

Romans 4:9-25 (James 2)

“The Promise Made Sure”

This morning we're continuing on in this portion of scripture whereby the apostle Paul is developing the premise, or the principle of justification through faith alone. and The 3 primary targets that he zero's in on in order to establish this position pertaining to our salvation, or justification before God is in contrasting faith vs works, grace vs law, and God's doing vs human effort. Which in reality is simply 3 different angles on saying the same thing. Because you know how we as people are, we're all about the letter. and In our own corrupt nature we're all about looking for a way to somehow take credit to ourselves for the work that only God can do. So if I say, "Ok" to faith, but don't understand grace, than perhaps I'll conclude I need to believe in Jesus, *plus* keep the law. If I get a semi-grip on grace, but don't realize that the righteousness of Christ is imputed through the conduit of faith, then perhaps I'll conclude that grace is there to take up the slack after I've done all I can *works* wise. If I don't understand that it's all about God's doing, than I'm going to be pursuing some sort of right standing before God through human effort. and That's what ch 4 of the book of Romans is really all about, debunking any avenue of righteousness, salvation, or justification before God via any other means than by grace, through faith.

But he wants us to know that the idea of justification through faith isn't some strange new concept that's just popped up out of nowhere but rather it's the same way that God has *always* justified man before Him. and In order to establish that fact Paul goes all the way back to who would become the founding father of the nation of Israel, Ab himself, if Ab was seen as justified in the sight of God, on what basis did his justification take place? Was it by works? No, and that's what we spoke about last week, Gen 15:6 quoted in Rom 4:3, "Ab *believed* God and *it* was accounted to him for righteousness." It was Ab's faith that God honored, not some work, he did nothing to gain God's favor, he was brought up in an idolatrous family, in an idolatrous nation and God according to the counsel of His own divine will selected Ab, *spoke* to Ab, and Ab *believed* God. and Because He believed the word of God, God accredited that to him as righteousness. So it's not about works, but rather through faith that God justifies us (look at vs 5, read). Now at this point some people get confused because they try to cross-reference what James said. Look at vs 14 of ch 2 (14-26)

"So what's the deal there preacher man? I mean it's *not* about works, *it is* about works, who's right and who's wrong?" They're both right, and neither of them are wrong, listen here's the deal. Paul never said that we wouldn't have works of *faith*, as a matter of fact we could spend considerable time quoting the things that he wrote that are quite to the contrary. What he *did* say is that we'd never be made righteous in the sight of God, justified in the sight of God by the works of the *law*. You see is it a work of legalism, or a work of love? One is right on, the other is vanity, one is a work *for* salvation, the other is the overflow *of* salvation in my life. James didn't anywhere there say that doing those things is what saved those people, what he did say is that the evidence of their salvation was made manifest by the way they led their lives, trusting God, being obedient to the Word of God.

But here Paul's not in reference to how our lives are lived *after* we're saved; we're simply talking about how one is saved *period*. and It's not through the works of the law; it's through faith, by God's grace. He demonstrates that through the life of Ab, and in vs 6-8, king David.

Israel's greatest king, the one through whom the Messiah Himself was promised to come, the 2 most highly esteemed men in the history of all Israel. and How were they justified, reckoned as righteous in the sight of God? Through faith, not by works, "Alright, the reader might say, we're tracking with you, but that raises a question. I like your examples they're good examples, but so far you've used examples of the circumcision, the Jew specifically, this salvation by grace through faith must be only for the circumcised. I mean the both certainly were, so this must be more favor poured out on the nation of Israel right?" Wrong, this righteous standing isn't just for the physical descendants of Ab who believe, but *all* who believe, notice.

Vs9-10

Now you guys this is key, remember we spent a descent chunk of time last week emphasizing the importance of the 1st phrase found in vs 3, "For what does the *Scripture* say?" Not, "What does tradition teach, or what position does my church hold?" or anything else. and Here Paul is pointing out a very important detail of the scripture as it pertains to *works vs faith* righteousness.

At what point was Ab accredited with righteousness, was it after he was circumcised, or *before* he was circumcised? Now as you study the scripture you find that in Gen 15 Ab is testified of by God as righteous. But it's not until you get to ch 17 that God initiates the sign of circumcision. Now math/Algebra was never my strong subject in school, but this much I know, 15 comes *before* 17. and As you read through that whole portion there you'll find that between ch 15-17 comes ch 16, you know what happens in ch 16? Ab goes into Hagar, Sarai's handmaid at Sarai's request as they tried to help God out through human effort to obtain the promise and what was the result? Ishmael, (the product of the flesh) now Ishmael was 13 yrs old when God gave to Ab the sign of the covenant (ch 17). But when God accounted righteousness to Ab Ishmael hadn't been born or even conceived, so the sign of circumcision was given to Ab at least 14 yrs *after* God had accredited him with righteousness.

