

Salvation by Divine Power--Not Human Effort

Romans 4:18-25

45-39

We look forward to tonight as we go back into the book of Romans and return to the fourth chapter. So, take your Bible, handy there, if you will and open to Romans chapter 4. We're trying to work our way through this great chapter of 25 verses on the faith of Abraham, a very classic chapter presenting the great illustration of salvation by grace through faith.

Now in this fourth chapter of Romans, as you know if you've been with us, the apostle Paul presents Abraham, the father of the nation of Israel, as the model, the prototype, the supreme example of salvation by faith. The Bible teaches that a man is made right with God by faith, that is it isn't something we do, it's something we believe. And in believing, righteousness is given to us and we're made right with God. And the great illustration of that is Abraham, and he begins with that illustration in the very first verse of the fourth chapter. Now keep in mind, also, that the book of Romans basically presents the gospel of God. In fact, that wonderfully rich phrase, "the gospel of God," appears in Romans in the very first verse of the first chapter. It is the good news from God. And the good news is that men can be saved through faith, not through their own works. And Abraham is the great illustration.

Romans, you'll remember, begins with a penetrating and deep, at the same time comprehensive and wide, look at the sinfulness of man, Chapter 1 verse 18 through chapter 3 verse 20. That whole section shows the sinfulness of men; that's the bad news. And then the solution to that in chapter 3 verse 21 through chapter 5 verse 21; and there you have the good news that in spite of the sin of man, God has provided salvation and righteousness and redemption through the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, we're right in the middle of that section. We've looked at chapter 3, we will look at chapter 5 and we're in chapter 4. Chapter 3 verses 21 to 31 states the teaching of salvation by faith. Chapter 4 illustrates it and chapter 5 demonstrates it, shows its results. So the statement of the doctrine in chapter 3, the illustration in chapter 4, the result in chapter 5.

Now the great illustration of this is, of course, Abraham and his unique faith. In order to really understand all that Paul is saying in the fourth chapter, you have to understand the story of Abraham. Now I want to just...and I have been through this chapter, been feeding you little bits and pieces of the story, and I hope it's beginning to fill up so that you understand the fullness of it. The man's name originally was Abram, A-b-r-a—m, no h-a in the middle, Abram. And it meant "father of many," and nobody was more inappropriately named than he was. He was the father of nobody. Nobody at all. And yet he was named Abram, the father of many.

Now at the age of 60, after that much life of barrenness, God came to him, and God called him out of idolatry in the city of Ur, said, I want you to get out of this place. It was a sovereign call of God, very much like the call of the apostle Paul. It seems as though Abram had little to do with it all initially.

God calls him out, he obeys God, leaves, at least in part, dragging along a lot of his relatives as baggage. He wound up only going as far as Haran and staying there for 15 years. Not quite making the full move that God had intended.

But at the end of the 15 years, by now he's reached the age of 75, he moves out of Haran and he sets out for the land of promise which God had originally given to him. He leaves his home, his people, his land, his idols, the whole thing, takes his wife and moves on to an unknown destination.

Now, it is essential, to begin with, to note that Abraham was chosen sovereignly by God and he responds to the sovereign choice of God simply by believing God. God says, you go and I'll bless you, and he believes-it. He believes it and he goes and that's basically the story of salvation. God sovereignly comes, calls a person, the person responds and says: That's what You say, that's what I'm to do, I believe it, I accept it. And in that simple term, Abraham is defined to us as the father of our own kind of faith.

Now, when God called Abraham, He also told him that he would produce a seed, that he would have offspring. In fact, ultimately his offspring would number as the sand of the sea and the stars of the heaven. We shouldn't be so surprised at that comparison. Dr. James Genes, astronomer, some years ago, said that it is very likely that the stars of the heavens equal the sand of all the seas. So, He told him he was going to have a great number of those who would come to be his posterity,

Now the problem is, here is a man who is told he is going to produce multitudes of people and he is in fact the father of nobody. He's never produced anybody. He has no seed. All he has is a promise. He has no land. All he has is a promise. He's looking for a son and he's looking for a land and he moves out in faith. Why? Because he believed God,

Now you say, "Well, why did he believe God?" I don't know because the Bible doesn't tell us that part. How did God convince him that He was to be believed? I don't know, the Bible doesn't tell us that. But somehow God convinced him. Now when God wants to do something, He can do it, can't He, if He chooses? Of course. And all of us are redeemed not only because God called us, mark this, but because God produced in us the response. And so, when God called Abraham He also produced in him the response. The call in whatever form it came was convincing enough to make Abraham believe when there really was no human reason to believe and all the odds were stacked against him.

