

FAITH, HOPE, AND GLORY

Growing Strong in Faith for God's Glory

Romans Series
PBC 2025

Text: Romans 4:18-25

In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, "So shall your offspring be."¹⁹ He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb.²⁰ No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God,²¹ fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.²² That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness."²³ But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone,²⁴ but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord,²⁵ who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

Introduction

This morning, I want to ask God for four things during our time together:

1. That the Holy Spirit would help us worship together well in ways that glorify God by exalting Christ in our hearts.
2. That we would discern the mind and will of God regarding the two pastors the elders have recommended to our congregation for affirmation as they serve in our Spanish ministry, which has grown to nearly 100 people.
3. We rejoice in God's goodness for bringing many who have been away this summer back to us safely, with more expected in the coming weeks.
4. That each of us would truly understand the magnitude of what God has placed before us in the final paragraph of Romans 4 and that it would produce the kind of joy in us that Paul intended for his original readers!

In Romans 4, Paul encourages us to see "Justification by Faith" not just as a doctrine we must believe, but ***as a reality we personally experience!***

To help us understand what experiencing justification by faith looks like, ***Paul points to three powerful, life-giving realities that are ours because our faith has resulted in God justifying us in His sight!***

1. ***4:1-12*** – Justification by faith should produce ***unquenchable, satisfying joy*** in us because we have received the ***blessing of a righteousness*** that will never be marred, stained, or depleted by any temptation that overtakes us, failure that discourages us, or sin that defeats us. (Psalm 32:1-3,11; Numbers 6:22-27)
2. ***4:13-17*** – Justification by Faith should give us ***unshakeable, sustaining hope*** because we have received ***a promise from God*** by which He makes us heirs of the world.
3. ***4:18-25*** – Justification by Faith should grant us ***personal stability and lasting satisfaction*** because it enables us to fulfill the purpose for which we were designed – to glorify God and enjoy Him forever!

Getting our Bearings: Romans 4:18-25

In this section of Romans, Paul makes very clear that justification – God declaring us righteous in His sight – is not obtained through human effort, good behavior, or religious association. (3:21-26)

The only way to obtain the righteousness that justifies is through a living faith that pleases God – ***the kind of living faith Abraham had, which led to his justification before God (4:1-17).***

Which brings up three questions:

What kind of faith pleases God and justifies us?

- This is how the writer of Hebrews defines this kind of faith: *A faith that justifies is personally confident and fully convinced of the truthfulness of God's promises before they are fulfilled.* (Heb. 1:1-2)

- This is how James describes this kind of faith: *A faith that justifies is a living faith that is wholehearted, single-focused, and fully trusting in God and in His Word.* (James 2:14-26)

What does this kind of living faith demand?

- Hebrews says that this kind of faith demands that *we believe God is and that He is the rewarder of those who seek Him.* (Heb. 11:6)
- Paul said that those who would have this kind of faith *must believe in God and in His ability to give life to the dead and to call into existence the things that do not (yet) exist!* (Romans 4:17)

What does it look like, and how is it strengthened in our lives?

- Put differently, what kind of faith saves us from our sin, pleases God, and enables us to fulfill our chief end—to glorify God and enjoy Him forever?
- Paul answers this question by pointing us to Abraham and showing us his faith as an example to follow.
- In fact, earlier in the chapter, Paul actually challenges us to “*walk in the footsteps of Abraham’s faith*” (4:12).

And to help us do this, Paul describes justifying faith (like Abraham’s) as ***enduring hope, rooted in unwavering belief, which brings great glory to God and saves His People.***

These **four parts of this description of Abraham’s faith** must be true of our own if we are to fulfill the purpose for which we were created and placed on this planet – to glorify God and enjoy Him forever.

Abraham’s faith (and ours) was displayed through . . .

I. Enduring Hope (vv. 18-19)

In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, “So shall your offspring be.”¹⁹ He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah’s womb.

A. The nature of Abraham's faith – "In hope he believed"

- Abraham's faith is described by the word "hope"
- Hope – confident expectation that a promise made will in fact be fulfilled, and acts accordingly. Here, the promise in view is the covenant God made to Abraham and to his descendants.
- Illustration: **Not this:** "I hope it won't rain next week"
But this: "I obtained a ticket for an anniversary cruise next week, and I have written confirmation, and I am so confident about my place on that cruise that I purchased air tickets to get to the city where we will board the ship."

