

Romans 4:1-25: What is Faith?

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Romans / Romans 4:1–25

Introduction

- Golden gate bridge on a foggy day - the fog didn't change the reality that the historic bridge was there. I just couldn't see it
- Faith often feels like that. You can't always see what God is doing. You can't always see how He's working. But the fog doesn't change the reality of who He is or what He's promised.
- [Hebrews 11:1](#): "Now faith is the reality of what is hoped for, the proof of what is not seen."
- Paul's argument in Romans: Faith is how we're saved - by trusting in what we cannot see with our eyes. While we have not seen Jesus face to face, we believe that He died and rose again for us, and we trust that what He has done for us is the only way to life.
- [Romans 4](#) hits us right where we live. Because we all carry questions like: "Am I good enough for God to accept me?"
"Have I prayed enough? Served enough? Obeyed enough?"
[Romans 4](#) says: **You don't have to be enough—Jesus is enough.**
- In [Romans 4](#), Paul takes us way back to Abraham as an example of faith - trusting God even though you can't see clearly all that God is doing. As Paul examines Abraham's life, he answers a huge question, "What is faith?"
- This morning, I want you to understand three truths about faith from this passage.

Faith has a specific outcome: God counts you righteous.

- If you were a religious Jew, you might have objected to Paul's Gospel message. Justified by faith? It's not about what you do? It's about what Jesus has done? That was a radical message.
- Religious Jews objection: "What about Abraham? Wasn't he justified by works?" The rabbis taught this. In the Mishnah (collection of Oral Law), it was written, "and we find that Abraham our father had performed the whole law before it was given..."
- Paul knows that's not at all what the Bible says. Abraham was justified (declared righteous) by faith in the promises of God - just like you and me - not works.
- vs. 2 - If Abraham was justified by his works, he would have something to boast about, but Paul already stated that we cannot boast in ourselves, rather only in what God has done.
- vs. 3 - [Gen. 15:6](#) - Abraham believed God and counted to Him for righteousness. [Gen. 12](#) - God promised Abe descendants. It hadn't happened yet. God stepped out in faith and encountered hardship.
- [Gen. 15](#) - Abraham had just gone through a war. This was not what he expected. Would God ever come through for him? [Gen. 15:1](#): "I am your shield." Abe to God: What will you give me? God: a son from your own body. Look at the stars..."
- All Abe had was the word of God. He had no evidence. No fulfillment. No visible change in his situation, but the Word of God was enough for him. He believed and God counted him righteous.
- God declared Abraham right with him not because of Abe's impressiveness. Abe wasn't impressive. He was an ordinary man who

even after God revealed Himself to him, had a lot of missteps. (E.g., lied about his wife being his sister.)

- But, Abe was impressed by God. He believed the promise - and God counted him righteous.
- Credited/counted = a banking term used 11 times in this passage. Righteousness deposited into Abraham's account. NOT a righteousness he was owed (vs. 4) but as a gift.
- vs. 5 - Even more shocking - God credits righteousness as a gift to the ungodly. Abe no different than us - ungodly. Before he believed, he was a pagan worshipping false gods. But, God revealed himself, and he believed - God credited righteousness to Abe not because Abe was righteous but because Abe trusted the promise of God.
- vs. 6-7 - David knew this. Paul quotes from [Psalm 32](#) - written by David after his affair with Bathsheba. David knew his sins were covered because of the grace of God, not because David had to "work" for his forgiveness. Praise God that when you sin you can run to the grace of God!
- **I don't need to be impressive.** Abraham is like so many other OT saints - he's not impressive. He has nothing to offer God but his faith in God. He can't stand before God and say, "Look at me," and neither can you. That's a relief! I don't have to fear disappointing God, try to be perfect so God might accept me, or feel the guilt that I don't measure up. God doesn't want my impressiveness, He wants my faith.
- **I just need to be impressed by God.** Be amazed that God would credit righteousness to your account just because He loves you and desires you to be in a relationship with you. When I'm impressed by God worship and gratitude become instinctive.

Faith has a specific object: God's promise.

- Abe counted righteous because of his faith, but his faith was in something specific: the promise of God. Abraham didn't have a vague spirituality: there's a god out there somewhere, so I just need to get in touch with the universe. Rather, faith in a promise that God was going to make him a great nation through a promised seed.
- Our faith has a specific object: the resurrected Lord. We don't have a vague spirituality. Our faith is specific: Jesus is the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the father except by Him ([John 14:6](#)).
- Paul's argument: Abraham counted righteous solely because of his faith in God, not because of his works or his ethnic identity. Abe wasn't saved because he was a Jew. In fact, he wasn't a Jew! There were no such thing as a Jew. He wasn't counted righteous because he was circumcised. He wasn't circumcised until [Gen. 17](#). For Abe, circumcision was a sign of his faith (vs. 11) not a requirement for righteousness.
- Because Abe was counted righteous before he was circumcised, he is the "father of all who believe." He is the model of faith both for the Jew and Gentile.
- vs. 13-15 - God made a promise to Abraham not because of his law-keeping. The law had not been given yet! God made a promise to Abraham simply because of His sovereign plan, and Abraham embraced God's sovereign plan by faith.
- If inheriting God's promise depends on law-keeping, then faith becomes pointless and God's promises become powerless because the whole system would depend on human effort and not God's power.
- Further, the law can't be the basis of becoming an heir of God's promise because the law shows our sin, not our ability to keep it.

