

Main Idea: There are three lessons about faith from Abraham's life revealed in Romans 4:18-25.

- I. Faith begins with a discovery (18-19).
 - A. The problems of life are big.
 - B. God is bigger.
- II. Faith involves a decision (20-21).

I choose to fix my attention on...

 - A. The Promise of God (not the problems of life)
 - B. The Glory of God (not the glory of self)
 - C. The Power of God (not the ingenuity of man)
- III. Faith makes a difference (22-25).
 - A. What? (22-24)
 1. It affected Abraham's standing with God.
 2. It affects our standing with God.
 - B. How? (25)
 1. It depends on Jesus' death.
 2. It depends on Jesus' resurrection.

Let's turn to Romans 4. This month's Scripture memory passage is Romans 4:20-21, a text that reminds us that we are called to be *people of faith*. I'd like to investigate that passage this evening and then work on memorizing our text with a song. This is our calling, brothers and sisters, to be people of faith, as we'll see. But first, a story...

It was a cold, winter day. A blanket of heavy snow covered the ground. It was a great day for me to be in our warm farmhouse with my family.

Looking out the window, something caught our attention. At first, I saw nothing unusual. The cow pasture surrounded by white board fence, the red barn, and the scenic rolling hills. In the distance there was the thirty acre bottomland, where months earlier tall corn had grown. Now the stalks were blanketed by the brilliant snow.

Way out in the open field, something was stranded. I could not make out what it was. It was bigger than a dog. It wasn't a cow. It was a light brown color. And it was obvious that something was wrong. The creature was stuck in the snow.

My brother, sister, and I raced to put on our snowsuits, boots, hats, and gloves. Then we set out on our mission. At first we ran, but the knee-deep snow soon forced us to slow our pace. After climbing the board fence, we shuffled through the snow for about 100 yards until we reached a barbed-wire fence. We carefully crossed this barrier, and searched for the animal. It was a deer!

The poor creature seemed to be floundering. We approached cautiously, whispering words of comfort to the frightened animal. I thought it strange that it did not run from us. I didn't have to wonder for long, for I soon saw the reason. There was blood in the snow. The lower half of one of the deer's back legs was missing! The wound was fresh. It was clear that the deer was both in pain, and frantic. By natural, God-given instinct, a deer is petrified of people. But this deer was helpless, and could not flee to safety.

^{**}Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church. It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

¹ This sermon has been adapted from a sermon preached earlier at WBC in October 1994 as a part of an expositional series through the book of Romans.

We rescued the deer that day. We named her Lucky, I guess because we figured she was lucky to be alive. We took her to the barn where she lived until winter was over, two months later. We gave her corn, hay, and love. Then we set her free.

When you stop to think about it, that's what God did for us, didn't He? When we were stranded in sin, He saw us. When we were lost and floundering without hope, He took action to rescue us. He sent His Son on a mission of mercy. Jesus Christ came to pick us up, and carry us to safety.

Salvation is wonderful! Romans is a book about God's salvation. It's a doctrinal book. If you are not a Christian, it tells you what CAN happen in your life. If you are a Christian, it tells you what DID happen in your life--so we can appreciate more fully what God did, and communicate more clearly what God did. Salvation is by grace alone, through faith alone, in Christ alone.

In Romans 4, we learn that we are saved by faith alone, just like Abraham. Abraham was a man who exhibited faith in his life. Abraham believed the promise of God. Abraham is a model of faith.

I want you to reflect on some important questions. Do you consider yourself to be a person of faith? What place does faith have in your life? Is your faith real in your life? How can our faith become stronger so that we truly are people of faith? Abraham can show us the way. There are three lessons about faith from Abraham's life revealed in Romans 4:18-25.

I. Faith begins with a discovery (18-19).

Rom 4 highlights the case study of Abraham. For Paul, Abraham is exhibit #1 of the premise he asserted in Rom 3. The premise is that a person is justified (made right with God) by faith apart from works (3:28). Abraham was not a perfect man, but he was a man of faith. How did he get to be a man of faith?

His faith began with an important discovery (which we, too, must make). Actually, it was a two-part discovery. The first thing he learned was this.

A. The problems of life are big.

Think about the problems in Abraham's life, as revealed in vv 18-19. "Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations..." God made a promise to Abraham, which we considered last week. God told Abraham, "I'm going to bless you, Abraham. I'm going to give you a great land, a great name, and a great son, through whom you will become a great nation." But Abraham had a problem, didn't he? His wife was barren. She was 90 years old. He was nearly 100. Humanly speaking, it was impossible to have a child.

Do you know what Abraham did? Here's the second part of his discovery. He said, "I don't live my life 'humanly speaking'. I live my life 'divinely speaking'. I live by faith." What did Abraham discover? True, the problems of life are big, but...