B. The content of Abraham's faith – "that he would be the father of many nations"

1. God, whom Abraham did not know and could not see, called him to leave everything he knew, loved, worshipped, and served in pursuit of a kingdom (land) that did not yet exist. [It was the kingdom of Eden, lost by Adam's disobedience, which will one day be restored through the obedience of the second Adam.] Furthermore, God promised to make Abraham **a great nation**, give him a great name, and bless the nations through him. And Abraham responded by going "as the Lord told him!" (Gen 12:1-4).
2. God told Abraham, *'I will give you a son, and from that son will come **descendants so numerous** you can't count them any more than you can count the stars.'* Think of the incongruity of this with the reality of Abraham's childlessness due to Sarah's barrenness. And Abraham responded in faith by believing God (Gen 15:1-6).
3. God spoke to Abraham a third time and said, *I am not going to make you the father of just one nation, but **a multitude of nations**, and I am changing your name from Abram to Abraham!* (Gen 17:1-8). Now the incongruity gets even worse – it goes from one nation to a multitude! And Abraham believed and circumcised himself and his son, Ishmael, in obedient faith to God's Word!

Abraham **believed** that God would give him what he did not yet possess and could not obtain in his own strength! And more importantly, he acted on that faith!

C. The context of Abraham's faith – "against hope . . . his faith did not weaken"

- The idea here is that Abraham's "hope" endured when all human hope had long been lost.
- In the face of human impossibility when all human ability had been exhausted, Abraham's faith endured.
- ***Despite Divine Delay:***
 - Call and promise when he was 75 years of age (Gen 12:4).
 - "*Eliezer will need to be my heir*" when he was 80-85 (Gen 15:1-6)
 - "*Ishmael will be my heir*" when he was 85 (Gen 16)
 - "*Your own son will be your heir*" when he was 99 (Gen 17)
- ***Despite Impossible Human Realities:***
 - He considered the deadness of his own body
 - He considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb
 - And his faith did not weaken as he took stock of all the human impossibilities that stood in the way of God's promise!
- ***So what kept Abraham's faith alive and strong*** over the course of 25 years, when nothing God promised had come to pass?
 - I will make you the father of a great nation (Abram), and for 15 years, Abram didn't have a single son!
 - And then God increases the impossibility by telling Abraham that he would be the father of many nations, even though Abraham and Sarah were no longer physically able to have children.

D. The ground of Abraham's faith – "as he had been told"

- God made Abraham a promise – that he would become the father of many nations – and ***Abraham believed God and took Him at His Word.*** And so must each one of us!

Where does this kind of confident expectation (hope) come from?

II. Rooted in Unwavering Belief (vv. 20-21)

No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God,²¹ fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.

A. *He did not allow unbelief to affect his faith*

- Abraham's enduring hope came from his refusal to let doubt (unbelief) **influence his thinking or impact his living** regarding God's promise to him. ***He focused on the right set of facts – God's!***
- And, as we have already seen in the text, there were many human reasons for Abraham to doubt God's promise. But he refused to let any of these obstacles affect his commitment to believe in God and trust Him to be faithful to His Word and fulfill His promise.
- Abraham never wavered in his belief in God's faithfulness or ability to keep His promise. ***He was not internally divided toward the promise of God because of unbelief.*** (Thielman, ZECNT)
- He is an example of what James talks about when he says that if we want God to give us wisdom, we need to ask in faith without wavering (i.e., without doubting). (James 1:5-8)
- What James means is not that our faith will never struggle, but that we will never go back and forth in our confidence in God's ability or in His faithfulness to His Word, which we possess.
- And James warns us that if we go back and forth between belief and unbelief in what God has said, we will not receive anything from the Lord! The Lord does not reward unbelief!
- However, ***unbelief is different from struggling faith.*** Genesis makes clear that while Abraham never wavered in His confidence in God's ability or His faithfulness, ***he did struggle with the divine delay that was part of God's plan for how and when he would receive what God had promised.***
- And the text actually tells us this by reminding us that Abraham overcame that struggle as he grew strong in his faith.

B. *He allowed God to strengthen his faith over time*

- His faith was empowered (passive tense), meaning someone other than Abraham strengthened his faith!
- In other words, Abraham did not do this on his own by engaging in faith-strengthening exercises!
- The ***strengthening of his faith came from God***. So how did God strengthen Abraham's faith? The same way He strengthens ours!
- James tells us how God strengthens faith in us: *"Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that **the testing of your faith produces steadfastness**. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing!"* (James 1:2-4)
- ***God strengthened Abraham's faith by testing it through trials that built strength into his faith, trial by trial!***
- He tested it through the trial of divine delay, which made Abraham wait in patient endurance for 25 long years.
- He tested it by extending grace to Abraham despite his failure to trust God, which led him to rely on his own human ingenuity to produce an heir through Hagar or to protect Sarah by deliberately misusing a truth to distort a bigger truth.
- He tested it by calling Abraham to repeated acts of obedience despite the promise not being fulfilled.
- He tested it by demanding the sacrifice of the promised son.
- And in every instance, year after year, obedience after obedience, despite sinful failures, Abraham's faith was strengthened by God because Abraham consistently responded the same way to God – he gave God glory by trusting and obeying, no matter how long or how difficult the trial.
- None of these tests or trials were meant to destroy Abraham's faith, but to strengthen it!
- Illustration: We build muscle by pushing it to the point of almost failing – and that's often how God uses trials to strengthen our faith – by pushing it to its limits.
- Which brings us to why God uses difficulty and trials to grow our faith – it is a spectacular way in which we glorify God!