So Ab was in God's covenant and under His grace through faith long before he was circumcised (and here's where it gets even more interesting) however Ishmael though circumcised was *never* in the covenant. Remember it would be by Sarah through *Isaac* that your seed shall be called. So we have a real problem, if it has to do with circumcision there's a significant period of Ab's life that he couldn't be righteous before God even though the Scriptures declared otherwise, and Ishmael should've been seen as apart of the covenant even though the scriptures declare he wasn't. and If you want to add insult to injury try this one on for size; because there were no Jews at that time (with reference to ethnic identity) when Ab was declared righteous he was, as it were, an *uncircumcised Gentile*!

Vs11-12

There are some key words there in vs 11 with respect to circumcision; perhaps you noted them as we passed over them. We read there that circumcision was a “Sign” #1, and a “Seal” #2, so circumcision was a *sign*, not the *source*, it was a *seal*, not the *substance* of his righteousness. It simply testified of the righteousness he already had before he was ever circumcised that he obtained *through faith*. The point being that Ab’s fatherhood stretches well beyond the circumcision, he’s the father of faith, of all those who *believe regardless* of whether or not they’ve been circumcised. Translation: *Faith*, not *circumcision* is the vital link to Ab, the seal of authenticity with respect to being of the seed of Ab isn’t circumcision, it’s faith, far more important to have Ab’s faith, than to have Ab’s circumcision.

Whenever we come across the principle of circumcision it seem only right to bring up baptism which is a similar notion in our culture. For us it seems to be that many people would project that unless you’re baptized you’re not saved. But baptism is to us, as circumcision was to them, it’s to be the outward illustration, or our inward transformation. It’s the seal, the sign, of an inward work, the baptism into Christ by faith, just as for them it was to illustrate the inward circumcision of the heart, the renouncing a dependence *upon* and a life lived *after* the flesh. We used the silly illustration last time about a can of perhaps fresh fruit. If I pick up a can that’s labeled “Fresh Fruit” so I decide to tear into it, but when I open it sardines come flopping out, I’m going to be a little upset. What was the point of the label if it didn’t testify to the reality of what was on the inside? That label was pointless, it only serves its purpose when it bears witness accurately to what’s on the inside. So to with circumcision, or baptism, they only serve their purpose when they bear witness accurately to the reality of what’s going on inside. If the label reads “Baptized” but when you’re poured out there’s nothing but flesh and carnality, worldly nature, than what was the point in the label? 1st you have to settle the issue with the inside, then you’re free to put the appropriate label on the outside, how is the issue settled with regard to the inside? Through faith, by God’s grace, believing in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sin. So it’s not about a work that I do *specifically*, “Ok what about a keeping of a certain set of morals or ethics *legally*, what about the law *generally*?”

Vs13-15

Now don’t be confused here, it doesn’t say that there’s no *sin*, but that there’s no *transgression*. Sin is innate with in us, it is unfortunately apart of our core nature, but a transgression is a willful crossing of a specific boundary. Well, if there’s no boundaries established how can I cross them? If I don’t draw a line in the dirt, you can’t cross it. and That is in essence what the law is, it’s a line drawn in the dirt so that our sin nature is readily discernable because I’m constantly crossing the line. Now that sin has been there the whole time, but it became transgression when I was made aware of the line. So by law is the *knowledge* of sin, it’s not the cause for sin, it simply shows me for the sinner that I am. and That’s the sense in which the law brings wrath, it gives sin the specific character of transgression, a willful disobedience, I was always guilty before a holy God, I just wasn’t aware of the gravity of the situation apart from seeing my sinfulness in the light of His Holiness.

In order for God to maintain His righteousness He has to deal with the sin issue or else He's no longer righteous, and that's really the point of the law, to make us aware of our sin so that we might be driven to Christ rather than looking to ourselves for salvation. Paul's seeking to demonstrate here that since the law came *after* justification by faith (to the tune of 430 yrs) it *must* serve another purpose other than to give us a means of justification before God. and That purpose was to make us aware of our sinful disposition.

Because if you become an heir of righteousness, or salvation through the law, than faith is made void and the promise (the promise that all the world would be blessed through Ab, and that he would be the father of many nations) that he received in faith would be made of no effect. and Those words, "void" and "Of no effect" are in the perfect tense meaning that they would be perpetually useless, pointless, and they're in the passive voice which means that it would be the direct result of *someone* or *something* else, in this case the law. The law would cause faith, and the promise of God to be being made continually with out purpose and of no effect. You wouldn't need God, you could just do it on your own and God would owe you salvation.