B. God is bigger.

Have you ever felt like the odds were against you in life? Abraham did. But he didn't live by his feelings. He lived by faith.

The text says that Abraham "against hope believed in hope" (18). He knew that God was bigger than his problems. He believed "against hope" (that is, when it didn't make sense to believe). He believed "in hope" (he knew God was in control).

Did Abraham have a "blind faith"? Absolutely not. Upon what did he base his decision to believe God, according to v 18? "According to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be." God said it. That settles it.

By the way, having faith is not the same thing as being naive. In v 19, the KJV says, "And being not weak in faith, he considered NOT his own body..." Actually, the second "not" shouldn't be in the text (at was apparently added by later copyists). The point is that Abraham DID "consider his own body now dead." He did face the facts, head-on--"I am too old. My wife is too old. My wife's womb is dead. Those are the facts."

Abraham was not gullible. He looked at his problem, then he looked at the promise of God, and made this discovery, "One promise of God outweighs one thousand obstacles. My problems may be big, but my God is bigger. I believe God."

Are you wrestling with problems in your life? Are they big problems? Remember this. We have a bigger God. That's the first lesson Abraham learned. Faith starts with a discovery.

II. Faith involves a decision (20-21).

Was Abraham a superman? Was it easier for him to live a life of faith than it is for us? No. In fact, he blew it his share of times earlier in life. The Egypt episode. The Hagar incident. Abraham was a real person just like us. But he learned to live by faith, and that faith involves a decision. So must we.

What kind of decision? If I am going to become a person of faith, like Abraham, I must choose to fix my attention on three things.

A. The Promise of God (not the problems of life)

V 20 "He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strong in faith." The word "stagger" means "to be divided, to waver," and is sometimes translated "doubt" (James 1:5). When we doubt, we vacillate back and forth. We stagger. We waver.

A word of caution. Doubts are not necessarily bad. Think about this observation by Martin Lloyd-Jones (217), "There are some people who think that, because they are assailed by doubts, they have no faith. That is a complete fallacy. To be entirely free from doubts does not always signify faith, it may mean presumption or the kind of psychological state that the cults often produce. There is a sense in which we can define faith as that which enables a man to overcome his doubts and to answer them. Some of the greatest saints that the Church has ever known have testified to the fact that they have been attacked and assailed by doubts to the end of their lives. But they were not weakened, they did not give in; they mastered their doubts, they conquered them, they overcame them."

How? What enabled Abraham to overcome his doubts? He made a decision to fix his eyes on the promise of God, instead of the problems of life.

Application: How can the promise of Ph 4:6-7 help me overcome anxiety?

Faith involves a decision. In the decision of faith, I must choose to fix my attention on the promise of God, not the problems of life. Secondly...

B. The Glory of God (not the glory of self)

V 20 "But was strong in faith, giving glory to God." A person of faith places a premium on the promise of God, and the glory of God. What does that mean? In part, it means that AHEAD OF TIME I must make a decision. Abraham did.

In the text, the participle "giving glory" modifies the verb "was strong." A key to Abraham's strength was that by faith, while he was still childless, he resolved that when God acted, he would give God the glory. I like the paraphrase of the LB, "But Abraham never doubted. He believed God, for his faith and trust grew ever stronger, and he praise God for this blessing EVEN BEFORE IT HAPPENED."

What does that mean for us? If we are to be people of faith, we must decide that we are going to live for the glory of God, not the glory of self. It's amazing to me how quickly people turn to God when they are in trouble, yet how quickly they forget God when the troubles are gone. A person of faith is not that way. A person of faith lives by I Cor 10:31, "Whether therefore you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God." As Calvin said (Cranfield, 95), "No greater honour can be given to God than by sealing His truth by our faith."

Who do you give the credit for your successes in life? Who do you turn to in the trials of life? A person of faith chooses to fix his attention on the glory of God, not the glory of self.

In the decision of faith, there's a third choice. When I am living by faith, I will focus on the promise of God, the glory of God, and...

C. The Power of God (not the ingenuity of man)

V 21 "Being fully persuaded." Abraham was fully persuaded. Of what? "That what He (God) had promised, He was able to perform." What truth gave Abraham the confidence that he could depend upon God's promise? God is able.

Let those words sink in. God is able. What He promises, He is able to do. The word translated "able" is the Greek word "dunatos" which elsewhere is appears as the word "power." Here's the point. God has the power to do what He promises.