So we meet the man who was the father of nobody on the way to nowhere. And all he basically knows is that God told him to do it. And beyond that he knows nothing, except that God's going to fulfill His promise. And he believes that, for some reason he believes it. The only reason we can ascribe to it is that God planted within his heart that confidence.

Now, once he finally leaves Haran at the age of 75 and makes his way into Canaan, which is the place to which God sent him, he is immediately faced with some very severe tests on his faith. First a famine, Genesis chapter 12. Then a pharaoh, also Genesis chapter 12. Then a fight with his brother, Genesis 13, then fear, Genesis 15, then foolishness, Genesis 16. And so he has to wade through all of the stuff: a famine, a pharaoh, a fight, fear, and foolishness; and if you think that was easy you're wrong. And he was waiting for a fulfillment. But all through all of this difficulty, see, he held on to God's promise. And this is supernatural, this is supernatural, it doesn't really make any sense

humanly. And it must not have been very easy,

Dr. Barnhouse points out some of the difficulty of the situation in a very interesting paragraph in his commentary on Romans, he writes this: "Now Abram was an Oriental. He was used to the palaver of the Orientals. Furthermore, he was strategically located athwart the roads of the camel caravans that carried the commerce of the ancient world between Egypt and the north and the east. He owned the wells and his flocks and the herds were great. The Scripture says that Abram was very rich in cattle and silver and gold, Genesis 13:2. When the caravans of the rich merchants came into the land, either from the north or from the south, they stopped at Abram's wells. The servants of Abram took good care of the needs of the camels and the servants of the traders. Food was sold to the travelers. And in the evening time the merchants would have come to Abram's tent to pay their respects. The questions would have followed a rather set pattern.

"Abram, how old are you? Well, who are you? Well, how long have you been here? Well, where did you come from? Well, what is your name?"

"To which Abram would be forced to name himself, Abram, father of many. It must have happened a hundred times and a thousand times and each time more galling than the time before.

"Oh, father of many, congratulations! And how many do you have?"

"And the answer was so humiliating to Abram, none. Many a time there must have been the half concealed snort of humor at the incongruity of such a name and the fact that there were no children to back up that name. Abram must have steeled himself for the question and the reply and hated the situation with great bitterness."

And Barnhouse adds another word. He says, "It was a world of cloth and goatskins where all lived in tents and where there was little privacy from the eyes and none in the realm of the ears. And there must have been many conversations on the subject. Who was sterile, Abram or Sarah? Was he really a full man? Oh, he was the patriarch, his word was law. He had the multitude of cattle and the many servants, but he had no children and his name was father of many." So says Barnhouse.

And I think this gives us some insight into what it must have been like in that time for Abram. Oh, the pressure applied to them caused Sarah to come up with a great idea. She decided that Abram needed to live up to his name and so she offered him her servant girl by the name of Hagar, and said, you go unto Hagar and let her conceive a son for you and this will save your face and demonstrate if in fact you are virile enough to produce. And of course, the word must have spread through the thin tents very rapidly that Abram had in such desperation stooped to try to gain a seed with a union with a servant. And it worked, And Hagar became pregnant and everybody who knew, knew that it was Sarah then who was the problem. And Sarah felt despised and oh did she hate Hagar. But Abram now had his heir.

And the next caravan that came through, when they said, "What's your name?" And he said, "Abram." And they said, "Oh, father of many, how many?" At least he could say, "One."

"Finally, at the age of 86, he had one. And I really believe that Abram wanted that one to be the fulfillment, because in Genesis 17:18, listen to what Abraham says to God, "O that Ishmael might live

before Thee." O that Ishmael may be the one to whom You look, God, the one You receive. You see, he produced a son of his own natural powers. He produced a son of his own human virility.

Thirteen years later, now he's 99, his son is 13 years old. He's 99 and God comes to him and God says, "Abram, that wasn't the one. That was the son of your natural virility, not the son of My supernatural power." Now mark that. That was the son of your flesh, not the son of divine energy. But I'm going to give you another son. This is the son of promise, the son you could never produce. And then God says, "From now on your name will be Abraham. Do you know what that means? "Father of multitudes." Now the year between that promise, when his name was changed, and its fulfillment must have been again a painful year because now he had to say, he was the father of multitudes. O, how many? One. So, he's sort of working up to living up to his name rather slowly.

By the way, may I hasten to add that Abram took the name of Abraham and used it, and that was indicative of his faith, wasn't it? He happily called himself Abraham because he believed God. Ishmael, then, was the son of natural generation and Isaac was the son of supernatural generation and a year later when he was 100 years old he had a son, Isaac. Abram begot Ishmael in the human strength. Abraham begot Isaac, mark it, in the power of God. That becomes very important.

