Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Abraham: The Old Testament Pattern of Saving Faith, Part 4
Scripture: Romans 4:18–25
Code: 80-349

We indeed are looking at Romans chapter 4 again tonight, and while it may seem that the Apostle Paul and this preacher is somewhat belaboring the point, it is necessary for us to capture all the beautiful magnificent nuances of this great doctrine of justification, and that is why the New Testament gives us so much very, very careful detail about it. The message of the Christian gospel is that salvation comes through faith alone, not works. That is the message of the Christian gospel, that for a sinner to be made right with God, it requires only the sovereign grace of God and the willing faith of the sinner.

Now in order to illustrate to us what real faith looks like, Paul in Romans 4 picks a model of faith and somewhat surprisingly the model that he picks is an Old Testament man and somewhat surprisingly perhaps not even a Jew but a Gentile by the name of Abraham. Before there ever was a Jewish people, there was Abraham. Jewish people, you know, preceded from him and so here is a man that transcends the Jewish people, here is a man of the world, a man from among the nations, from among the Gentiles who is the model of the faith that saves. This, of course, would be especially surprising to Jewish people since the Jews believe that salvation comes by works, law-keeping, ceremony, ritual. They would be surprised to find out that salvation comes by faith and even more surprised that Abraham is the model of salvation by faith.

Now we've looked at this chapter down to verse 17, so let me read you verses 18 to 25 and we'll focus in on this section. “In hope against hope, he believed so that he might become a father of many nations, according to that which had been spoken, so shall your descendants be. Without becoming weak in faith, he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb. Yet with the respect of the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform. Therefore it was also credited to Him as righteousness. Now not for his sake only was it written that it was credited to him, but for our sake also, to whom it will be credited as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus, our Lord, from the dead. He who was delivered over because of our transgressions and was raised because of our justification.”

Now you recognize a lot of very important theological themes there. You recognize that the overarching reality is this is a section that gives testimony to Abraham's faith. It is his faith to which God responds in verse 22 and based on his faith credits to him righteousness. But this is not only for Abraham, as verse 23 says, not for his sake only was it written that it was credited to him by faith but

for all of us so that we would all know that righteousness is imputed to those who put their faith in God, and more importantly, vers 24, who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, having covered our sins by His sacrifice on the cross and then raised for our justification.

And so the general flow of this text is simply this, Abraham is a model of faith. His faith is defined, he then is credited with righteousness and gives us the example of how we too can have righteousness imputed to our account, apart from working for it simply by believing in the God who raised Christ who had satisfied Him with His sacrifice on the cross.

Now with that in mind as sort of the overview, let me go back into the story of Abraham a little bit because I want you to understand all that I could possibly deliver to you about the nature of his faith so that you can see the reality of what saving faith looks like. And I'll tell you the story. He started out with the name Abram, A-b-r-a-m. Abram means father of many...father of many and no one has been more inappropriately named because Abram was the father of nobody. At the age of 60, God came to Abram and called him out of idolatry in the city of Ur, told him to go to a land that He would show him. God literally sovereignly plucked him out of all humanity and said, “Leave your city, leave your idols, go to a land that I will show you.”

We don't really know what the means of divine communication was, but it was very effective. We have no biblical record of the conversation that God had with Abram but Abram obeyed. He left his home. He left his people. He left his land and took his wife and went on a journey with his servants to an utterly unknown destination. That is a big leap of faith.

Now on the way to wherever he was supposed to be going, the land of promise, he stopped...he stopped, actually, in a place called Haran, H-a-r-a-n, and he stayed there for 15 years. So this is a man who had a deferred promise, to put it mildly. Fifteen years he's in Haran and finally after the 15 years is finished, he sets out for the land of promise.

Now consider the picture. Sovereignly chosen by God, told to leave everything familiar, everything precious, everything he had, go to a land about which he knew nothing, and on the way get stuck in a kind of no-man's land for 15 years. Very early on then in the saga of Abram, we understand that he is a man who can operate on a promise. He is a man who doesn't have to see an immediate fulfillment. He is a man who can defer that for which he waits. He is a man who knows how to live by faith.

