

What Saving Faith Looks Like

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Unshakeable: Romans / Romans 4:17-25

We've all been there, haven't we?

On the receiving end of a broken promise.

Maybe it was something small. A friend who said they'd show up and never did. Someone who said they'd call and you never heard from them again.

Or maybe it was something that cut much deeper than that. A parent who promised they'd be there and wasn't. A spouse who made vows before God and broke them. An employer who promised you something and pulled the rug out from under you.

We've all been there haven't we.

But if we're honest with ourselves — we've also been on the other side of that. We've been the ones who made the promise and didn't keep it. We've been the ones who said we'd be there and weren't. Who said we'd do something and let someone down.

And when you live in a broken world, with broken people and broken promises, it makes it difficult to trust, doesn't it? It makes us guarded, and hesitant to trust.

Because we've learned the hard way that people don't always come through.

And sometimes we bring that same caution into our relationship with God.

We hear His promises. We read them in His Word. And somewhere in the back of our minds a quiet voice says — but what if He doesn't come through? What if I trust Him and He lets me down like everyone else has?

Last week we saw Paul use Abraham as the example of saving faith, he is the father of those who have faith he said.

He's been using Abraham to show us what saving faith looks like.

In our passage this morning he uses Abraham to press even deeper.

Because Abraham had every reason not to trust God. He had been waiting on a promise from God for 25 years with nothing to show for it. A man whose body was failing, whose circumstances screamed impossible, whose situation by every natural measurement was hopeless.

And yet.

This man believed, he trusted. He was fully persuaded that God would fulfill his promise.

This morning Paul wants us to look back at Abraham as a picture of what saving faith actually looks like.

He wants us to see that saving faith isn't about the strength of your belief. It's about the strength of the one you've placed your faith in.

Saving faith believes that God will do what He promised He would do.

Look with me at our passage this morning.

So we're coming to the end of the first section of Romans. And Paul has finally solved the tension for us that we started with.

He started with this massive human problem — that we fall short of God's righteousness. There is this gap, this insurmountable void between humanity and God.

We are far from God because we have rejected Him and we fall short of reflecting His image of holiness and righteousness.

And the question we've been wrestling with is how can it be fixed? How can I be made right with God? How can a person be reconciled to God?

That's what the first part of Romans 4 was all about. Paul brings forward Abraham, the Old Testament patriarch, to show us that God's plan has always been that his people are made right with him — that is, we are counted righteous by faith.

He showed us Abraham and he brought us back to Genesis 15 to show us that God made Abraham a promise, and Abraham trusted, he believed in God's promise, and God counted it to him as righteousness.

That's his point in verse 3.

Romans 4:3 ESV "***For what does the Scripture say? Abraham believed God, and it was counted to him as righteousness.***"

Abraham believed, he trusted, he relied on God's promise to him and God counted his faith as righteousness.

And his point is that when we have the faith of Abraham — when we like Abraham trust and believe in God's promise through the finished work of his Son — we like Abraham can be counted righteous. Made right with God. Reconciled to God through Jesus.

And the point was clear — Abraham didn't earn it through religious works, and we can't earn righteousness through religious works. Abraham didn't earn righteousness by being a good person, and we can't earn righteousness by being a good person.

The only way — the only way — that we can be found righteous before God is by trusting and believing like Abraham.

This morning Paul goes a bit deeper with us.

He doesn't just say that Abraham has faith,

He shows us what saving faith look like?

He asks the question, if faith is what saves us, then what does it look like to have saving faith?

And so he returns us to Abraham, and he sums it up really in one statement...

Verse 21. Abraham was...

Romans 4:21 ESV

fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.

It's such a simple statement, isn't it? Abraham was fully convinced that God could do what He promised.

That's what saving faith is, you believe He will do what He promised He will do.

You believe it so strongly that you're willing to stake your life on it, your eternity on it, your soul on it.

You believe so strongly that God is able to do what He promised he would do, through His Son, that it impacts the entire direction of your life.

You believe that God is able to do what He promised He would do so much that it impacts how you live, it impacts the choices you make.

Faith is not just an intellectual acknowledgement. It's not just a nod that says yes, that's rational, yes that's believable. But it is being fully persuaded, fully convinced that God can do what He promised He can do.

But let's be clear — it's not the strength of our faith that matters. It's the strength of the person we place our faith in.

It's not so much that Abraham had great faith, amazing faith. No — it's that Abraham placed his faith in a great and amazing God.

He placed His faith in the right person.

And that's the first thing we need to see about saving faith this morning.

Saving faith is trusting in the right person.

TRUST THE RIGHT PERSON

Look at that key phrase in verse 17.

Romans 4:17 ESV

as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations"—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.

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

Abraham had good reason to trust that God could do what He said He would do.

He is the God who gives life to the dead. He brings life where there is no life. And He is able to bring into existence, that which does not exist.

And He does it by simply speaking a word.

I mean that's how God brought this entire universe into existence isn't it.

[Genesis 1](#) that in the beginning there was nothing. You and I can't even imagine what nothing is, because if we imagine something, then it something, not nothing.

But out of that nothing God speaks creation into existence.

God said let there be light — He just spoke the word and light began to exist. Let there be land and land came into existence. That's the God we serve.