Look with me for a moment at Galatians chapter 4...Galatians chapter 4 verse 21. One of the very most difficult portions of the New Testament and we're not going to dig into it in great detail. You can listen to our teaching on that some other time, but I do want to point out the basic connection. Galatians 4:21 says, "Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law? If you desire to live by the law (In other words, you desire to accomplish God's goals by the flesh, if you desire to live that way.) then remember that the law says that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a free woman." That is one by Hagar, the slave, one by Sarah, the free woman. "But he who was of the bondwoman," that's Ishmael, "was born after (What?) the flesh." You see, that child was born of the natural power of Abraham. "But he of the free woman was born by promise." And there we find the divine connection. Ishmael illustrates then, now mark it, Ishmael and Isaac are illustrations in Galatians 4. Ishmael illustrates the principle of living by what? The flesh. Isaac illustrates the principle of what? Living by the promise of God. And that becomes the allegory, the only allegory, by the way, so stated in all of Scripture, of the fourth chapter of Galatians.

Ishmael, then, is a son born in the usual way and is a living representative of all those who believe they can accomplish God's will through their human effort. Did you get that? And Isaac is a son born of faith by a supernatural miracle and an illustration of all who receive spiritual birth, so that Isaac and Ishmael become living patterns and illustrations. The contrast — now go back to Romans 4, the contrast — is between human effort and divine power. God would never tolerate Ishmael as the son of His promise because that was the child produced by Abraham. He would only tolerate Isaac as the son of His promise because he was supernaturally conceived.

Now Abraham believed that, Abraham accepted that, and waited for the son Isaac to be born. We meet him then in Paul's picture after he has heard the promise and is waiting for the birth of Isaac. And we pick up the story in verse 18. And Paul says of Abraham, "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. And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body — or rather he considered his own body now dead (Either one appears in manuscripts and I'll explain that in a moment.) — when he was about 100 years old, nor yet the deadness of Sarah's womb, he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief but was strong in faith, giving glory to God and being fully

persuaded that what He had promised He was able also to perform. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness.

Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him but for us also to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on Him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead who was delivered for our offenses and was raised again for our justification."

Now Paul then closes the chapter on Abraham with this tremendous section. It's very clear as we go through what he's saying and I want you to follow it. Remember that the first eight verses of the chapter show that salvation comes by faith not works. Then verses 9 to 17 show that salvation comes from grace not law. Now these verses show that salvation comes through divine power not human effort. And that is demonstrated in the life of Abraham as all the others are as well.

Now as we look at Abraham's faith in the last section, verses 18 to 25, I want you to note three realities, three realities: the analysis of faith, the answer to faith, and the application of faith; the analysis of faith, the answer to faith, and the application of faith.

First the analysis, now we want to do this because this is what Paul does. You notice that in the beginning of verse 18 there is a string of phrases all the way down through verse 21 that describe the faith of Abraham, one right after another, just strung together like pearls. A series of phrases, and by the way, they overlap and interlock. Each one is unique to itself and yet pictures and catches all the meaning of the rest. And they describe the faith of Abraham. Now let's make several points as we look at the phrases.

First of all, and we're analyzing Abraham's faith, you say, "Why is that important?" Because we are also saved by faith and we want to see what kind of faith saved Abraham so we can transmit it to ourselves, right? And see what kind of faith saves us, and so we could ask the question, what is saving faith?

First, he hoped against hope, he hoped against hope, verse 18. Now that figure of speech, I don't know if any of you English teachers are here but if I remember my grammar rightly, that's called an oxymoron. And what it basically means is it's a figure of speech which uses opposite ideas to convey a thought. Have you ever heard the phrase "the silence was deafening"? Or, you've heard the phrase, "there was thunderous silence." That's an oxymoron, two opposite things, and that's what you have here. He hoped that when there was no hope, and what it means is that against all human capability and all human capacity, he believed God.

Now, hope and faith are different. And I know if you thought about it long enough you'd know the difference. It's very simple. Hope is the desire for something to happen. Faith is the confidence that it will happen. You see, hope is just the desire that it might happen and faith is the confidence that it will. Now he hoped when there was no hope. I mean, it didn't make any sense to hope when he hoped. God had told him he would be the father of many nations and Abraham believed it. Verse 18 says, "Who hoped against hope, believing that he might become the father of many nations according to that which was spoken when God said, 'So shall thy seed be.'" And that was the statement of God relative to the sand of the sea and the stars of the heaven. You're going to have a multitude come from your loins, Abraham. And even when it looked impossible, by now he's 99 years old, the whole idea is ridiculous, but God says that's what it's going to be. In fact, in Genesis 15:5,

God brought him forth and said, look toward heaven and count the stars if you be able to number them. And He said to him, 'So shall thy seed be,' and that's what is quoted by Paul.