But there's even more than that. God told him that He would bless the world through him. He would bless the world through Abram and through Abram's seed. But he had no seed. He was the father of absolutely no one, no seed, only a promise. Here is a man operating in faith, headed to a country that keeps being deferred for years, and being told he's going to be the father of many and that he has an appropriate name when in fact he's the father of no one. But he keeps moving and he keeps believing. He is looking for God to fulfill the promise. He's waiting for the land. He's waiting for the

seed, and it's all by faith. He's living on hope. He's living on a promise. He made a complete break with the past, including idols, and turned to worship the true and living God.

Eventually, as you know, he arrives in Canaan and when he arrives in Canaan his faith is tested again and again and again and again. He finally gets to the land of promise but there's not a lot of promise that unfolds immediately. There is a famine. He faces a famine. There is a pharaoh, there is a fight, there is fear, there is foolishness and there is postponed fulfillment. And all through all of this, he held on to God's promise and really it wasn't easy to do that.

Dr. Donald Grey Barnhouse many years ago wrote this, “Now Abram was an oriental, he was used to the palaver of the orientals. Furthermore, he was strategically located along the roads of the camel caravans that carried the commerce of the ancient world between Egypt and the north and east. He owned the wells and his flocks and herds were great. The Scripture says in Genesis 2 that Abram was very rich in cattle, in silver and in gold and 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 come to Abram's tent to pay their respects. The question would have followed in a set pattern. The guests would have said, ‘Abram, how old are you? How long have you been here?' But maybe the most interesting question they ever would have asked would be, ‘How is it that you have the name Abraham? How many children do you have?' It must have happened a hundred times...says Barnhouse...maybe it happened a thousand times and every time more galling than the time before. ‘O father of many, congratulations, and how many sons do you have?' And the humiliation answer had to come back, ‘None.' Many of a time there must have been the half-concealed snort of humor at the incongruity of the name and the fact that there were no children to back up such a name, Abram must have steeled himself for the question and the reply and hated the situation with great bitterness.'

Barnhouse says, “Father of many, father of none, and it was a world of cloth and goatskins where everybody lived in tents and where there was little privacy from the eyes and none from the realm of the ears. There must have been many conversations on the subject. Who was sterile, was it Abram or was it Sarah? Was he really a full man, or was the patriarch somehow deficient? He had no children and his name was father of many.”

Well certainly there was desperation on the part of Abram and there was desperation on the part of Sarah. There's a serious measure of embarrassment because of his name. So Sarah decided to sort of help the thing along a little bit, made the suggestion that Abram go in to the servant girl by the name of Hagar and try to get her pregnant so that somehow he could produce a child, at least they would know it was him or Sarah that was deficient.

Abram was so desperate about having the promise seed, that he agreed to such a union. Hagar became pregnant and everybody knew that Sarah was the problem. She then felt despised. She didn't realize that she couldn't bear a child and she hated the handmaid who could and the child born of the handmaid whose name was Ishmael. But Abram, he finally had an heir, he finally had a child. He was finally the father of somebody. He felt like a man at the age of 86. Abram even cried to the Lord, Genesis 17:18, “O that Ishmael might live before Thee.” Praying on behalf of divine blessing for Ishmael.

He had a son, follow now, born of natural powers...born of natural powers. And when asked his name, he could say, “I am Abram and I have one son.” Thirteen years later when he was 99 and feeble, God gave him another son. This is not the son by natural powers, this is the son by supernatural power. God gave him the promise of an heir, the son of the promise, a son not of his natural ability but a son of the power of God. And amazingly God changed his name.

Now his first name, “Abram, father of many,” had built into it a promise. The promise at least initially began to become true when he had Ishmael, but it still was a stretch to view him as the father of many. Now he has had the son of promise, a second son by the name of Isaac, and God changes his name by adding a “ha” in the middle, Abraham, that means father of multitudes. Ishmael was the son of natural generation, Isaac of supernatural generation because Abraham was so old and Sarah was barren. Abram begot Ishmael in the power of human strength. Abram begot Isaac in the power of God, and in fact, a kind of resurrection strength. God gave life to the deadness of Sarah and the deadness of Abraham.

