

Romans 4:18-21
By Faith Abraham Did Not Consider His Circumstances

The book of Romans chapter 4 verses 18 through 25. Picking up where we left off last week at verse 18. Speaking of Abraham, **Who beyond hope.** Not *against* hope, but *beyond* hope, that is, hope that is past.

- 18) Beyond hope he believed upon hope, for him to become father of many nations, according to that which was said, "In this way shall your seed be."**
- 19) And being about a hundred years *old*, not having become weak in the faith, he did not consider his own body already having died, and the death of the womb of Sarah:**
- 20) and he did not doubt by unbelief toward the promise of God; but was empowered by faith, having given glory to God:**
- 21) and having been fully persuaded that, what He has promised, He is able to do.**
- 22) Therefore it was also credited to him for righteousness.**
- 23) But it was not written on account of him only, that it was credited to him;**
- 24) but also on account of us, to whom it is about to be credited, to the ones believing upon the One having raised Jesus our Lord from out of *the* dead,**
- 25) who was delivered over on account of our trespasses, and was raised on account of our justification.**

The difference between the book of Romans and Galatians is that Romans is presenting the doctrine of justification in doctrine form, systematically. In Galatians Paul is ministering the same truths only in light of false teaching and its application. So in Romans it is a little more in depth laid out for us. It is meant to be a systematic theology of the Christian faith. We have already studied the doctrine of condemnation in chapter 1 verse 18 through chapter 3 verse 20. We are now in the doctrine of justification, chapter 3 verse 21 through chapter 5 verse 21.

We are in Romans chapter four, which is entitled The Principles of Justification. First of all verses 1 through 8, the proof of justification by faith. The contrast of faith and works. The highlight:

Verse 3, that Abraham believed God and so it was imputed to him, or put to his account, for righteousness, just by believing what God said.

Verses 4 and 5, works and debt. If Abraham had earned his way, God would be indebted to him but it is not by debt, it is justification by faith alone.

Verses 6 through 8, the example of David, who lived under the law, committed two major sins in which there was no sacrifice for under the law, there was only death. He had Bathsheba's husband murdered. He committed adultery with Bathsheba. But we know in Psalms - especially

Psalm 51 - that he fell before the Lord and prayed for the Lord's mercy upon him. And God granted, out of His grace, forgiveness. Not through the law, or on account of the law, but just out of grace by faith David was allowed to continue to serve as king and was not killed.

So Romans chapter 4 verses 1 to 8 is about works and faith.

Romans chapter 4 verses 9 through 17, the problem of justification by faith. Because the Jews could not accept the fact that circumcision and/or keeping the law had nothing to do with salvation. They just could not fathom that. They went around and told other believers that you can believe in Jesus as Messiah but you had to keep the law. They just could not let go of the religiousness. The problem of justification by faith, the contrast of grace and law.

Part I - Romans 4:9-12, The Contrast Between Grace and Law

We saw the condition of Abraham verses 9 and 10. That he was a Gentile. He was uncircumcised. That it was 430 years before the law was given that God made the promise.

The confirmation to Abraham that circumcision was a sign that God has sealed His covenant with Abraham. Verses 11 to 12, the contemplated result of Abraham, that he would be their father. The father of all of those who would believe, both of the circumcision and uncircumcision.

Part II - Romans 4:13-17, The Condemnation of the Law

And then verse 13, second part to this, Romans chapter 4 verses 13 to 17, the condemnation of the law. The canceling of the promise in verses 13 and 14 because if salvation is by works then faith and promise is canceled. There is no more faith, it has to be by works.

Romans chapter 4 verse 15, the character of the law. That it was given to convict us of our sins.

Verse 16, the character of the promise was that it would be given to us from out of faith.

And then last week, we were in verse 17, the Creator of the promise. Abraham believed in the one who makes alive the dead and the one who called everything into existence.

And just as a note before we move on today, it is interesting that Abraham's view of God is that He can raise the dead; and He can call, and has called all of creation into existence. What is the consideration about God not being able to keep His promises? So he saw Him as the Creator of the promise - that whatever He says, He is able to do.

Verses 18 through 21 is our second section, the power of justification by faith. Contrasting life and death. Verse 18. And there are four characteristics we want to share with you about the power of justification by faith.

1) The Comparison of Hope and Faith

It says in verse 18 that he believed God beyond hope and yet upon hope. In the physical realm it was beyond hope that God's promise could be fulfilled. He was beyond the years of bearing children. Sarah was beyond the years of bearing children. And so it is beyond help from the human realm; yet it is based on hope in the spirit realm.

The word *hope* in Greek it does not express a wish, it actually expresses an expectancy. *Hope* in the Bible is: I expect God to keep His word. I do not just hope He keeps His word as if He might not, but I am expecting God to keep His word. So when Abraham was beyond hope - beyond placing his hope in anything in the human realm - Abraham placed his hope upon what God said.

