

Romans 4:18-25 – Faith!

- Opening - fairy seen in the water

Intro: Father Abraham

- **And in this text we will specifically see that all examples of faith can trace their lineage back to Abraham as Father – From those with childlike faith to men like Michael Sattler with great faith**

I read just this week of the Anabaptist theologian Sattler who during the reformation wrote the Schleithem Confession and was then arrested by the imperial government to be tried for execution – He was charged with: *acting against imperial mandate, initiating a corrupt version of the LS, teaching against infant baptism, and despising Mary and the saints to name a few of the charges* – **Ched Spellmen writing of Sattler writes:** *Sattler responded “fearlessly” to each of these charges by appealing to the logic of Scripture saying... prove to us with the Holy Scriptures, that we err and are in the wrong...but if no error is proven to us, I hope to God, that you will be converted, and receive instruction.” The Town clerk replied: “You desperate villain and archheretic, I tell you if there were no hangman here, I would hang you myself, and think that I had done God a service.” To which Sattler said, “God will judge rightly.”*

- **And what this chapter is teaching us is that Abraham is father of all us who are of the faith and if we are to be a part of the people of God it means a faith like Abraham’s – Here is the context if you missed last week – Abraham was counted righteous not because of faithfulness to the Law by because of His faith and now we will see so it is with his offspring**

So we must examine the nature of Abraham’s faith since it is this specific faith that will mark that of his children and so we will look at this in 2 parts: **Abraham’s Faith Exemplified (4:18-22) and Abraham’s Faith Applied (4:23-25)**

(READ 18-22) Abraham’s Faith Exemplified – We see in this text what I would call Tombstone language

- **If Abraham’s faith is saving faith we know what his faith looked like and first we see – Saving Faith believes God’s Word (READ V. 18)**
- **Abraham’s faith was focused on the Word of God spoken to him particularly in focus here is the promise from Genesis 15 that he would be the father of many nations – This is why his name was changed from Abram to Abraham because Abraham means Father of many nations – *And Abe has hope against hope* (and we will see why it seems hopeless in a minute) *that even though he does not currently have an heir he can take God at His Word!***
- **Faith is utter trust and confidence in God to keep His word – Aren’t you glad this morning that there are no take-backs with God or that God never makes you a promise with his fingers crossed behind his back?**

(READ v. 19-20) Saving faith perseveres and grows stronger – There is a play on words here – *Even though his body is weakening and is as good as dead his faith is not*

- **Saving faith perseveres and grows regardless of the circumstances – Faith trusts in the promises of God even when from a human perspective it looks as though not only are God’s promises improbable but impossible – *Abraham was convinced that the certainty of the divine promise outweighed every natural improbability***
- **Application: Shouldn’t we rejoice this morning that we serve a God who promises seemingly impossible things and then accomplishes them**

But Faith is not opposed to reason as though Abraham is denying reality (he considers these things) but in many ways it goes beyond feelings and appearances and perception – Faith does not dismiss the obstacles but it does not linger on them because saving faith is not dependent on our circumstances – *Things looked hopeless but in hope against hope Abraham set his confidence upon God that God would make for him a family out of nothing*

- Faith is not a blind leap as if by faith we check our brains at the door but it is a faith seeking understanding – We are not talking unreasonable faith that might say, *“well I can jump off a building and be OK if I have enough faith”* and this is not false prosperity faith that might say *this text is teaching “if you are struggling with infertility if you would just have enough faith God will give you what you want”* – THAT IS FALSE TEACHING THAT ACTUALLY DAMAGES FAITH!
- No, this is why knowing how to read the bible and reading in context is so important – The promise here is a specific one given to Abraham – But the Lord does give promises for those that might be hurting struggling with infertility that He is near the brokenhearted and that you can hold onto and it is not opposed to reason though it begins with faith!