And then verse 6 is so wonderful, "And he believed in the Lord." He believed, He believed that he'd actually have seed like the stars of heaven, and up to this point all he had was Ishmael, and so he hoped against hope. He wanted something to happen and he believed it would and he held on. You know, it was 25 years, 25 years from the time that he really got the promise of a son originally until that son came, 25 years of hoping and waiting.

The second phrase that helps us analyze his faith is that he was not weak in faith, verse 19. It says: "And being not weak in faith." Now conversely would you notice verse 20, toward the end it says, "He was strong in faith." And of course, those are saying the same thing, one from the negative and one from the positive. He was not weak in faith. The word "weak" means, obviously "without strength." It can mean to doubt or to hesitate. But he wasn't that way, he was strong in faith. And it wouldn't be easy to be strong in faith when you never had had a child and you were as old as this and God waited 25 years from the time of the promise to its fulfillment.

You say, "But how did he possibly maintain any faith?" I mean, there are some people, for example, who have been praying for something in their life for two or three months and they're running out of gas. Some people have been praying for something for a few years and they've lost hope that it will ever happen. But this man for 25 years is strong in faith and it's hard to understand why, unless you look at verse 17. You see, here's the key. He believed in a God who could give life to the dead, and who could call things which are not as though they were. Now listen, you see the reason he never lost hope was because he believed two things about God. One, that God could create something that didn't exist, and two, that He could revive something that had existed and ceased to exist. He could raise the dead and He could create out of nothing. And when you believe in a God like that you can be confident that what He says He'll do He'll do. And so, he had the confidence. He believed in the God of creation. He believed in the God of resurrection. And those are the two greatest obstacles. In fact, the only obstacles you could think of, I mean, the worst thing you could possibly imagine would be that something didn't exist that God had promised you, or that something had gone out of existence that God had promised you. And if you believed that God could bring into existence what doesn't exist and revive what used to exist, you don't have a problem.

For example, Genesis 17 verse 4, "As for Me, behold My covenant is with thee. Thou shalt be a father of many nations, neither shall thy name anymore be called Abram but thy name shall be called Abraham, for a father of many nations I have made thee and I will make thee exceedingly fruitful, I will make nations of thee and kings shall come out of thee and I'll establish My covenant between Me and thee and thy seed after thee and their generation for an everlasting covenant. I'll give unto thee and unto thy seed after thee the land wherein thou art a sojourner, all the land of Canaan for an everlasting possession and I will be their God." And God gives him this marvelous promise and he believes. He trusts in God. And he's not limited because he believes in God's ability to create out of nothing. So if he doesn't have a son, that's no problem for his God because his God can make one, right? And later on, isn't it interesting? When Isaac was born that God asked him to do what with Isaac? Kill him, take him up on the mountain Moriah, put him on an altar, run a knife through him, take his life, burn him up as an offering. And you know something? He did that, he marched him up the mountain; in fact Isaac even carried on his back the sticks that would have kindled his own fire. He got up on top of the mountain, put him down, lifted up the knife and was about to plunge it into his heart.

You say, "Well, how can a man do that?" Well, it's simple because, you see, he not only believed in the God who could make things out of nothing, who gave him the son from no possible son, but he also believes in the God who can do what? Raise him from the dead. And you see, he was without question, he was confident that if Isaac were to die, then Isaac would be raised from the dead. Because in Hebrews 11 it says: "By faith, Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac." Why? "Accounting that God was able to raise him up even from the dead." So, you see, the man's faith was based upon the character of God, who could bring something out of nothing and bring back into existence what had ceased to exist. So he was not weak in faith.

Third, and this is marvelous. It says in verse 19 that he was not discouraged by his own natural weakness. I mean, he knew he could make no contribution. It says in verse 19, "And he considered," I think the better manuscript way to look at this, and there are divergent ones, some have the word "not" in it, some have the word "not" out, basically comes out the same either way. "He considered his own body now dead." He looked at his own body and he said, "I'm not going to be able to make a contribution to this. I am 99. I have died as to procreative power. And Sarah," who is mentioned in the rest of the verse, "never has been any help. So, between the two of us we cannot do this."

You see, but he was not discouraged by his own natural weakness. He considered, *katanoeō* means to fix your mind on it, thought about it, he thought about the fact that he was now dead. That's a perfect participle in the Greek and it means that he was in a state of deadness, he was never able to function again, and so, he fixed his mind on the reality that he was never able to produce this son himself. He was impotent.

Now, he could have easily reasoned like a lot of other folks would have reasoned and said, well, that's it. I mean, God blew it. I had my moments. I mean, there was a time and now I'm old and impotent, the promise can't be fulfilled. But that was not a problem to Abraham because he knew he had a God who could make out of nothing. And you don't need an Abraham to create something out of nothing.