This message is so foundational to our understanding of the gospel that I want you to turn to Galatians 4 for a minute. In Galatians 4 you have a look at this that ties beautifully in with this. Galatians 4:22, “It is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bond woman and one by the free woman.” One by the bond woman, meaning Hagar the slave; the free woman being Sarah, his wife. “But the son by the bond woman was born according to the flesh, by natural powers. And the son by the free women (should be woman) through the promise, divine power.” Ishmael then illustrates the principle of the flesh, rejecting the promise of faith and in the flesh seeking to purchase the purposes of God by works.

Ishmael is the child of human effort. Ishmael is the human effort child while Isaac is the divine provision child. Ishmael is the son born in the usual way and is a living representative of all those who have experienced only the natural birth, who have been born only into the slavery of sin. On the other hand, Isaac is a son born of faith by a supernatural miracle and is an illustration of all those who receive spiritual birth. This is the allegorical aspect, or analogical aspect would be a better way to translate that. This is an analogy, verse 24 says. There are no real allegories in Scripture. An appropriate translation would be an analogy, a picture, for these women are two covenants...one proceeding from Mount Sinai bearing children who are to be slaves, she is Hagar. Now this Hagar is

Mount Sinai in Arabia and corresponds to the present Jerusalem, for she is in slavery with her children. Verse 26, “But the Jerusalem above is free, she is our mother, for it is written, ‘Rejoice, barren women, who does not bear, break forth and shout you who are not in labor, for more numerous are the desolate than of the one who has a husband. And you, brethren, like Isaac are children of promise but as at that time he who was born according to the flesh, persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, so it is now also. But what does the Scripture say? ‘Cast out the bond woman and her son for the son of the bond woman shall not be an heir with the son of the free woman.' So then, brethren, we are not children of a bond woman, but of the free woman.”

That may sound very convoluted and difficult, it is not. It is a marvelous simple analogy. Ishmael equals flesh, human effort, natural power. That equals Sinai, Law, Law-keeping. That is manifestly the religion of Jerusalem where they tried to earn their way to salvation to a right relationship with God and all they ended up with was bondage. Isaac illustrates supernatural power, spiritual power. Isaac is like the Jerusalem above. Isaac is connected to the promise and to the freedom of being liberated from sin by the fulfillment of that promise. The contrast is simply between human effort and divine power. Isaac is a child of divine power. Ishmael is a child of human effort. Sinai is the Law and if salvation comes by the Law, it is by human effort, human power. But salvation cannot come by the Law, salvation comes by promise. It comes by divine provision.

So Paul shows us that Ishmael analogically, or as an illustration, connects with Sinai, which connects with the Law which connects with natural effort, where as Isaac connects with the Jerusalem that is above, divine power, divine presence, divine promise. Abraham did not receive the promise by human effort. His human effort only brought Ishmael and Ishmael brought nothing but trouble. The Middle East even today is full of Ishmaelites who profoundly hate the seed that came from Isaac.

So Abraham finally received the son of promise and the son of promise is an analogy of salvation by faith alone. Abraham made no contribution to that child on his own because he could not bring about the pregnancy of Sarah at the age of 99, nor could Sarah produce a child. There was no way for that to happen by human effort. It was Abraham's faith that was counted to him for righteousness.

So, if we break down the chapter, go back to Romans 4, break down the chapter a little bit, the first eight verses said Abraham was justified by faith, not works. The second section, verses 9 to 17, he was justified by grace, not by Law. And now verses 18 to 25, he was justified by divine power, not human effort. Salvation is by faith, by grace, by sovereign power...divine power.

So as we look at this section, summarizing Abraham's justifying faith, just three things to think about. Number one, the analysis of Abraham's faith. What kind of faith is it that saves? What kind of faith is it? There are a series of phrases that are overlapping and interlocking that flow from the Holy Spirit through the pen of Paul describing Abraham's faith. First one, he believed against hope. He believed against hope. Or to put it another way, he believed what appeared to be unbelievable, verse 18, “In

hope against hope, he believed." In other words, it's a figure of speech, it's an oxymoron. You know what an oxymoron is, there are lots of them that you hear today. An oxymoron is a figure of speech in which opposite ideas are combined. "The silence was deafening." That's an oxymoron. I heard the other day someone say, "Postal Service" is another oxymoron. Well there may be many oxymorons that you could come up with. "Christian Science," is an oxymoron. Apparent contradictory things. In an oxymoronic fashion, Abraham hoped against hope. He hoped when there was no reason to hope, when hope didn't make any sense against all human ability, all reasonable expectation, he believed. Hope is expectation for something that has been promised, that is anticipated, that is looked forward to.