Look at his purpose: **He believed upon hope, for him to become the father of many nations.** Notice, *many nations*. Not just the Jewish people or the Jewish nation. In Genesis chapter 12 verse 3 God told Abraham that in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed. Not just Jews, everybody, both Jew and Gentile.

Secondly, the premise: **According to that which was said, "In this way shall your seed be."** Genesis chapter 15 verses 5 and 6. This was said right after God told Abraham to go outside and count the stars. Look at the stars. Look at the sand of the sea. In this way your seed will be. There will be so many. And this is at a time when Abraham has no children. Sarah obviously not being able to bear children because she has not borne yet, and she is now reaching the age where she cannot give birth. So it is beyond hope. But yet he believed upon hope, and because of that he became the father of many nations.

2) The Consideration of Circumstances and Faith

Verse 19, secondly, the consideration of circumstances and faith. We saw the comparison of hope and faith, this is now the consideration of circumstances and faith. When Abraham believed God he was conscious of his physical circumstances, he knew about them. And three of those circumstances are listed for us in verse 19. The word *consideration* means *to perceive in depth*. He did not try to block out his circumstances, he took everything into consideration.

1. The performance of his physical body.

It says, **He consider his own body already having died.** That is how it literally reads. It was dead of its empowerment to produce. He was still alive and breathing but he knew that his ability to produce and bear children was now over.

2. His position in life.

He being about one hundred years old. Yeah, I think if I was a hundred I would probably take that into consideration too.

3. The physical condition of Sarah.

Two things about himself: his own physical body and his age. And then, thirdly, **the deadness (or death) of the woman Sarah.** He is now about one hundred, that means she is ninety. And so in Genesis chapter 17 verse 21 it tells us God says, **At this time next year Sarah will bear a child.** And in Genesis chapter 18 verses 11 to 14 it says that when Sarah heard the news she laughed. And God said, "Why are you laughing?" She said, "I did not laugh. Mm-mm. Not me." And so the son's name would be Isaac, (יִצְחָק *yitschāq*) in Hebrew means *laughter*. So that every time they saw him, or called his name, or thought about him, they would be reminded, "You laughed, did you not? You laughed."

So those three things, those were his circumstances. And the Bible says that he considered these three factors when he trusted the Lord.

Circumstances will never produce faith. You can never evaluate circumstances in order to figure out God or even to produce trust in Him. Faith and circumstances are opposite. Circumstances are in the physical realm, which brings us to our third point in verse 20.

3) The Confidence of Faith Over Unbelief

And unto the promise of God he was not wavering (or doubting) with unbelief, but was empowered by faith. Very interesting statement. The confidence of faith over unbelief. If anybody had the right and the opportunity to waver and to doubt, it would be Abraham taking all these things into consideration. But he was not wavering, he was not vacillating between faith and his circumstances. He saw his circumstances and said, "Well, that is the way it is over there in the physical but God said this, so I believe God." Never mixing the two.

Interesting, because the word that we translated *wavering* or *in doubt* there in verse 20, it is the same word used by James in James chapter 1, **The one who wavers and the one who doubts, let him not think that he will receive anything from the Lord.** One foot in, one foot out. Worry on the one hand because of circumstances, does not look like it is going to work out the way I would like it to. Yet on the other hand I am trusting the Lord. James says, **Do not expect to receive anything from God if there is doubt and wavering.** No vacillation. No wavering. No doubt by unbelief.

4) The Certainty of Faith and Promise

But fourthly, the certainty of faith and promise. That **he was empowered by faith.** One of the many times in the Scriptures where it tells us that faith is produced by God and is given by God. This is what is called the aorist passive. It is a passive voice, which means Abraham had

nothing to do with being empowered by faith. It was given to him by God. He was empowered by faith to believe God. You and I have no ability to believe the Lord without His Spirit. None. We have a human faith and a religious faith but we do not have a spiritual faith.

Galatians chapter 5 verse 22 says that kind of faith comes by the Spirit of God, produced by the Spirit of God.

I Corinthians chapter 12 verse 9 says that faith is given by the Holy Spirit.

Hebrews chapter 12 verse 2 says that Jesus Christ is the author and giver of faith.

The kind of faith that Abraham had empowered him of the certainty of what God said and what He promised over and against the circumstances. Now this certainty of his faith and of the promises were exhibited in two things:

1. **having given glory to God.** The power produced in him giving glory to God. Giving praise to God is in indicator, is a fruit that a person is trusting the Lord; not just with statements and phrases and with words, but from their heart.
2. **having been completely persuaded that He is able, the One who made the promises, to also perform them.** Completely convinced that God has the ability to do what He says is going to do.