You know, I always think about Noah when I think about, I think about faith, I think about Abraham and Noah. I mean, I can imagine Noah buildi ... He built a boat in the middle of the desert and it took him 120 years to do it. And he kept telling people that the reason he was doing it was because it was going to rain. And of course, there had never been rain in the history of the world. It had never rained. There had never been rain. The earth was watered specially by the canopy that covered it prior to the flood when those things were broken up and the clouds burst forth with the rain. But it had never rained. There never was such a thing as rain. And here is a man who believed God that it would rain, that water would fall out of the sky and it had never happened. And that it would be enough water to float a boat the size of the Queen Mary, which would be filled up with all the animals, two of every kind, who would wonderfully cooperate, showing up, marching in, in single, double file.

Now I personally can imagine someone ordering the lumber; I can't imagine still hammering on the stuff 120 years later. I mean, maybe in the euphoria of the original announcement you could get turned on but the long siege of 120 years would tend to sort of run you out of gas as far as the possibility of this, espel...especially with the incessant harassment of people who laughed and mocked at the whole idea. Here's Noah building a boat for something which he himself can't provide, rain; totally dependent on God.

Abraham is in the same situation. He has no personal capacity to make the promise happen. He is utterly impotent but he is not weak in faith and he does not get discouraged by his own inability.

There's a fourth phrase that helps us understand Abraham's faith. It says: "Neither was he, of course, discouraged by the deadness of Sarah's womb." Genesis 18-11 says that Sarah's womb was dead and she was unable to produce a child. He couldn't produce the seed and she couldn't carry it in a fertilized egg, no artificial insemination, no surrogate mothering, no nothing, no hope. But that didn't bother Abraham to the extent that it robbed him of his confidence. His faith was fixed.

There's a fifth element of his faith. Look at verse 20: "He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief but was strong in faith." Fifth principle, he did not vacillate in doubt, he did not vacillate in doubt. No vacillating, the word means "to stagger, or waver," or vacillate. It's the word, and some of you who know Greek, it's the word *krinō*, which means "to judge," with *dia* at the front of it, which has to do with two — to judge between two things. He didn't flip-flop back and forth unable to make an opinion, solidify an option. He was strong in faith. Like the psalmist in Psalm 57:7, he could say, "My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed." His eyes were filled with the vision of God and God could bring something out of nothing and God could raise the dead. And the deadness of Sarah's womb was not a problem and his own impotence was not a problem. He believed God, strong in faith.

Now at this point, you begin to ask yourself, "Is this guy human? I mean, he's not like us, is he? He doesn't appear to be like us." You see, we always consider all these human factors and we may be saying... I said this to myself honestly as I went through this: If this is the kind of faith that saves, who in the world can come up to this? I mean, who can say that he never wavers in faith against all human inability? Well, I certainly can't say that. And neither can you. And I don't think that's what it intended to say here. Let me show you why. Go back to Genesis 17 and I want you to note something that's very comforting, verse 15. "And God said unto Abraham, 'As for Sarah, thy wife, thou shalt not call her name Sarai but Sarah shall be her name.'" It means princess. "And I will bless her and give thee a son also of her." Now here comes God and he's giving him this promise at the age of 99, "I will bless her and she shall be a mother of nations." Now this is really getting ridiculous. "Kings of people shall be of her."

"Then Abraham fell on his face and laughed," which I can promise you does not go over real big with his wife. "And he said in his heart, 'Shall a child be born unto him that's 100 years old and shall Sarah that is 90 year old bare,'" and it's hysterical. I mean, the woman has never produced yet, what's going to make a difference at this point?

And then he says, O God, you better look back at Ishmael. It's Your only option. Now just between you and me, I'd say his faith was wavering here a little, wouldn't you? I mean, it doesn't take a genius to figure that out. It isn't as strong as we'd like to think it would be.

You say, "Well, then how can the apostle Paul say that he staggered not at the promise of God?" Well, I think that's pretty clear. Verse 19, "God said, Sarah thy wife shall bear thee a son indeed and thou shalt call his name Isaac and I will establish my covenant with him for an everlasting covenant and with his seed after him."

Now you say, "God reiterated the promise." That's right. "But isn't he wavering?" Yes, here's the point. Watch this. All faith works through the struggle, but the kind of faith that saves is the kind that lands on the confidence side. You see, the ultimate end of Abraham's struggle was that he was confident. Oh, there was a time when he...which he had to deal with the options and the opinions and he had to land, and when he landed he landed firmly. In fact, it was the struggle, I think, that strengthened his faith.