God had told Abraham that he would become the father of many nations, Genesis chapter 12, and that was repeated through all of God's conversations with him. Chapter 12 and right on through chapter 15, chapter 17, and so forth. God's intention was to make him the father of many nations. Abraham believed that promise.

God also said to him that He would give him a land, He would give him a great land. Abraham believed that God would keep that promise. He was a man who had hope when there was no human way to see that hope realized. He had no army to conquer the land. He had no capability to produce the child. But he believed the promise and he hoped when there was absolutely no reason to hope. So in hope against hope, he believed so that he might become a father of many nations, according to that which had been spoken, so shall your descendants be. God had told him they were going to be like the sand of the sea...he believed that. According to what God had said, Abraham hoped for the fulfillment.

And it's an amazing thing to think about it. Just when you go back over the story I just told you, but listen to the discussion. In 15 of Genesis, verse 2, "Abraham said, 'O Lord God, what will You give me since I'm childless and the heir of my house is Eleazar of Damascus?'" The only one to inherit everything he had was a servant by the name of Eleazar. "And Abraham said, 'Since You have given no offspring to me, one born in my house as my heir.' Then behold a word of the Lord came to him saying, 'This man will not be your heir...this Eleazar...but one who will come forth from your own body, he shall be your heir.' And He took him outside and said, 'Now look toward the heavens and count the stars if you're able to count them," and He said to him, So shall your descendants be.' Then he believed in the Lord and He reckoned it to him as righteousness."

The moment of Abraham's salvation was when he believed something that was just plain unbelievable. He believed in something he could not see. He lived in something to which he could not make any contribution. But he believed. How strong was his belief? Well, he believed that promise for at least 25 years before it came to fulfillment. And this is a grandiose promise. Children that number like the stars, or the sands of the sea, many nations, and through him to bless many nations, and to possess this massive land. And all the years go by and the years go by, and the years go by and he

keeps believing.

If you go back to verse 19, it tells us a second thing about his faith. One, he believed against hope, or he hoped against hope, or he believed when it seemed impossible. Number two, he was not weak in faith. Verse 19, “Without becoming weak in faith.” Which is to say through all those years of having absolutely nothing to indicate that this massive promise could come to pass, his faith did not diminish. It was never without strength. He did not doubt the God who had promised. His faith is strong. Verse 20, “With respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith.” Now how can this be? How can it be possible? He and Sarah can't have children.

I think you have to go back to verse 17. I don't know how God fully revealed Himself to Abraham, because it doesn't tell us in Scripture. But Abraham believed in this about God, verse 17, middle of the verse, “In the presence of Him who he believed, even God who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which doesn't exist.” He believed that this God who had plucked him up out of Ur was the Creator, ex nihilo, He called into being things that didn't exist. That's creation, exnihilo, out of nothing. And he also believed this God also had the power to create everything out of nothing, but He had the power to give life to that which was dead. It is sufficient then to assume that God had so declared this and revealed Himself in this way as the Creator and as the life giver to Abram...Abraham, and he believed. He believed, let's say then, in the God of creation, and he believed in the God of resurrection.

The most formidable obstacles to fulfilling our plans would be non-existence and death. It's kind of hard to work with what doesn't exist and it's extremely difficult to get past the article of death. That is no problem for God because He can call into being what does not exist and He can give life to what is dead. And again, we don't know how God planned in his mind these confidences, but when God came to him at the age of 99 and said he would have the son that He had promised 25 years earlier, Abraham hadn't lost his faith. It is an amazing kind of faith. It's an amazing kind of faith when we compare it, I think, very often with our very short-sighted high-demand kind of faith, where if we don't see something immediately, we begin to wonder if it's ever going to happen.