A person of faith, like Abraham, fixes his attention on the power of God, not on the ingenuity of man. Abraham learned that the hard way. There were times when Abraham tried to "finagle" his way out of problems, and when he did, he got himself into deeper problems. But the change came when he learned to fix his focus on the power of God. Abraham's faith was not a passive "Let's see what happens" thing. He didn't have fatalism. He had faith. So must we. The key to confidence is power. The key to power is faith. The key to faith is a right view of God.

Here's the second lesson. Faith involves a decision. If we are to be people of faith, we must choose to fix our attention on the promise of God, the glory of God, and the power of God. Are you living by faith?

Objection: "Does it really make a difference?" Yes! The third lesson...

III. Faith makes a difference (22-25).

Which leads to two important questions. The obvious first question is "What".

A. What is the difference faith makes? (22-24)

V 22 "And therefore." "Therefore" indicates a result or implication. Faith does make a difference. Notice two implications highlighted by the apostle.

1. *It affected Abraham's standing with God.*

V 22 "It was imputed to him for righteousness." That's the same time Paul quoted this verse in Rom 4 (see v 3). He's quoting Gen 15:6. What was the result of Abraham's faith? It affected his standing with God. When Abraham took God at His word, when Abraham heard the promise of God, and said, "So be it! I believe it!", God credited it to him for righteousness. God declared Abraham to be righteous. God announced that Abraham was acceptable in His sight. All because of his faith.

The same goes for us, too. Notice a second implication.

2. It affects our standing with God.

V 23 "Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him, but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed..." God didn't preserve the account of Abraham to be a bedtime story to put us to sleep. It's a paradigm to jolt us into action! God hasn't changed. He works the same with us today as He did with Abraham. How are we made right with God? By faith alone in Jesus Christ.

Do you know what makes Abraham's example so amazing? Wiersbe writes (526), "He did not have a Bible to read; he had only the simple promise of God. He was almost alone as a believer, surrounded by heathen unbelievers. He could not look back at a long record of faith; in fact, he was helping to write that record. Yet Abraham believed God. People today have a complete Bible to read and study. They have a church fellowship, and can look back at centuries of faith as recorded in church history and the Bible. Yet many refuse to believe!"

The point is this. Faith makes a difference. It did for Abraham, and it must for us. Faith in Christ makes us acceptable before God. Which leads us to a second question.

B. How does faith make a difference? (25)

Listen carefully. Faith doesn't save us. The demons have a faith of sorts, but aren't saved. Other religious groups may promote faith. But faith doesn't save us. What does? Christ saves us. Saving faith, that is, faith that makes a difference for eternity, depends on Christ. Don't miss this. Saving faith depends on two activities which Jesus Christ accomplished.

1. It depends on Jesus' death.

V 25 "Who was delivered for our offenses." The word "offenses" means "false steps, trespasses." Man's problem is that he went his "own way" (Isa 53:6). We were guilty of trespassing on God's earth. What was the penalty for our crime? Death. Here's the amazing truth. Christ was delivered over to death for our sins. He went to the cross to take care of our sins. Saving faith depends on Jesus' death.

Do you believe that? Yet to say that Christ died for our sins is only half the gospel. The Cross would mean nothing without the empty tomb, would it? Lots of great men have lived and died. What made Jesus different? He conquered death. And faith that saves is a faith that depends on Jesus' second activity.

2. It depends on Jesus' resurrection.

V 25 "Who was raised again for our justification." Here's the good news. In His crucifixion, Jesus took care of our sin. In His resurrection, Jesus took care of our need for righteousness. F. F. Bruce cautions (119), "We must not interpret the two clauses so woodenly as to suggest that His resurrection had nothing to do with the atonement for their sins and His death nothing to do with their justification."

The point is this. The payment for every sin I have or ever will commit was made at the cross. Every bit of righteousness that I need to stand before a holy God was secured for me in Jesus' resurrection. What do I need to do, then? I need to learn to live in light of what Jesus did! Saving faith depends upon Jesus' death and resurrection.

Challenge:

In light of this truth, I ask you to consider an important question. Have you taken God at His Word? Have you? Have you ever taken God at His Word for salvation? His promise is true, "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved (Rom 10:13)." Have you?

Have you taken God at His Word for daily living? Another promise says, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart...and He will direct your paths (Prov 3:5-6)." Are you trusting Him right now for your daily affairs? If you have not been, make a commitment today to do so.

Remember, when we were hopelessly stranded in sin, God sent His own Son on a mission of mercy to rescue us. Now He invites us to trust Him, to live by faith in Him alone. What God promises, He performs (Wiersbe, 525).

I pray that God will etch these three lessons deep into our hearts. True faith begins with a discovery. True faith involves a decision. And true faith makes a difference. May God help us to be people of faith.

Scripture Memory Song: Romans 4:20-21