And do you realize that is always our consideration? Now, I know I should trust the Lord but the reason why I waver is because, in reality, at this point in my life I do not know that the Lord has the ability to keep His word. That is what it boils down to. I believe it and I know it in my head, but when it comes to life that is the challenge. The Christian life is not just built on doctrines, it is built on trusting the Lord in life. He not only believed in God's promise but in God's power to produce it. He was empowered by the power of God for faith to believe that God had the power to do it. Whatever He says He is going to do.

See, but there is one element missing, which is where we get thrown off, I guess you might say. It is the time element, God has promised it but He did not say *when*. So instead of waiting, we have to think up doctrinal approaches to make it happen now. Always got to be now rather than waiting on Him and trusting Him. Well, You said it, You have a timetable. It might not even be in my lifetime! But if God said it, the question for me is, does He have the ability to do it? And is He in charge? "But Lord, I do not see You doing anything." He has a time fixed for everything. See, that is what faith is.

The Bible reveals that God is God and whatever He says are the promises of God. But in the reality - what is more real to me - the circumstances of everyday life? Or the spiritual reality that God has the power and ability to keep His promises? By the help of God's Spirit, we handle these physical things in life. They play on, and they influence us emotionally, and psychologically, and physically, so therefore they are more real to us. At least they feel more real than faith does because faith is taking God at His word. He says it, so that is the way it is.

But there comes a time when God's Spirit makes even the reality of what we experience in the physical, the mental, the emotional, and the physical, to be plastic. That is the flesh. These things out here, they are all temporary. We are just using them as we go through, as we pass through life. The reality is the person of God himself. And the fact that the God who created the universe has come into my spirit in His fullness. I mean my physical body ought to explode. The creator of the universe is now entering. Kaboom! How can God in His fullness live inside of a physical body in my spirit and it be all of Him?

But we spend a lifetime learning that the God who created all things - and the book of Hebrews says the God who holds all things together by His word - is the same God that lives in me carrying out His will after He created life in me too. But you see, between the Creator who lives in me and His creation that shows His power and His wonder, between these two elements is my physical body that influences my mind with all kinds of doubts and frustrations and anger. What is God doing? When in reality, when we allow God to manifest Himself in the circumstances we are giving glory to God. The last thing we should want is people see us being upset with God when He wants to manifest Himself through us. And that is what giving glory is. *Glory* means *substance*. Letting God manifest Himself in the circumstances.

So the power of justification by faith comes when God empowers us with faith. Not only is it justification by faith alone but He gives us the faith and it is His power. It is the power of God in contrast with human effort. Human effort cannot produce that kind of faith and that kind of power. You and I must realize that even though the Scriptures tell us of the evil and wickedness of the flesh, everything that we have in Christ including Christ has been given to us by Christ, even the ability to believe. We should guard ourselves so that we do not get caught in the trap of a Christianity that attempts to motivate people to produce their own spiritual faith and their own spiritual life. As if I am trying to reach out to Christ and I am trying to show Him and work my way up to being somebody that He will be proud of and will receive. And yet, He is living inside of me the whole time. I mean where am I going? He is already there. I am looking for Him out here. "Well Lord," you know. He is already there. He knows me better than I know myself. So if He wants to take the chance and save me and live inside of me that is His business. If that is His choice, it is fine with me. But do not say I did not tell You. Lord, You are in for quite a ride.

I stand justified, made right, before God through Jesus Christ. It is by His power that produces His faith in me to believe. It is not human effort.

So we have studied the proof of justification in the study of faith and works. We have seen the power of justification, contrast between death and life. Abraham was dead in the area of his life that was supposed to produce for God. And God purposely waited in God produced His promise.

We have seen the problem of justification by faith in that the Jewish person - in fact, all religious people have the same problem, they cannot just trust the Lord by faith. We have to add all the other rituals and all the other things because we just cannot receive it by faith. Have to do something! Got to earn it! And in so doing we find ourselves in the trap and that is what Paul is going to minister in ~~Galatians~~ Romans chapter 5. You started off with the gospel of grace and

now you are following legalism, you have fallen from grace. You are no longer living under God's favor. You are now working your way in and at the same time you are living under condemnation because the law produces destruction.

We are all susceptible to it because that is the way we are as human beings, especially in the Western world. No free lunch. You only get as far as the effort you put in. How about this great Biblical verse - my favorite in the Scriptures: God helps those that help themselves, which is not in the Bible. I think that is great. You see, we think that way. It has got to be in the Bible because it just makes sense. We cannot just believe, and that is what it is all about. Do not let anybody rob you of your freedom that you have in Christ. Not free to do whatever you want to do, but free to receive and to believe. Faith does not merit salvation. Faith receives salvation.

Let's close with prayer.