John Calvin said this: "We are never so enlightened that there are no remains of ignorance, nor is the heart so established that there are no misgivings. With these evils of our nature, faith maintains a perpetual conflict, in which conflict it is often sorely shaken and put to great stress but always it conquers." You see, that's the point. Oh it was battered around but in the end it did not waver. You see, James puts it this way. In chapter 1, he says; "The trial of your faith brings ultimately perfection." And ultimately you stop wavering and being double-minded. And so, he worked through the struggles, he worked through the difficulties; he worked through the famine and the pharaoh and the fear and all the other elements. He worked through even the folly of the thought that they could bring a child into the world. And when it was all worked through and the struggle was over, he was unwavering, strong in faith.

Back to Romans. Not wavering. Now, there's a sixth element in the analysis of his faith. He gave glory to God. At the end of verse 20, giving glory to God. Oh what a great thing this is. Faith glorifies God. You say, "Well, how do you mean that, John?" Well, just think of it this way. God says, "Abraham, I'm going to give you a son." Now if you believe that... If Abraham believes that, what does that say? That says, "God, You're trustworthy," right? You can be trusted. If You say it I believe it. And that glorifies God; that honors God when you believe him. For example, if you turn the tables and when God says, "I'm going to give you a son," and you say, "I don't believe You, God, I don't think You always keep Your word." Does that honor God? Of course not. You see, that is precisely the significance of the statement of I John chapter 5 verse 10. Listen: "He that believeth not God hath made Him A what?) a liar." And when you make God a liar by not believing Him, does that bring Him glory? Of course not, because He is the God of truth who cannot what? Lie. So we glorify God when we believe Him.

I mean, I always think about the Hebrew young men who were with Daniel: Mishael, Hananiah and Azariah, better known as Meshach, Shadrach and Abednego by their Babylonian names. And they go before the king and the king says: "If you don't cease your identification with your God, I'll throw you in the fiery furnace." And they say that's okay, that's okay. I love this, "Our God is able to deliver us." Isn't that great? And you all say, "Amen, boy, I agree to that." I mean, you're sitting right here, you're not standing next to the flames, right? See. That's a little different situation. Wouldn't you think? I mean, the thing was so hot that the guys who threw them in all got burned to death. Just getting close was fatal. And they were standing there saying, "Our God is able to deliver us." And boy, did they give glory to God, didn't they? They glorified God as the God of deliverance, the God of power.

And I love it in Acts 27 and Paul is in that ship and he starts out as a prisoner, you know. And then the thing gets into a storm and they start jettisoning the cargo and then they start throwing the tackle out and the storm is driving the ship across the sea and they haven't seen the stars for 14 days. They can't navigate, they don't have any of their tackle left. They know they're headed for the Syrtes, which are the sands of devastation on the north coast of Africa. They're confident they're going to be destroyed. And Paul pops up on the deck. Who's he but a prisoner, right? He isn't the captain, he

isn't anybody. But he says; "Be of good cheer, cheer up everyone, for God has sent His angel to appear to me and everybody is going to be safe." And he's totally confident. He says, "In fact, we better eat a little bit, get some nourishment for the task at hand." And then he says this, "For I believe God." Isn't that great? It's easy to believe God where you are, but it's a little tougher out there, on that ship. That gives glory to God. And Abraham even believed God to the point of driving a knife in the heart of Isaac if it meant that. What faith!

A seventh element in the analysis of his faith: He was fully persuaded of God's power and promise. Verse 21, "Being fully persuaded that what He had promised He was able to perform." Now this tells us the certainty of his heart. He really had the conviction, he was certain, he was fully convinced. No hope in human resources, complete hope in God.

There you have the analysis of his faith. Listen carefully, he hoped against hope, he wasn't weak, he wasn't discouraged by his inner impotence, nor those around him. He wasn't wavering. He glorified God. He lived in full confidence. That's his faith.

Now let's look at the answer to his faith in verse 22. What happens with that kind of faith? "Therefore it was imputed to him (For what?) for righteousness." He did not have righteousness; only God had that. But because of his faith, God gave him righteousness and that's how the transaction works. We believe God, and it isn't on the merit of our believing but it is that our believing receives the gift He offers. God gave him righteousness. And the "therefore" indicates consequence. The ground of his justification was his faith. He believed God, therefore he was made right with God. How does a person become right with God? By doing so many of these things and so many of those kind of things and so many spiritual activities? No, you become right with God by believing what God says, by believing He is the God He reveals Himself to be, by believing enough to do what He says, in an act of belief. He transmits His righteousness. So, he was accepted by God, a sinner, and was given divine righteousness, which he received through faith. Oh, what a great truth. And, beloved, that verse 22 is the heart of the whole passage. How do you get right with God? That's what righteousness means. How do you get right with God? Through faith, the kind of faith Abraham had.

