

Abraham's Faith, Our Faith

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[0:00] You may be seated. Good morning. My name is Matthew Capone and I'm one of the pastors here at Cheyenne Mountain Presbyterian Church. It's my joy to bring God's word to you today. This morning we're continuing our series in the book of Romans and you'll remember that the book of Romans is a letter.

It's a letter written by the Apostle Paul in the 50s AD and it's called Romans for a very simple reason, which is that it's written to the churches in the city of Rome.

And it is about the gospel. It's about the good news of Jesus' death and resurrection. Now if you've been with us for a while, you know that maybe a couple times every year I pull out the quote by Samuel Johnson, an English writer from the 18th century who said people need to be reminded more often than they need to be instructed.

People need to be reminded more often than they need to be instructed. I looked back in my notes and the last time I said that was February 2nd, so we're doing great. I haven't run into my limit yet. And I say that because this Sunday is another reminder Sunday.

We are finishing this long stretch we have had with the figure of Abraham. And we're going to see Abraham one last time. We will not see him again until Romans chapter 9.

[1:24] So you'll remember back in the month of May, we started in Genesis chapter 11. We went through Genesis chapter 25. Then we started in Romans 4. And now Paul is going to remind us of everything we've seen.

So the question is this. What is the most important lesson from Abraham? What is the most important lesson from Abraham?

What is it above everything else that we are meant to learn from him? So with that question, I invite you to turn with me now to Romans chapter 4, starting at verse 16.

You'll find it on page 7 of your worship guide. Remember as we turn here that this is God's word. Jeremiah chapter 23 tells us that God's word is a hammer that breaks a rock into pieces, which means there is nothing that can stand against the power of God's word.

So that's why we read now Romans chapter 4, starting at verse 16. That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring.

[2:41] Not only to the adherent of the law, but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all. As it is written, I have made you the father of many nations.

In the presence of God, in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead, and calls into existence the things that do not exist. Verse 18.

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.

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.

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

[3 : 44] That is why his faith was counted to him as righteousness. But the words it was counted to him were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also.

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

I invite you to pray with me as we come to this portion of God's word. Our Father in heaven, we do praise you and thank you again for drawing us together as your people.

We thank you again for coming and speaking to us in your word. We ask that you would do that again this morning. That you'd honor your promise in Isaiah chapter 55, that your word does not return to you empty, but accomplishes all your purposes for it.

And so we ask that that would be true this morning, that you would use your word to accomplish great things in our hearts and our minds and our lives. Most importantly, we ask that you would show us Jesus, that we would see him, that he would be more beautiful than we've realized ever before.

[4 : 51] And we ask these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen. Do you guys need me to do something different before I... No? Okay. Let's keep rolling.

One of the most boring events in politics every four years is the vice presidential debates, and they are boring primarily because vice presidents do not matter.

But the 1988 vice presidential debate made history for a grand total of four sentences that became famous sentences that are still remembered today.

Senator Dan Quayle, who was the Republican, was coming up against Senator Lloyd Benson, the Democrat. And Dan Quayle, Bush 1's running mate, had come under a lot of criticism.

He was widely viewed as insufficient and unqualified. So the press had a heyday going after him. And so Quayle's strategy was to compare himself to John F. Kennedy, the 35th president, because there's the logic.

[5 : 57] JFK did not have much experience. He was still a great president. I don't have much experience. I will be a great vice president. And so he would repeat this on the campaign trail.

His opponent, Senator Lloyd Benson, then began to practice in his debate prep a destructive killer line. He was waiting for Dan Quayle to bring this up in the vice presidential debates.

Dan Quayle did not disappoint. And so when, once again, he compared himself to JFK, Lloyd Benson said this, Senator, I served with Jack Kennedy.

I knew Jack Kennedy. Jack Kennedy was a friend of mine. Senator, you're no Jack Kennedy.

And the point was this. Do not compare yourself to the greats. Yeah, that's fine that Jack Kennedy didn't have a little bit of experience, but he was a great man, right?

[7 : 00] He's the exception that proves the rule. You, Dan Quayle, are in fact not. And still today, this phrase is used.

If you want to cut someone down to size, all you have to say is, you, sir, are no Jack Kennedy. Paul, the entire chapter, chapter four of Romans, has been focused on Abraham because Abraham is one of the greats.

Right, remember, a couple weeks ago, he pulled out Abraham as an example, and then he pulled out David to prove his point. Hey, if this is true of the greatest figures of Israel's history, it can be true of you as well.

In fact, that's Paul's point here as he comes to the very end of chapter four. He's saying actually the opposite of Senator Benson. He doesn't say, Christian, you are no Abraham.

No, he actually says the opposite. That's his point here. Christian, you can be like Abraham. Christian, Abraham was one of the greats.

[8:14] You can be too. That's why our sermon title, you'll see this on page seven, is this, Abraham's faith, our faith. You, Christian, can be like Abraham no matter how great he was.