Here is what I mean if God could: create the universe and uphold it, and God could give a barren woman a son named Isaac, and God could raise His Son from the dead – *He could if it were his will overcome our infertility or if it is not His will He could provide us peace in the storm!*

- This why saving faith looks away from self to God as it puts to death self-reliance and places reliance upon God (more on this in a minute) – Abraham’s faith is such an example because he could have no confidence in himself to bring about the promise – *So genuine faith trusts in the promises despite chaos around that might hinder the promise!*

In the midst of what seemed to be an impossibility Abraham did not weaken or waiver – How can Paul say this did he read Genesis (What about the whole Hagar situation)?– **Is Paul wrong? No!**

- Paul is not attempting to chronicle in detail all of Abraham’s life – Instead the Greek wording here indicates the basic pattern and direction of Abraham’s life was one that typified trust in God and not unbelief because he persisted in the faith –
- Paul is not intending to say Abraham never had doubts in his life but what he is saying is that with all the ups and downs of his life he persevered in the faith and that his faith was never extinguished – He hung on to the promises of God even in the valleys and as a result his faith ultimately increased as time went on and by this he brought glory to God – *As he looked at his valleys, failures, mistakes, and struggles he was reminded my only hope is to trust in God* (this should give us hope!)
- We should not think that saving faith is perfect and never has dips or doubts where we struggle with the things of God – But ultimately saving faith perseveres in setting hope on God and doesn’t waiver into unbelief – *This is good news that God does not focus ultimately on our dips and doubts because if it were up to us to earn our salvation none of us could but He ultimately focuses in on your faith*
- I like to use the Spiral Analogy in considering the life of faith (there will be highs and lows but ultimately the trend is up) – And as you persevere and grow stronger in the faith in the face of struggles and circumstances you bring glory to God because you give evidence that He is your ultimate treasure!

(READ v. 21) Saving faith focuses upon God – Abraham’s faith also brought glory to God because it was focused on God and His faithfulness to His promises – *Really this is the banner over all the aspects of his faith in that it is directed toward God and trusts God’s word, power, wisdom, and faithfulness*

Saving faith as I have mentioned is not self-oriented but God-oriented – And what words to describe it: fully convinced (is that true of you?) – *This brings glory to God because we honor Him with our total reliance upon Him for our lives and destiny*

Abraham is fully confident that God is able to do what He said – And this confidence of Abraham is not directed at self as though he has unusual abilities to accomplish this but in in God’s faithfulness to keep His word and in trust that He has the power to do so – And what we notice in Paul’s description of Abraham’s faith in a reversal of the description of the human race in Chapter:

- **(READ THIS)** *Whereas humanity knew God but did not honor him as God: Abraham believed in Him – Whereas they knew about the power of God but refused to acknowledge it: Abraham recognized His power and trusted it – Whereas they did not give glory to God: Abraham grew in faith and thus gave glory to God – Whereas they dishonored their bodies: Abraham trusted God with His body even though it was as good as dead – Whereas they worshipped created things rather than Creator God: Abraham’s hope and worship are set on God who can bring life out of nothing!*
- **Being of little faith in the bible is described in a scene where Jesus is on a boat and the winds and the waves pick up and the disciples are terrified and Jesus calls them “ye, of little faith” – In that moment even though the master of Creation was in the boat with them they took their eyes off of Him and put them on created things – *Our faith will glorify God if it is set on Him and not on self!***

Application: Abraham’s Faith, which glorified God, was God-Centered; Word-Centered, and perseveres and so it is with his children – So how do we grow strong in the faith, fully convinced – Some questions to consider:

- **Do you take Him at his Word even when it goes against feeling, popular opinion, and ridicule, seemingly even common sense? – You have to imagine at times Abraham was jeered at for believing this promise, maybe someone even said how’s an old codger going to be father of many nations but he would not falter – *or what about for us, do you believe his promise that He cares for the generous giver even when money is tight and it appears giving is risky?***
- **Do you study, pray, and meditate regularly on the Word in order to know His faithfulness and power more? Is your faith set on God or human possibility or logical probability?**
- **Is your “faith” (meaning doing churchly things) for your happiness or so you can have a better life or is it set on God and desirous of His glory? – *What we need to see is that faith in God will not give you what you want but what you need!***
- **Does your faith persevere in the midst of trials? *Do you let people know when you are struggling in the faith?* (IT’S OK NOT TO BE OK!)**