We took the time to derail that last week, God will be a debtor to no man, nor will He share His glory with any man, and when we seek to achieve a righteousness through means other than faith in Christ, we eclipse the glory of the work of Christ upon the cross and take it unto ourselves, God won't have that.

Vs16

"The Father of us all," that's a phrase which would've sent the Jew for a spin. But notice, "Its of *faith* that it might be according to *grace*," *Faith* is to *grace*, as *works* are to *law*. Grace and law are the principles at hand, faith or works being the means by which we pursue those paths at it relates to our relationship with God. and For the sake of redundancy (though we've hit this a few times lately) I'd point out again here that to speak technically, specifically faith does not save you, the redeeming *grace* of *God* saves you, however the way that God's redeeming grace is appropriated to your life is through faith.

So it's of faith, and it's according to grace, why? Notice, so that the promise might be *sure* to all the seed. In other words the work of justification, of salvation is dependant completely upon God and His ability to perform what *He's* promised, not about me and my ability to keep the law. Why is your salvation sure? Because it's not based upon your ability to perform, it's based upon *God's* ability to perform, through the Old covenant God was in essence demonstrating our inability to relate to Him on the basis of the law. *If* one could keep the law be it both in action and intent of the heart, God would save him on that basis, however that's an emphatic impossibility.

If it was based upon me, everyday I'd be ate up inside, wondering if I'd hit the mark, maybe today I can do it, I blew it yesterday, in this moment I'm righteous, in the next moment I'm not. Because my relationship *with* and right standing *before* God is predicated upon my ability to keep God's Word. Therefore the net effect is that I'm *unsure* minute by minute if God will accept me, if I'm sure of anything it's that He won't, not based upon my ability to live up to His law because I can't.

But the beauty of our relationship to God being of faith, that it might be according to grace is that the entirety of my righteousness, and the guarantee of my salvation is based upon *God's Promise* and His ability to perform His Word. Now me keeping God's Word is a guarantee for condemnation, God keeping God's Word is a guarantee of justification, of salvation, all I have to do is believe Him for it. God's Word to me is that if I'll believe on Jesus Christ for the remission/forgiveness of my sin and receive Him into the innermost recesses of my heart as my Savior, that He'll take my imperfect faith, and impute to my account the perfect righteousness of Christ thereby seeing me as worthy of everlasting life in His sight. The only question then left to be answered is, "Do I believe it?" "Do you believe it?" When righteousness is dependant upon me and what I do, that's the ingredients that make for condemnation, when righteousness is dependant upon *God*, and what *Christ* has *done*, those are the ingredients that will make for guaranteed justification. and How is that imputed, or accredited to me? Through faith, faith in the work He's done on the cross and the promise of His word to me. That's how Ab was made righteous, that's how you'll be made righteous.

This phrase, "Who is the Father of us all," points to the fact that the promise of God to Ab in Gen 17:4-5 spoke of more than a simply physical lineage, but to a great spiritual lineage as those of every tribe tongue and nation came to believe God just as Ab did.

Vs17-18

Now here's what Paul is building up to, that even as it took a supernatural life giving work to make Ab the *physical* father of many nations, so too it took a supernatural life giving work to make him the *spiritual* father of many nations.

But the 1st thing I want to draw your attention to in this section is this phrase in vs 17 regarding the power and of God, "Who gives life to the dead." and We thank God for that. The bible says, "*But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ*" Eph 2:4-5 We serve a God who gives life to the dead, "and calls those things which do not exist as though they did." Of course this is a reference to the omniscient, every present, eternal nature of God before Whom past present and future is all contained in the now. He's not bound by the linear constraints of time, He's the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end, the author and the finisher of our faith. So He's able to call those things which don't exist as though they did. Now that's good news when it comes to God calling me righteous, or justified, sanctified and all the rest, because He sees the finished product of who I am. All I know of me is in the now, but God calls those things that don't exist as though they did, because He know what *will be*.

Now this phrase, “God, who gives life to the dead,” we drew a personal *application* out of that. But the specific *interpretation* is what follows here, the fact that God called life out of the deadness of Sarah’s womb, and the inability of Ab’s body. and The point that we would do well to receive is the fact that *God’s Promises* can only be performed by *God’s Power*. Will He use human instruments? Yes, will He accept legalistic human effort? No, Ishmael represents the human effort of achieving/receiving God’s promise, but even as God rejected human efforts then, He rejects human efforts now. But when you trust Jesus Christ you become a child of promise. Remember this vs, “*Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of promise.*” Gal 4:28 Isaac was the product of the Spirit, not the end result of human achievement, and that’s the point, we want to be of the Spirit, not of the flesh.