So when you look at the faith of Abraham, it is clear that the supreme verification of his trust in God was not that God loved him so much, it was not that God led him in a certain way, it was not that God had given him a land, it was not that God had even given him the seed. He was able to believe God for what didn't exist...what had not even come into existence and he was able to believe God that what was dead could come to life. Hence, when God asked him to take Isaac up in Genesis 22 and put him on the altar and take his life, Abraham had no hesitation in doing that because he knew that God is a God who gives life to the dead. That is the testimony of the writer of Hebrews to Abraham. In chapter 11 of Hebrews, that wonderful, wonderful testimony to the faith of Abraham, let me just read you a couple of verses, Hebrews 11, “By faith, Abraham,” verse 17, “when he was tested, offered up Isaac and he who had received the promise was offering up his only begotten son. It was he of whom

it was said, ‘In Isaac your descendants shall be called.' He considered that God is able to raise people even from the dead.'”

So it may have not been a full New Testament orbed theology, but he had a very clear understanding of God as Creator, source of life, who could make things out of nothing and give life to those who were dead. And it was an unwavering faith. He could bring a life into existence and He could bring back life from the dead.

Now, third thing about his faith, go back to Romans chapter 4, was that he was not discouraged by his own natural weakness. Back to verse 19 again. “He contemplated,” he didn't become weak in faith even though he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead.

That's kind of an odd way to refer to old people, as good as dead, “Since he was about a hundred years old and the deadness of Sarah's womb.” Her womb had always been dead, and now he was as good as dead.

How interesting. He was not even weak in faith in the contemplation of the reality of his own deadness and the deadness of Sarah. That is the human impossibility. His own impotence and Sarah's barrenness was in his mind, katanoeo(??), to fix one's mind, to contemplate, to consider, to concentrate. He is now in a state of deadness. He fixes his mind on that reality, but it never ever diminishes his faith because he understands that this is a divine promise, this is not something that he has to pull off. Oh, I agree for a while he succumbed to Sarah's plot and plan. It was certainly a time of temptation and sin. But it was not the death of his faith. Abraham still counted on a God who was omnipotent and could create out of nothing and revive what had been long dead.

This is the kind of faith Noah had. Just think about Noah. God told him to build a boat because it was going to rain and there never had been rain in the history of the earth. Spent 120 years building a ship, but he believed in the God who could create. And if God said there was going to be a flood, then God would create the flood.

Abraham had no personal capacity to make the promise happen. None whatsoever, but he was not weak in faith because he knew God and he knew how powerful the Creator/God was. The key to everything for Abraham and his constant perspective was to focus on God.

Another thing it says about his faith, characterizing it. He was not doubtful because of circumstances outside of him. That's implied also in verse 19. “Sarah's womb was dead.” He contemplated his own situation and he could make no contribution to this child. And then outside of him there was Sarah, she could make no contribution either. According to Genesis 18:11, Scripture says her body was unable to produce a child. It couldn't happen. The circumstances within him and the circumstances outside of him together made no contribution whatsoever. His faith then was purely on the creative

and resurrection power of God, nothing other than that.

So verse 20 says, “Yet with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief.” No vacillating, no staggering, no wavering, he's fixed, steady, set, locked on, like Psalm 57:7 where the psalmist says, “My heart is fixed, O Lord, my heart is fixed.” He has a full vision of God, he's not expecting that he's going to make a contribution or Sarah's going to make a contribution. I love the way the King James put it. “He staggered not at the promises of God but was strong in faith.” The word for “stagger” there, or equivocation, or waver, as it's translated in verse 20, is diakrino, it means to vacillate between two opinions. He doesn't flip-flop. He's not wavering. He's fixed, strong in faith, literally a passive word, he's been made strong in faith, it's a divine gift.

Sure in his humanness, he struggled. But his faith was always triumphant. Sure he fell to temptation and sin, but his faith was always triumphant. It was a real faith. It was a God-given faith and it was strengthened in the struggle, and the more he struggled, the stronger his faith became. Even coming out of the whole situation with Ishmael, his faith was strong. God continued to affirm His covenant again and again with Abram. His faith grows in the midst of his struggle.

And here's the key to everything, back to verse 20, end of the verse, “...Giving glory to God...giving glory to God.” Always God focused, always God focused. It seems impossible, it seems like it can't happen, but I give all the glory to God. He has the power. He has the plan. He made the promise. He keeps His Word. Nothing is too hard for Him. All his hopes, all his dreams, all his expectations, all his anticipations, all his hopes and promises were bound up in God. And he was such a true worshiper of God, even with that which was unrealized, he was such a true worshiper of God that in the midst of all the things that were not happening as the decades rolled by, he continued to glorify God. That is a marvelous kind of faith. What faith.

