall, Abraham had a strong faith in God's promise and acted based on that faith. As imperfect as he was, his faith is still an incredible example to us today.

²¹ being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. ²² This is why "it was credited to him as righteousness." ²³ The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, ²⁴ but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. ²⁵ He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

Abraham's Faith in God was Strong. Abraham's moments of doubt were overcome by his faith in God, and because of that it was credited to him as righteousness. You see, faith is an attitude, a willingness to receive from God. John Calvin compared it to having "open hands."⁴ It's abstract, and we like the concrete-ness of a checklist, a list of tasks to achieve, a way to define the results – but we could never achieve the results God is simply giving to us in response to our faith, our open hands willing to

⁴ Moo, *Romans*, 162.

receive, our acknowledgement that we can't take any credit for our salvation – it's all God. It is a response, not an action, not a work. Even our faith only has power because of the God we have faith in – not because of us!

The challenge for us is to have the faith of Abraham, to have faith in the promise, to be one people in God, to have a strong faith – not perfect – but a life pointed in that direction, striving to grow in our faith. I know for me, as time goes on, as I have more experiences that point to God, faith becomes more natural. Abraham followed God for years, his faith growing as time went on. But we have more than Abraham did, don't we?

Tim Keller writes, **“We, of course, have far more facts about God to focus on, far greater demonstrations of his love and power. We know that God made Sarah's barren womb a place of life (Genesis 21:1-2); and we know that, supremely, he raised his own Son to life. We have far more to go on than Abraham did as we consider who God is, and what he is capable of!”**⁵

Surround yourself with other believers who will keep you pointed in the right direction, spend time in the word, spend time in prayer, open your hands and watch your faith grow.

Close in prayer / Romans Title slide

Reminder to join on Facebook Live, Monday 10am, Give Online, Connection Card

LOVE IN ACTION: On June 24 one of our Brandywine Kids, Brielle, ran a lemonade stand near her house. The lemonade was free but Brielle accepted donations to be specifically given to BVBC's Love-in-Action fund. Our Love-in-Action offering is a benevolence fund that allows us to help people who are experiencing financial emergencies. Brielle is only 6 years old, but knew that she could make a difference and wanted to help others. Her lemonade stand raised \$181.55, all of which was donated to Love-in-Action. Let's be inspired by Brielle and her heart for giving in Jesus's name. Way to go, Brielle!!

TRANSITION TO WORSHIP TEAM / NOTHING BUT THE BLOOD

⁵ Timothy Keller, *Romans 1-7 for You* (Purcellville, VA: The Good Book Company, 2014), Kindle location 1401.