(READ V. 23-25) Abraham’s Faith Applied – Saving faith in the new covenant looks like Abrahams faith from the old covenant as it trusts in God, His Word, and His work in Christ – *This is why Paul has gone into such detail about Abraham’s faith because we can expect that his children would be counted righteous in a similar way*

- **Or to say it another way: Whereas Abraham’s faith was in the promise of a descendant our faith is in what his descendant achieved as he fulfilled all the promises given to Abraham – The chapter closes by applying the example of Abraham to the Roman hearers (and thus to us) and pointing out that Jesus is the fulfillment of the promises made in Genesis – *The story of Abraham is not just one of history but is relevant to us letting us know that by faith we can be a part of his family with all the blessings that entails!***
- **And just as Abraham was justified or counted righteous by faith and not by working – We are counted justified by faith and it is a faith Paul tells us here that finds its center in the work of Christ on the Cross and in the Tomb – *This faith is centered on the trust that God put forth His son***

to die in our place for our sins and that God raised Him up for our justification and through this work we take hold of a righteousness that is not our own by Faith!

Who delivered Jesus up for our sins (Judas, Sanhedrin, Pilate, Rome)? – Well yes – **But ultimately God did as these verses have echoes of Isaiah 53 (READ v. 5, 10, 11) – Jesus has been delivered up as the suffering servant who bore the sins of many by being pierced on the tree atoning for our sins and praise the Lord through this work He makes many to be accounted righteous!** (don't grow cold to this!)

- **But why is Resurrection here connected to our Justification where elsewhere it is always the Cross? – Well for one the Cross and Resurrection are two sides to one coin – But here Paul is saying that the Resurrection confirms that God is pleased with the sacrifice of Jesus and that our sins have truly been dealt with and the Resurrection is proof that God has accepted His work to rid us of our sin and give us His righteousness**
- **This is why Paul would tell the Corinthians if Christ has not been raised we are still dead in our trespasses – Because if all Jesus has done was die for our sins then death would still have its hold on us but the resurrection is a guarantee that God's wrath no longer abides on Jesus but His eternal pleasure – And thus for those united to Christ who have received His righteousness by faith God's wrath no longer abides on you but His eternal pleasure**
- **And if Christ who is righteous has been raised to eternal life then you who have His righteousness will be raised to eternal life – And best of all Jesus has now sat down indicating His work is over! Complete! Finished!**

The theme in chapter 4 is exemplary faith – so two questions to consider about faith:

- 1) **Why Faith? – Faith glorifies God, features grace, and excludes boasting – This is because faith alone recognizes God as the central actor and sovereign in salvation – Piper puts it this way: The reason God chose faith as the way that we get right with him - the way to be justified - is that he wanted to base the whole thing on his almighty, all-glorious grace, so that our boasting would be excluded and his glory would be exalted and our salvation would be certain.**
- 2) **What does faith accomplish? – True saving faith (even childlike faith) immediately justifies us and produces in us a persevering faith – Justification occurs in the first act of saving faith (GENESIS 15) because it secures for us positionally a verdict of not guilty before God and this verdict cannot be overturned – Which is why even though you will have times of doubt and dips you can be confident that He who began a good work in you will complete it and thus you can look at perseverance in the face of obstacles as evidence of genuine saving faith!**

This is good news you should have unshakable confidence that with true faith comes immediate counting of righteousness towards you and your incorporation into the covenant family of God – *Which means the weakest faith can hang on to the strongest promise or the Christian who is strongest in the faith and the Christian who is weakest in the faith both enter New Creation the same way – This is because your standing before God is based on what He is not what you are which is why He chose faith so that He gets the glory*