And finally, in verse 21, all of this because he was being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform. If I took you back to the book of Genesis, I could show you how many times God repeats the promise...repeats it, repeats it, repeats it, repeats it, repeats it again and again and again and again, even puts Abraham to sleep, anaesthetizes Abraham and God goes through an amazing scenario to seal the covenant in blood. He is then convinced because God continues to reiterate His promise to him. This is the kind of faith that is the model faith of saving faith.

Look, you have not yet received your inheritance, have you? You're like Abraham, you have an inheritance undefiled, fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you. Anybody seen it? No. You haven't received it. It's waiting for you. You have the promise of spiritual perfection in heaven, you haven't received it. You live in hope. You can make no contribution to it. You don't know how to get from here to there, do you? What did Thomas say to Jesus? When Jesus said, “I'm going to go away.” Thomas says, “Wait a minute, Lord, we don't know the way. How do we get there?” You don't have any way to get to heaven. You want to go there, you're dependent on the promises of God which are as yet

completely unfulfilled, right?

Oh you have some indications because God keeps reiterating His promise to you like He did to Abraham on the pages of holy Scripture, and by the confirming work of the Spirit of God in your life so that you live in hope. And when you struggle with sin, like Abraham did, and when you fall to temptation, and when you doubt and have those moments of fear and wonder about those things, the Spirit of God comes alongside and comforts your heart and strengthens you and builds you up. But you are like Abraham, you're strangers wandering in a foreign land, you're somewhere between Ur and Canaan. You're somewhere between here and heaven. You're stuck in Haran for your whole lifetime.
Why do you believe in the future? Why do you believe in heaven? Because you believe that the Creator created this and has the power to create that and you also believe that the Creator is the life giver who raises the dead. So when you look at the faith of Abraham, it's not as different as some people might think from the necessary faith that we have, but our God can create heaven, can create a perfect environment, can recreate us and raise our dead bodies to everlasting glory as well as raise our dead souls from the deadness of sin.

So Abraham lived just kind of the way we live, in the middle of a whole lot of repeated assurances from God. I know you haven't seen it, I know it hasn't come. I know you haven't arrived. And by the way, when Abraham died, the fullness of the promise hadn't come to pass either because bound up in that promise was the greater Son who was the Messiah, Abraham saw His day and rejoiced, but he certainly never saw the Messiah. So he died in hope the way all believers die. His whole life was the outworking of these great promises from a sovereign God who plucked him up out of nowhere, communicated to him who he was to the degree that Abraham sought only to glorify God and that he knew at the heart of glorifying God was believing Him, trusting Him, banking his life on God's promises even though he himself could make no contribution to it.

I mean, in all honesty, do you know absolutely for a fact unequivocally that your sins are forgiven? Well, you believe that because the Bible tells you that if you put your trust in Christ, your sins will be forgive, right? But you can't see the transaction, so you live in hope, you live in faith. That faith is based upon the promises of God. The promises of God are trustworthy because there is evidence that God can make something out of nothing, namely the universe, and that He has power to give life. And how do we know that? We're going to find out in a few moments, because He raised Christ from the dead.

So when we're here on Earth and we're waiting for all the fulfillment to come in the future, we live the way Abraham lived. We hope against hope but we don't grow weak in faith when we don't get the realization of our promised inheritance. We're not discouraged because we can't create our own heaven. We're not discouraged because we can't earn our own salvation. We can't gain our own righteousness by our own works. We don't waver in faith, we glorify God and we live in a full faith and

a full confidence, like verse 21, “Being full assured that what God has promised, He's able to perform.” That's how you live your life. That's how Abraham lived his life. That was Abraham's faith. Now what was God's answer to Abraham's faith? Verse 22, “Therefore, it was also credited to him as righteousness.” Everybody would think, except Christians that you have to sort of earn your way, how could...how could someone be credited with righteousness that wasn't theirs? I mean, that seems like it's unjust, right? But the grandeur of Abraham's faith and the wonder of Abraham's faith was that it was all that God asked and it was sufficient based upon Abraham trusting God to fulfill His promise. It was enough for God to impute to Abraham His own righteousness, to credit to Abraham's account the very righteousness that belonged only to God. He is given divine righteousness, not that his faith earned it, his faith received it.