III. That Brings God Great Glory (vv. 21). [For the Fame of His Name]

but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God,

- Abraham's faith was strengthened **as** he gave God glory. ***So how does our faith glorify God?***

A. Abraham glorified God's faithfulness to His Word by trusting Him to keep His Word and fulfill His Promise!

- Illustration: Piper and the pool illustration.
- He trusted in the bare word of God alone in spite of circumstances!

B. Abraham's growing faith resulted in greater displays of God's glory because it eliminated human possibility!

- The more Abraham trusted God and acted in belief, the more God was glorified.
- No matter how discouraging – 25 years
- No matter how difficult – dead body / barren womb
- No matter how dangerous – no small thing for a 90 year old woman to bear a child in that day and under those circumstances.
- No matter how devastating – the command to sacrifice the beloved son you have waited so long to receive.

And in this final test, we see why Abraham's faith was so pleasing to God and why it brought Him such great glory!

He was so convinced that God would fulfill His promise to give Abraham many descendants through Isaac that he willingly went to sacrifice Isaac ***because he believed God would raise him from the dead*** (Hebrews 11:17-19). And we know this because of something Abraham said to his servants when he left them at the bottom of the mountain – *"Then Abraham said to his young men, 'Stay here with the donkey; I and the boy will go over there and worship and (we shall) come again to you.'*" (Gen 22:4-5)

And we know this pleased God and glorified Him because of what He said to Abraham: *“For now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me!”* (Gen 22:12)

Which brings us to the final point this morning – this kind of faith is how God saves people and invites them to enjoy Him forever!

IV. And Saves His People So They Enjoy Him Forever (vv. 22-25)

That is why his faith was “counted to him as righteousness.”²³ But the words “it was counted to him” were not written for his sake alone,²⁴ but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord,²⁵ who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

A. The Immense Reward of this Kind of Faith (v. 22)

That is why his faith was “counted to him as righteousness.

B. The Intended Recipients for this Reward (v. 23-24a)

But the words “it was counted to him” were not written for his sake alone,²⁴ but for ours also.

C. The Immense Promise made to all who believe (v. 24b-25)

It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord,²⁵ who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

- To receive Abraham’s reward, you and I must demonstrate Abraham’s faith in God – we must believe, like Abraham, that God can raise the dead and call into existence what is not yet present (4:17).
- Abraham believed that the God who called him to sacrifice Isaac would raise him from the dead in order to give Abraham the inheritance He promised **through Isaac**. *(Back when God first promised to give him Isaac, Abraham confirmed his faith by obeying God’s command to be circumcised – Gen 17:22-27).*
- We must believe that the God who delivered Jesus up for our transgressions also raised Him up for our justification. *We confirm our faith by obeying Jesus’ command to be baptized.*

D. The Immense Generosity implied by this Reward (Rom 8:31-32)

*What then shall we say to these things? **If God is for us, who can be against us?** ³² He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, **how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?***

- When we believed, God removed the enmity between us and reconciled us through His Son so that He is no longer against us but for us in all things!
- When we believed, God removed the recompense of our sinful deeds and replaced it with the abundant reward of inheriting all things by making us heirs of the world with Abraham!
- At the end, we will receive as our possession the entire restored creation to rule over with Christ and to enjoy its abundant blessing – just as it was before it was ruined, marred, and lost by Adam’s sin.
- But getting this inheritance requires that we live by faith and not by sight – waiting for the coming of that kingdom as God promised.

And that brings me to one final application drawn from Abraham’s life in Genesis 13:1-18.

Conclusion: Will we walk by Faith or Will we walk by Sight?

- Abraham - lived for a reality God promised that He could not see with earthly eyes – a kingdom and a city that God promised to establish.
- Lot - settled for trinkets of earthly treasure and worldly pleasure that he could see, feel, and experience now in the cities of this world.
- When we look back 4000 years later who got the better end?
- Who brought God glory?
- Abraham - walked by faith and received the blessing when God glorified Himself through His faithful goodness
- Lot - walked (lived) by sight and lost all when God glorified himself in His fierce judgment.
- What will you choose to do with God’s promises to you?