- **And this is important because counted to us does not mean that our faith is our righteousness but that our faith unites us to Christ who is our righteousness – Faith is what takes hold of righteousness – It is so important that we understand that the we are not saved by the strength of our faith but by the object of our faith**
- **No wonder this doctrine has made men weep who knew they could never be good enough or who felt enslaved by works based religion – The Great Reformer Luther said this doctrine of justification by faith changed everything and gave him peace after years of torment – And the English champion Bunyan speaking of when he finally understood this doctrine it was as if chains had fallen off of him**
- **Brothers and sisters you cannot do enough to be made right with God that sort of religion is slavery – You need a righteousness that is not your own and we have found it!**

Conclusion: In the first century there was a man in Judea, a son in the line of Abraham who never even one time waivered in his obedience or trust in God – And though he had never sin was delivered up to arrest, beating, mockery, and then placed on an instrument of torture outside that camp as hour after hour he whom the apostle John would call the faithful witness hung there – *And what no one walking by would have recognized was that this one who was completely righteous was taking on the sins of the world in His own body on the tree as there stood the true and better Isaac who was not just offered up on the mount but was crucified for the atonement of his people sins*

- And He bleed there on that Cross and die and be put in a hole in the middle east – But there were ancient promises that on the last day God would show who His people were by putting His Spirit on them and raising their dead bones from the grave – *On that Sunday morning that happened and one man walked out signaling to the world that the promised son of Eve, and the promised Son of Abraham, the True Israelite who was to come and reverse the curse by cutting off the Dragon's head and taking His final weapon of death from has come and He can do all He says He can do*
- Meaning He can atone for your sins and be raised for your justification and ascend to the right hand of the father showing His work is complete – ***AND NOW THERE IS A MAN, a son of Abraham sitting on the throne in heaven: Have you ever thought about that staggering reality (yes he is the Son of God) but our ELDER BROTHER sits on the throne in Heaven not afraid to approach that throne boldly? The promises made to Abraham have become a reality in Christ!***

Response to this text is simple - for both - set your hope upon this man, Jesus our Lord

- **Unbeliever:** We all have faith in something whether that be friends, education, family, plans, ideologies, or ever something spiritual as we look to something as an anchor in the world of uncertainly – **My plea is that you will make Christ that anchor by crying out to Him for mercy, repenting of your sins, and putting all your trust there!**
- **Believers:** Be built up in the faith because your faith rest in one who was faithful and obedient on our behalf – **And be strengthened if God can create the World and bring His Son back from the dead He can keep His promises to you!**
- And lets realize this story is our story – **We are now actors in the greatest drama ever as we are part of what one scholar calls the company of the gospel – We are a part of Abraham's family which will be a blessing to the nations so it means we share our story so that people can become part of this gospel company as well!**

I conclude returning to the end of Sattler's story of faith in this world: *"He was then driven to the place of execution where five more times the glowing iron tongs were applied to his body (ripping out his flesh). Eyewitnesses recount that during these procedures, Sattler continually prayed for those persecuting him and urged others to do the same. Just before he was plunged into the fire, Sattler echoed the testimony of martyrs throughout Christian history as he cried out, "Almighty eternal God, Thou who art the way and the truth, since I have not been taught otherwise by anyone, so by Thy help I will testify this day to the truth and seal it with my blood." After he was thrown into the fire with a small sack of gunpowder tied around his neck... When the ropes that bound Sattler's arms were burned up, he lifted them both with the first two fingers on each hand outstretched. This dramatic gesture was the symbol that he and his brothers had prearranged so that Sattler could signal to them that he was faithful even unto death. Eight days after Sattler's grisly execution, his wife Margaretha was put to death by drowning, experiencing her "third baptism" in the Neckar river...When she was offered her freedom by the wife of the imperial regent, Margaretha "persisted in saying that the crown she wanted was the one her Lord Jesus would give" ...Wilhelm Reublin recounts that she "accepted and suffered death" with "great joy and strong faith."*

- Indeed "Father Abraham has many sons and daughters... I am one of them and so are you, so lets just praise the Lord!"