Justification, this great doctrine of justification is the imputation of righteousness to undeserving sinners. You remember that back in verse 5. “To the one who doesn't work, don't earn it, but believes in Him...here's the key...who justifies the ungodly.” Not the godly cause there wouldn't be anybody qualified. “He justifies the ungodly, his faith is credited as righteousness.” There's the same point. Justification is a gift of God, righteousness credited to our account so that before God you are viewed as righteous, not because we earned it or deserved it, but because we believed that God would give it if we put our trust in Him.

Salvation not by works, by faith...not by Law, by grace...not by human power, by divine power. Well the Apostle gives a final point, the application of Abraham's faith, verses 23 to 25, and this brings it down to us. “Not for his sake only was it written that it was credited to him.” The point is, what does it say to us? What does this mean to us? These things were not recorded as mere historical facts, but as illustrations for all people of all times of God's method of justification, that God credits righteousness to those who have faith.

So this isn't just the story of Abraham, this is everybody's story and that's why we can be called by the Apostle Paul, in the New Testament, the children of Abraham. Not in a racial sense, but in a spiritual sense. Here's an illustration of how anybody in any time period is saved, by believing in the promises of God. And this is also a great statement, by the way, on the role of Scripture. Look at it again. “Now not for his sake only was it written that it was credited to him.” It was written for us. Verse 24, “But for our sake to whom it will be credited, or imputed, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.”

The very one who was delivered over, crucified because of our transgressions and raised because of our justification. The application of the story of Abraham is to everybody. Salvation is by grace alone through faith alone, not by works righteousness...I love this phrase...verse 24, “It was written for our sake also to whom it will be credited...it will be credited.” That is to say from now on. It's not a future. It starts now and it will always be this way. It will always be this way. Righteousness will always be imputed to those who believe. Abraham is living testimony to the great Old Testament truth...the just

shall live by faith. And he even gives us a definition of that faith, s we saw so magnificently explained by the Apostle Paul. The only way for any sinner to be saved is the way that Abraham was saved. The only way for any of us to be made righteous before God is the way that Abraham became righteous before God. Righteousness was imputed to him because he trusted in the revealed promises of God.

It is the object of Abraham's faith that saves. Do you get that? It is the object of Abraham's faith that saves, not the nature of his faith. He's not saved because some...there's some meritorious faith. He is saved because he puts his trust in God, the true God. He fully believed in the God who could create out of nothing, the creator God, he fully believed in the God who could raise the dead and he utterly committed his life in submissive obedience to that trust. He believed that God could raise him, could raise his son, could raise a child out of their deadness. He believed that God had the power to do anything when it came to giving life. He even believed that God would raise up one day a Redeemer...a Redeemer who was dead and came to life.

Did Abraham really believe in Christ? I mentioned it earlier, here it is, John 8:56, “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day and he saw it and was glad.” Could it have been that in the occasion with Isaac God gave him some personal instruction that taking Isaac and laying him on the altar and then providing a ram out of the thicket as a substitute, could God have given him the full theological lesson of substitutionary atonement by a provision that God Himself would bring? And then that God would raise that one from the dead, as Abraham believed He would have done in Isaac's case if he had taken his life? We are saved because we believe in the Creator/God, the God who raises the dead and now on this side of the cross, we believe in the God not who will raise the dead, but who has raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, after His atonement on the cross for our transgressions.

What does it take to be a Christian? Romans 10:9 and 10, “To confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead.” It is He who went to the cross...I love verse 25, just a couple of comments...”Delivered over,” technical term meaning to put somebody in prison or trial or take them for execution, “for or because of our offenses, our transgressions.” He paid the penalty, as you know, “And was raised for our justification. By raising Jesus from the dead, God affirmed that He had accepted Christ's atoning sacrifice as sufficient in full.”

So we're nothing but a lot of Abrahams in a way. We're made right with God because we believe whatever God has said. He didn't have the full picture, but he probably had a lot more than we know about what was to come. On the other hand, we have the full story, salvation comes to us, this is the Christian message, this is the Christian gospel, not by something we do, not by our works but by believing what God has said to be true about Himself. At any point in time, saving faith was faith in God to the full point of His self-revelation. Now, of course, the revelation is full and complete concerning Christ.