And that's where we jump into this passage. He gives us the first reason in verse 16. You can be like Abraham because Abraham was in his salvation, in his life, based on faith rather than works.

That's why we see verse 16. It depends on faith in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring, not only to the adherent of the law, but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham.

Paul here is saying, look, you can be a child of Abraham whether you're a Jew or a Gentile. If you believe in God, you are Abraham's child.

That's why he says there, who is the father of us all. In other words, Paul's saying, look, because Abraham's life was resting on faith and not on works, you, if you rest on faith and not on works, are his child.

[9:33] In fact, that's the only way. That's the only way that the blessings of Abraham can be guaranteed to his offspring. If it were based on works, then we'd have to see every generation, will this generation be good enough will this generation measure up?

Will they be able to do the great things that Abraham did? That's not the question, though. The question is not whether they can do the great things Abraham did. The question is whether we believe in the great God that Abraham believed in.

And so then, after verse 16, he jumps into it. What does it look like for us to be like Abraham? What does it look like for us to have that Abraham sort of faith? Verse 17, he tells us about Abraham.

Abraham was the one who believed in God. It doesn't just tell us that he believed in God, though he tells us the type of God that Abraham believed in.

In the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

[10:48] That's one of the great themes of Scripture, by the way, that God creates something out of nothing by the power of his word. God's word is so powerful that, as I mentioned in my prayer in Isaiah 55, he makes this promise, my word will accomplish whatever I want it to accomplish.

God speaks and it is done. And so how is it that we're supposed to be like Abraham? Well, the first answer is this.

We are like Abraham when we believe in Abraham's God. Believe in the God who is powerful. Being like Abraham is not like trying to be like JFK.

Being like Abraham is not trying to be great. Being like Abraham is believing in the God who is great. Believing in the God gives life to the dead and calls to existence the things that do not exist.

Abraham believed in the all-powerful God. Christian, you believe in the all-powerful God as well.

[12:25] Paul then tells us what exactly that belief looks like. Okay, we see that Abraham believed in this powerful God. What does it look like to have faith in that powerful God? He goes on from telling us about the type of God that Abraham believes in to the type of faith that Abraham had.

That takes us to verse 18. Abraham believed in the impossible. That's what had hope against hope means.

Now that's a confusing phrase. In English we might say this. Abraham had hope against all odds. Abraham believed God despite the evidence.

And what was it that he believed God to do? Verse 18 also tells us that. Abraham believed against all odds that he would be the father of many nations.

It's a simple logic here that Paul's following. So verse 18, he believes the impossible. The impossible is that he'd be the father of many nations. Verse 19 tells us why exactly that's impossible.

[13:30] It's impossible because Abraham is impotent and Sarah is infertile. Abraham's belief was against all odds because humanly it was impossible.

So again, we're talking about the type of faith Abraham had. It takes us to verse 20 which tells us despite these things being impossible, impossible, Abraham's faith is growing in hope.

And then finally, verse 21. What is it that Abraham believed? Remember I said this was a review Sunday. Abraham believed that God would do what God said he would do.

The faith of Abraham is believing in the almighty and all-powerful God. The faith of Abraham is believing that that God will do exactly what he said he would do even when and especially it is impossible.

Abraham's faith, our faith. And then verse 22. What happens? That faith was counted to Abraham as righteousness.

[14:57] Abraham was made right with God not by works but by faith. There you have it. Now if you're a cynic, you might be thinking, man, we just spent four plus months in the story of Abraham in Genesis.

And now we're spending a month in Romans chapter 4 and at the very end, Paul has nothing new to say. He's telling us the same thing that we have reviewed again and again and again.

He's telling us that God's a promise keeping God. He's telling us the same thing that we should believe those promises. He's telling us that justification is by grace through faith alone.

And so is it not that as we end the story of Abraham, we end not with a triumph but with a whimper? Is it not that we're ending merely with a review?

If you're a cynic and you think you've heard this all before, you are in one sense correct. Right? We already know this. If you've been with us, you know that God made great promises to Abraham.

[16:13] If you've been with us, you know that God honored and kept those promises against all odds. You know that God did what he said he would do. We have talked about this over and over.

But, in another sense, you are dead wrong. Remember I asked you, I told you the question was this.

What is the most important lesson from Abraham? And what's new about this passage is this. As we come to the very end, Paul tells us why it matters more than anything else.

Paul tells us the main point of the Abraham story. And he does it in verses 23 and 24. Paul finally points back to us.

Points the finger straight at the reader. Notice we shift here finally to the first person plural. The words it was counted to him were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also.

[17:39] It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord. And so the point is this.

Not just Abraham. You, sir, you, ma'am, can be like Abraham.

That's the point. That's what we've been driving to now for about five months. For Paul to say this. All the stories of Abraham, everything we've seen of his great trust and confidence in God, the ways that he put it all on the line, the ways he risked it, all of that's been driving to this question.