Thirdly, look at the application of Abraham's faith. We've seen the analysis, seen the answer, or the result of it. Here's the application, verse 23. This is so direct. Paul applies it: "Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him." I mean this whole story about him wasn't only written for his sake, "but for us also to whom it shall be imputed if we believe on Him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead." Isn't that great?

What does all this say to us? I mean, what does it mean to us, this whole story of Abraham? Well, mark this, that the Bible does not record this or anything else just for those about whom it is recorded, but for all of us. And that...and I don't have time to develop it, mark that down in your Bible, that's one of the great statements of the purpose of Scripture; that the purpose of Scripture is for us, for us.

I'm reminded of other scriptures that tell us similarly that Scripture was not just for the people of the time in which it was written but for the people of all time. In fact, in Psalm 78 verse 5, "He established a testimony, he appointed a law in Israel which he commanded our fathers that they should make them known to their children that the generation to come might know them, even the children who should be born, who should arise and declare them to their children that they might set their hope in God and not forget the works of God but keep his commandments." It isn't just for them. It's for

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everybody who ever lived after them.

Paul reiterates this again in the 15th chapter of Romans. I believe it's in verse 4. For whatever things were written in earlier times were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope. Paul tells this to the Corinthians that all these things that have happened have happened as examples to us. And so we must be vitally concerned with the story of Abraham, because it was not written just so that we'd know about him. It was written to be applied to us. How? Watch. Verse 24: "For us also to whom it shall be imputed." What is the "it"? Righteousness. Righteousness shall also be imputed to us if we believe. If we believe what? If we believe on the same God that Abraham believed, the same God who was able to do what? Raise the dead. Only we are on Abraham's side having never seen that power in action... We're on this side having seen it in action. For we believe in the God who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead. So you see how much like Abraham our faith is? We too must believe in a God who can make something out of nothing and a God who can raise the dead. And so Abraham is the living evidence for all history, that the just live by faith, that they live by faith in God, that they live by faith in the God who raises the dead, that they live by faith in the God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead. And I believe Abraham, given a glimpse of the future, even saw fully ahead in some way to the very resurrection of Jesus Christ, because in John 8:56 Jesus said of Abraham. "He rejoiced to see my day and he saw it and was glad." God must have given to Abraham a vision of the coming Christ and even his resurrection. And he from that side saw it and we from this side see it. And salvation is by faith in the God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead. That's the way you receive righteousness. My! What a great, great truth.

And then, note would you please, verse 24 in the middle, "If we believe on Him." That's the condition, isn't it? Should be underlined in your Bible. That's the condition. That's the condition for salvation. If we believe. Sixty references in Romans alone to faith or unbelief. Sixty. The heart of the receiving of the gospel. And we are saved because we believe the God of resurrection and we believe he demonstrated that He was the God of resurrection by raising up Jesus our Lord — and He is no other than our Lord — from the dead. And then verse 25, that mountain peak gospel statement: "Who was delivered over." And that's a judicial term meaning to give someone over to prison, to commit them over to trial and punishment. He was given over for our offenses, our sins, our *paraptōma*, our transgressions, not His. And He was raised again for our justification. If Jesus had never been raised from the dead we never would be justified, right? Because God could not have accepted His sacrifice. The reason that God raised Jesus from the dead, of course, was to show the conquering over sin. Also it demonstrates that God was pleased with what Christ did, raised Him from the dead, lifted Him to the right hand, exalted Him and said, You have accomplished salvation. So, He was raised into the very presence of God, as an affirmation that His atoning death had done its work.

Charles Hodge, that great theologian of the past, says: "With a dead Savior, a Savior over whom death had triumphed and held captive, our justification had been forever impossible. As it was necessary that the high priest under the old economy should not only slay the victim at the altar but carry the blood into the most holy place and sprinkle it on the mercy seat, so it was necessary not only that our great High Priest should suffer in the outer court, but that He should pass into heaven to present His righteousness before God for our justification, both therefore as the evidence of the acceptance of His satisfaction on our behalf and as a necessary step to secure the application of the merits of His sacrifice. Thus the resurrection of Christ was absolutely essential for our justification."

Christ went to the cross, died for our sins and rose again. So, we believe in Him who died for us and was raised from the dead for our justification. This is the meaning of this chapter and it all comes right down to you.

Let me see if I can't give you a perspective. Millions of people in our nation are running like mad to theaters to see a movie called "E.T." Now I don't know anything about "E.T." except the storyline and that it's some funny little thing. But people are weeping, getting emotional. The other day I saw a bumper sticker: "Honk if you love E.T." I've seen other ones, "E.T. Lives." Now you don't have to be real bright to begin to make some comparisons. This little thing comes from outside our world, lands in our world, is rejected, resented by most, but by those who get close to him, mainly this little boy, he's gentle, loving, kind, thoughtful. And he touches dead flowers and they come to life. And he touches people with infirmity and they are healed. And he dies and he rises from the dead, in the picture. And the picture even ends with him ascending back to where he came from, leaving a rainbow trail across the sky. People love it. "Honk if you love E.T." They love E.T.