Father, we thank You for this wonderful portion of Scripture that unpacks for us the essence really of saving faith, to believe what we cannot see and haven't experienced, but because You have said it to us again and again and repeated Your promise in Your covenant on the pages of holy Scripture and You have verified it in our hearts by the work of the Holy Spirit and You revealed Yourself again and again to us. We trust You. We know You to be the Creator/ God. We know You can raise the dead because You have given us the record of Scripture in which the dead have been raised and most notably You raised Christ and based on His resurrection, we will rise as well. We thank You for the hope in which we live. We thank You for the righteousness given to us to which we could make no contribution by our own effort. The only heaven that exists is the one that You created and the only way to get there is to have You take us. The only way we could ever be taken is to be righteous. The only way we could ever be righteous, to have a righteousness not our own imputed to us, the only way that happens is when we know we can't earn it and we ask for it as a gift of faith and grace. Encourage our hearts, Lord, in the wonder of this salvation, in Christ's name. Amen.

Now before you go tonight, as you know we are blessed in this church to have a missionary family that has to be the best on the planet...all over the world, such faithful people. One of our special treasures and one of our beloved missionaries is Josiah Groundman(?), his wife Crystal, they've been down in Mexico now for a number of years and I don't know how many years you've been down there now? Two years and Josiah struggles with all kinds of physical issues, telling me earlier that the whole time you're down there your temperature never goes below 101. Thirty-six hours here and he's normal, well as normal as Josiah will ever get, normal temperature. He's a special servant of the Lord and I think we talked about a few years ago how difficult it was to have a child and lost a child, Crystal lost a child in pregnancy but since that time the Lord has given them a daughter and you're on your way to having a son, and we're so excited. They came back for a few days for a wedding, and get this, he got out of there on one of the last flights before the quarantined everybody on the Swine Flu. So he flew before the flu took over Mexico. We're glad, we're glad that he's here and by the time they're scheduled to go back, the real fear element is over. But they canceled the seminary, they canceled church and the church where he serves and a seminary with great blessing. And just to give you a little bit of look forward, I'll let him talk about this. He's coming back on a permanent basis in August, he's going to start a training center here to train Spanish-speaking pastors. We need to do that. Sixty-five million Hispanics in America and a tremendous need there. We're going to bring him back where it's easier for him to survive.

Well I said, “Who's going to replace you?” Well he spent the last two years training all the guys to replace him, right? I doubt that. But I think you made a good effort at it. So Josiah's going to come and I want him to say a word, say what's on his heart, greet you a little bit and then lead in a closing prayer.

Let's welcome Josiah. (Applause)

JOSIAH: It's really a joy to be with you here this evening. We are so grateful to the Lord for His kindness that He shows us through your gifts and your prayers. Crys and I were talking before the service and saying we wonder if, unless you've been a missionary, you can understand the preciousness of receiving cards and phone calls and e-mails, so we're just so thankful to the Lord for you and the support that you guys show us in real tangible ways. We're staying in your house, the missionary house next door, that's a great blessing. We would love to meet you throughout the week if you want to stop by, we're going to be here for another week. But it's just a joy to be here.

One of the biggest things on my heart, the five years before we went to Mexico City, I served as a hospital chaplain in downtown L.A. and it was just such a burden on my heart to see what precious little we were doing to reach the Hispanic community here in Los Angeles. To give you a...not we as a church, sorry, I got some weird looks there...church at large in America, just to give you an idea, to put it in perspective, there's eight millions Hispanics supposedly in Los Angeles, seven million people that live in El Salvador and you have thousands of churches, hundreds of seminaries in those locations and in the United States we're not doing that much. So we're just real excited to be coming home, going to have a night school here to be training pastors. And we're really, really looking forward to that.

Please join me in a word of prayer.

Father, we praise You for who You are. We thank You for faith and the precious gift that it is, the grace and the peace and the hope and the forgiveness that come with it. As we think of the short-term missions team that will be sent out, we're reminded that this message of faith and forgiveness is a message that has been entrusted to us as Your ambassadors to take with us in our communities and to the ends of the world. And we pray that You would make us faithful. We thank You in Christ's name whom we long to be like. Amen.

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