What about you? Do you believe that God raised Jesus Christ from the dead?

Do you? I'm so serious. Do you believe that God raised Jesus Christ from the dead? That is what the point of the story of Abraham is that we've been driving at for five months now.

[19:12] There are so many reasons that people come to church. People come to church because it's a great place to meet other people. People come to church because they're lifted up by the message and the music. They want principles and ways to live and they want to learn about the Christian worldview and what it is that we do as we move forward together in God's mission.

But none of that matters unless we can answer that question. Did Jesus rise from the dead? Do you know why we worship on Sunday and not Monday or Tuesday?

We worship on Sunday because Jesus rose from the dead on the first day of the week. And so we celebrate Jesus' resurrection every week on the first day.

In other words, happy Easter. Every Sunday is Easter Sunday. Christian, if you believe that God raised Jesus Christ from the dead and you stake your life on it, you live your life as if the resurrection is true because it is.

and you take all the aspects of your life and orient them around that. You stake your life, you set as your north star, whether it is in your finances, your friendship, your family, your work, your play, your vocation, that Jesus died and was risen from the dead.

[20:45] If you do that, then you are like Abraham. Abraham. The words it was counted to him were not written for his sake alone but for ours also.

Paul is turning the mirror on the reader for the first time. Abraham had great faith. That's wonderful. What about you?

Will you also believe the impossible? Will you also believe that God will do what no human can do?

Do you believe God has done what no human can do? Has Jesus Christ been raised from the dead or has he not?

Do you believe in verse 17? Do you believe in the God who gives life to the dead and calls into existence things that do not exist?

[22:03] Do you believe that? Do you believe that as you navigate the mess of family and relationships and work and community and government and nations?

Do you believe that as you come up against disease? Do you believe that what you do in this life is greater than the sum of its parts and it's greater than the sum of its parts because what God tells us through the apostle Paul in Ephesians chapter 1 is true that the very same power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead is at work in you?

Do you? Do you believe it? If you do you are like Abraham.

Do you believe that God keeps his promises? Do you believe that no matter what happens in history in this world in time and space in nations in geopolitics in families in generations that no matter what the end of history is a great wedding feast between God and his people?

Do you believe that no matter what happens that will happen? If you do you are like Abraham.

[23:39] You like Abraham hope against hope. You like Abraham hope against all odds. You like Abraham believe in something that is not humanly possible.

You like Abraham believe what's true. You like Abraham will see the reward.

Do you believe that God raised Jesus Christ from the dead? Do you hope against hope?

Do you believe that all the promises of God are yes and amen in Christ? Is that your north star?

Paul says don't just talk about Abraham. Don't just remember the stories about Abraham. Don't just rehearse how great Abraham was be like Abraham.

[24:57] And be like Abraham in this sense that Abraham believed in a great God. Abraham believed in the impossible.

Abraham believed in the God who gives life to the dead and calls into existence things that do not exist. that's the point.

That's the point of Abraham's life. The final analysis we're reminded of what Paul later says in Romans chapter 10.

If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead you will be saved.

Do you believe that God raised Jesus Christ from the dead? Paul makes one more point.

[26:03] Not just is it that we are meant to be like Abraham that these things were not written for his sake alone but for ours also. it is also easier for us to be like Abraham than it was for Abraham to be like Abraham.

I'll say that again. It is easier for us to be like Abraham than it was for Abraham to be like Abraham and it's easier for us for this one reason.

Abraham looked forward. Christian you look backward. Abraham's hope and belief was in something that had not yet happened.

Your hope and belief is in something that has. The death and the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That's what Paul says here in this last verse.

Who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification. given up for our trespasses he's just saying what we've talked about many times Jesus paid the penalty that we deserve.

[27:18] Jesus took God's punishment so that we would not. But then he doesn't just talk about that he talks about Jesus resurrection raised for our justification.

Wait I thought Jesus death was for our sins. Why is it the resurrection that's given with our justification? Jesus resurrection proves once and for all that he lived the perfect life that we should have lived.

If Jesus did not rise from the dead if he was only handed over for our trespasses then his death was not for our sins.

If Jesus did not rise from the dead then Jesus death was for Jesus. The resurrection proves once and for all Jesus died for our sins was raised for our justification.

It is the confirmation that everything God promised to Abraham was true. The resurrection is the confirmation that Jesus did in fact die for our sins and live for our righteousness.

[28:41] What is the most important part of the Abraham story? What should we learn take away more than anything else?

It's this. Abraham believed the impossible would happen in the future. we know the impossible has already happened in the past.

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

that is why his faith was counted to him as righteousness. Has Jesus risen from the dead? Yes, yes, he has. Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we do praise you and thank you again for your word.

[29:52] We thank you for the example of Abraham, not that he was great, but he believed in a great God. We ask that you would make that true of us, that we would see clearly that you are the God who brings life from the dead and calls into existence things that do not exist. We ask all of these things in the mighty name of Jesus Christ. Amen.