Even though according to human standards and probabilities it was an impossibility Ab contrary to hope, in hope believed. Or another way to understand that, he knew human *impossibilities* only made for Divine *opportunities*, from the human perspective, impossible, from the Heavenly perspective, no problem.

This is where we begin to see the nature of faith come into view, and bring more balance between Paul and James. Because even though Isaac’s conception was a miracle, it wasn’t immaculate, Ab didn’t just sit around and wait for God to form a child in Sarah’s womb. They did what they needed to do in order to conceive a child, they had marital relations and trusted God for the miraculous result of life though they were both well past the age of being able to humanly bear children. So faith doesn’t sit by and do nothing, it’s active obedience to the Word of God and the will of God for our lives.

Vs19-22

I love vs 21, because it’s about as good of a definition of faith as I can find, “Being fully convinced (or persuaded) that what God has promised, He’s able to perform.” Some people don’t A.) Come to Christ, or B.) Go any farther with Christ because they haven’t concluded this point right here. They’re *not fully convinced* that what God has promised He’s able to perform. “Perhaps it worked for others, but it’s not for me,” you’re not fully convinced, your faith falters.

But there are 4 keys here to effective, and powerful faith that we see illustrated in Ab’s life that we’d do well to assimilate into our own. The 1st one is back in vs 19, “He did not consider his own body.” Didn’t consider the limitations of his human frame, he was nearly 100 yrs old, Sarah nearly 90, you don’t have children at 90 and 100 yrs old. It’s a physiological impossibility, Sarah was barren all throughout her young life, now having gone through menopause on top of it all, and her husband being 99 yrs old. and If you’ve ever been at a place where you’ve wanted children and couldn’t seem to have them no matter what you did or what doctor you saw, you have some sort of understanding to the stress and heartache and strain that can be.

They'd long since given up hope, but when God promised, that no longer factored in, he no longer considered the limitations of the human frame, God's bigger than all that.

#2 Vs 20 "He didn't waver at the promise of God through unbelief." How many times like a wave of the sea we waver back and forth at the promises of God depending upon the circumstances surrounding our lives? It's ez to remain steadfast when things are going well, Ab remained steadfast in the face of radical circumstantial opposition. He didn't waver at the promise of God, unbelief will rip us off for the blessings of God in our lives. with out faith it's impossible to please Him, yet how easy it is waver. Ab didn't do that, he was strengthened in faith and #3 "Gave glory to God." He was praising and thanking God before Sarah ever conceived, how often we fail to glorify God until *after* His word has come to pass. As though we need to make sure 1st. Now if some individual calls us up whom we know and He gives us his/her word that they're going to do something on such and such a day that we really had need of, man we rejoice. But yet when God gives us His promise to supply all our need according to His riches in glory, we hold off on the praises until we see it come to pass, yet who's word is more reliable? #4 We've touched on, "He was fully persuaded that what God had promised He was also able to perform." You see how big is your God? If for your God some things will be impossible, than we serve different Gods. The bible tells us that God is able to do exceedingly and abundantly beyond all we're able to ask or even think. We should be those who give glory to God in advance, because we trust He's able to perform the promise of His Word.

Vs23-25

You see this is the substance of which the testimony and supernatural life giving work of God through Ab foreshadowed. Life from death, this is the gospel, that Jesus was delivered up to death for the sake of our offenses, and what raised for the sake of our justification. Our justification is found in the resurrection, life-giving power of Jesus Christ not through human effort. and That's what makes the promise sure, even as Ab didn't have to worry about human limitations, the focus of the gospel isn't upon our ability to perform, it's based solely upon God's promise to us in the person of Jesus Christ and His ability to perform *His* promise, the forgiveness of sin to all who call upon His name. Don't fret over it, rejoice in, and give Him glory for it.

Prayer Points:

God Your Word to us is so good, so refreshing, so renewing and refocusing, thank You that the way you justified Ab then, is the way you justify all who come to You today. That in Your mercy You'll receive an imperfect faith from us, and translate that into perfect righteousness from You. and We thank You for the fact that You've made the promise of everlasting life sure, not predicated *upon* us, but upon You and Your faithfulness *to* us. Lord we're persuaded that You're able to perform that which You've promised. Help us not to waver at the promises of Your Word, but glorify You in advance for all that You've promised to do in Christ.

If you're here and you've never given your heart to Christ, perhaps you've thought that you're just unable to live up to the standard, here's the good news. It's not about your ability, it's about His, you don't have to *do* any of the work, because He's *done* it all. All you have to do is trust Him for it. You can leave here righteous in the sight of God today, by simply placing your faith in the person of Jesus Christ that His redeeming grace might flow into your life. Just humble yourself before the Lord, open your heart to the Lord, and ask Jesus to come in.