- And where there is no law - Since the promise is based on faith and not law, our transgressions do not nullify God's promises. God's promise to Abe not based on Abe's performance but on God's faithful promises.
- vs. 16-17 - The only way God could create a unified people - Jew and Gentile - and make Abe the father of many nations ([Gen. 17:5](#)) was by grace through faith. If it was because of our efforts, we would have messed up God's plan.
- "One who is of the law..." a reference to believing Jews who had the privilege of the Law and embraced the Messiah - "one who is of Abraham's faith..." reference to Gentile believers. Remember, Abe was a Gentile. Jew or Gentile, what we all have in common is that we all need grace. Not one of us have earned salvation. We're all the recipients of the same righteousness that comes through faith as Abe received.
- What Paul is showing us is that:
- **Faith requires a trust relocation.** This is what the Jews needed - a relocation of trust. Identify today where you place your trust - if you put your confidence in what you can do, you will miss salvation. This is what it looks like:
 - "I had a good week. God must be pleased." vs. "Even on my worst week, God accepts me because of Jesus."
 - "I need to take control" vs. "I give God control because He knows best."
 - "I need others to approve of me." vs. "God's approval is enough."
 - "I can figure this out." vs. "God sees what I cannot see, and I know He's working."
 - "I don't feel God right now." vs. "My feelings shift, but God's promises don't."

- **Faith results in a radical realignment.** Faith in God's promises caused Abraham to act - he realigned his whole life around the promise of God. Acting in faith means God's voice is the loudest voice in my life - not because I'm trying to earn His favor - but because based on His promises, I know His will is best for my life.
 - Faith realigns the way I parent, live with my spouse, work my career, manage my money. There's not part of my life that is not affected by my faith in God. How can I honor God in every area of my life? Where are you still refusing to listen to God's voice?

Faith has a specific focus: God's power to do the impossible.

- vs. 18 - Abe believed "hoping against hope." The promise seemed impossible - a 90 year old man and an 80 year old woman having a child? But Abe hoped against hope - he believed that God could do what seems impossible.
- God honored Abe's faith - He did make Abe the father of many nations.
- vs. 19 - Abe did not weaken in his faith. How can Paul say this? It seems as if Abe wavered several times. ([Gen. 17:17](#) - Abe laughing about the possibility of having a child, lying about Sarah, having a child through Hagar, etc.)
- Faith has moments of struggle but a trajectory of trust. Paul not saying that Abe never struggled or made mistakes, but that he never gave up on what God promised. Abraham's story not a story of perfect faith but growing faith. Despite moments of struggle, he kept returning to God's promise. Faith was Abraham's settled posture. His faith did not collapse under the weight of what seemed impossible.
- Even though Abe's body was failing, he trusted God would deliver on His promise.

- vs. 20-21 - Ultimately, he was strengthened in his faith - think about the sacrifice of Isaac - in faith, Abe willing to sacrifice to son of promise. That's faith in God! Abe fully convinced that God would fulfill His plan.
- vs. 22-25 - Paul returns to his main idea - Abe's faith was credited to him for righteousness. And what was written about Abraham is for us - In Abraham's story we see how God has ALWAYS operated. He has always saved on the basis of faith. He has never saved on the basis of works. Abraham was saved because he had faith in the promise of God - a seed that would become a great nation from whom a Messiah would come. We are saved because we have faith in the Messiah that came from the seed of Abraham - the Messiah was who died for our sins and who was raised from the dead. vs. 25 - the One raised for our justification.
- Faith is trusting God's power to do the impossible - God has the power to forgive you of all your sins and give you new life. That seems impossible, but God has done the impossible by sending His Son in this world to live the life you could not live, die the death you deserve, and to rise from the dead to give you new life. God has done what seems impossible. By His power - He has saved a people who lived as His enemies, and made them sons and daughters. Talk about the power of God!
- If not a follower of Jesus, today, experience the saving power of faith. Place your faith in the ONE who can give you new life. Repent and give your life to Him.
- For those of us who have placed our faith in Jesus:
- **Name where you've stopped believing in the power of God.** And ask God to show you how He is powerfully at work in areas of your life where you think He's not at work. He might not be at work in the ways you expect, but I promise He's at work for your good and His glory.

- **Don't deny your reality, but trust God is over your reality.** Walking in faith is hard, especially when you're trying to live out your faith in difficult circumstances. Let's not pretend like faith makes all our problems go away, but faith does help us to navigate all of our problems with wisdom. Faith gives us wisdom to navigate difficult relationships, make wise choices, etc.
- **Move forward in obedience even when you don't see progress.** For Abe, a lot of years of trusting and no progress. Sometimes that's what faith looks like - a slow plodding when you don't see immediate results. Keep moving forward. Keep trusting. God is at work even when you don't see it. How is God calling you to move forward this week?