You see, people don't mind celestial visitors who are full of love, gentleness, kindness and make flowers grow, who have supernatural power over the elements, who heal people, who demonstrate love, who even die and rise again. That's marvelous. But the reason, you see, that there are more people in the theater tonight watching E.T. than are in the church hearing about Jesus Christ is because E.T. doesn't say anything about sin. That's the point. The world likes that; very comfortable, very comfortable. But Jesus told the truth and the truth is, He had to come into this world, verse 25 says, to be delivered to the executioners for your transgressions. That's right. And He went through that grave and He was raised for your justification, to make you right with God. Justification is another word for righteousness. And that is applied to you. It says in verse 24, "If you (What?) believe." The height of stupidity is to believe in E.T. He doesn't exist. But Jesus Christ does.

What kind of faith appropriates Christ? What kind of faith brings righteousness? Think of it. Hopeful, hoping against hope, the kind of faith that saves is the kind of faith that says I'm out of options, right? I have nothing in myself, my body is dead, I cannot redeem myself, nobody around me can redeem me either. I am impotent. Those around me are impotent. It's that hopeful faith, that humble faith, that, that feeling of unworthiness, of hopelessness. It's the kind of faith that says I have nothing to offer. That's where Abraham was. That's the kind of faith Abraham had when it was imputed to him for righteousness.

And then, you see, it's faith in the right object, the creator God who can raise the dead, who raised Christ from the dead. The kind of faith that is faith in God, the right object, who has done the right work in raising Christ. It is an unwavering faith. It is the faith that fights through the struggle and says, I believe, I'm convinced, I'm not staggering. It's not the kind that comes to say, oh, I believe, I believe,

and as soon as Jesus says something you don't like, you're gone. It's the strong faith.

And may I submit to you that it's the submissive kind of faith that demonstrates patience. It allows God to be God. And it is selfless, obedient faith. Abraham left everything, hoped against hope because he believed God. Saving faith is hopeful, it's humble, it's strong, it's confident, it's submissive, it's obedient. And we have every reason to put that faith in our God, do we not? Because He raised Jesus from the dead.

You say, "What does that mean?" It means that the sacrifice for our sin was paid for and satisfied and we are righteous in Christ if we believe.

Let's bow in prayer. O Father, how we long to understand the fullness of the blessedness of our salvation. And how our feeble minds seem to be running around on the fringes always, unable to grasp in fullness all that it means to be made righteous, to have in us the living God in the form of the Holy Spirit, to be partakers, possessors of the divine nature, to be new creations, to be a totally new "I" that loves the law of God and longs to fulfill it. Father, how hard sometimes for us to understand that, because as Paul says in Romans 7, "Of sin that is in us." It clouds our vision. Those of us who are Christians, Lord, tonight we ask that You would give us a clear view of our salvation, that you'd fill our hearts with praise and thanks, gratitude. Thank You not only for sovereignly calling us, but sustaining in us the faith to respond.

And, Lord, we do pray for those in our fellowship tonight who don't know Jesus Christ, who perhaps do not yet believe that You are the God who creates something out of nothing and who raises the dead, and that You raised Jesus Christ who died for the very transgression of the one who does not yet believe, and rose for that one's righteousness. By Your Spirit, convince the heart of who You are as You convinced Abraham of old, as You convinced Me and so many of us. Do Your work in that heart. And may the response be that humble hopeful strong confident unwavering submissive obedient faith that-reaches out to the Lordship of Christ.

While your heads are bowed as we just close and it's almost with a sense of joy and sadness mixed that we come to the end of the fourth chapter because of its great nature. But as we thought through these things again tonight, I just feel in my heart kind of impressed to say that I am sure there are some in our fellowship who have never come to Christ. You don't believe and so you're not righteous before God. Your sins are not set aside, not forgotten. They're held against your account. The only way that you'll ever be delivered from those is to believe, that's all. You're impotent and so is everybody around you. You see, only God, by divine power, can accomplish the transformation that must occur in you to forgive you of your sin, make you righteous and fit you for heaven, fill your life with blessedness. And you must believe. If you're wavering, why don't you pray and say, O God, give me the faith, give me the strength. Like the man who said, "Lord I believe, help my unbelief." Fight through that battle. Then reach out in faith to Jesus Christ and He'll respond. Believe in the God who creates and the God who raised Jesus from the dead, affirming the perfect completion for His work for you.