And we see that same power in Jesus, don't we? All Jesus had to do was stand at the tomb of His dead friend and speak the word — Lazarus come forth — and with just a simple word Lazarus walked out of that tomb.

All Jesus had to do was speak a word and the deaf hear. Speak a word and the blind see. He speaks a word and winds and storms cease. He speaks a word and demons flee. He speaks a word and the dead walk out of their graves.

With just a simple word — He has the power to bring life where there is no life and bring into existence that which does not exist.

That's why you can trust Him. That's why you can place your faith in Him. He is trustworthy. He is able to do what He promises to do.

And what He does in the gospels, He does for people who are dead in their trespasses and sins. He speaks the word and life is given to dead souls. He speaks the word and eyes that were blind to sin and ears that were deaf to the gospel are opened.

He speaks one word and sins are forgiven and your soul is restored to the God who created you for Himself.

So let me ask you this morning — is your faith in the right person?

Like Abraham, this isn't going out on a limb. It isn't a risky bet or a faint hope. The God Abraham placed his faith in was the one who could do what He promised. The one who brings life where there is death and calls into existence that which does not exist.

It matters where you place your faith.

So important to realize that it doesn't matter so much how strong your faith is, as much as it matters how strong the person is that you place your faith in.

Think about it this way.

You could walk out on thin ice with complete confidence, absolutely certainty, it will hold you. You believe with everything in you. But it doesn't matter how strong your faith is — if the ice is thin, you're going through. Your confidence doesn't change the ice.

But the opposite is also true. It's the middle of a Canadian winter, the ice is two feet thick, solid as concrete. But you're nervous. You're cautious. You inch out slowly, you're not sure, maybe you're even trembling. But guess what — you're not going through. The ice holds you not because of your confidence but because of its strength.

The object of your faith is what matters. Not the intensity of your faith.

And that's both good news and a warning.

It's good news for us. Because so often our faith is weak isn't it? So often we falter.

When things are going well it's easy, so easy to trust in the Lord. But when faith is tested, when life is hard, when things don't seem to be going our way — our faith can weaken.

But praise God. Jesus said if you have faith like a mustard seed, you can move mountains. It's not the strength of our faith that matters — it's the strength of the one you've trusted in.

But it's warning, isn't it. Because you can have all the faith in the world, and place it in the wrong place, in the wrong person, in the wrong teaching, in false gospel.

You can believe that lie with all your heart, but it still won't hold you up.

Is your place in the right person this morning, is it in the right place.

Is your faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus, as the only way by which you and I can be saved.

Are you trusting in a God who raises the dead and calls things into existence from nothing.

Even on your weakest faith day — that God holds you.

Even when your faith is weak — He holds you.

But here's what Paul shows us next. And this is where it gets really personal.

Because saving faith isn't just about who you trust in. It's about what that faith looks like when everything around you is screaming that God's promise is impossible.

Do you still believe in the promises of God?

And nobody illustrates that better than Abraham.

Here's what we see when we look at the life of Abraham..

Saving faith looks beyond our circumstances.

BEYOND CIRCUMSTANCES

Look with me at verses 19 through 21. Abraham had every reason to doubt, every reason to not believe in his circumstances.

Romans 4:19-21 ESV

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.

Think about Abraham's circumstances, God had promised that He would have a son, and that son would produce a whole nation. But Abraham had every reason to doubt.

For one, he had already been waiting for 25 years, but he was about one hundred years old, so he was way past the age of having children, his body, Paul says was as good as dead, but his wife wasn't much younger, she was way past the age of bearing children as well.

When he heard God's promise he had every reason to say no way, there is no way that could happen.

But Abraham saw beyond his circumstances, when he considered his circumstances, his faith did not weaken, there was no unbelief that made him waver.

It's not that he ignored his circumstances or disregarded them, notice it says he considered it. His circumstances were reality; he couldn't ignore them. It's simply that as he considered how great his circumstances were, he knew his God was greater.

However great the circumstances are, God is greater than your circumstances.

Abraham knew that whatever his circumstances are, he was fully persuaded that God would do what He promised He would do.

In fact, most commentators believe there is a subtle nod to later in Abraham's life with Isaac here.

Why, when God finally gave Abraham his son, was Abraham willing to sacrifice his Son? He didn't know God was testing him, but Abraham trusted God so much that he knew that He is the God who is able to bring life where there is dead, a God who will do what He promised He would do, a God who is greater and more powerful than his circumstances.

And maybe that's exactly where some of you are this morning.

You're in a season where it's hard to trust God. Where the odds feel stacked against you. Where the circumstances are loud and the promise feels distant.

Maybe you're trusting God to bring life back to your marriage. It's on life support — distant, disconnected, full of conflict. You need to know this morning that the God who gives life to the dead can bring life back to your marriage. He is greater than your circumstances.

Maybe you've lost your job. You're struggling to make ends meet, waiting for the right door to open, and it feels like the odds are against you. Trust Him this morning. Believe that God is greater than your circumstances.

Maybe you just heard a scary diagnosis from your doctor. The report was not good and fear has set in. God is greater than your sickness. He is greater than that diagnosis.

And maybe this morning, your faith is dead, it once burned with passion for God, but it seems dead, distant, disconnected. We serve the God who brings life back to dead faith or brings faith into existence that wasn't even there!

Whatever your circumstances, whatever you're facing this morning, whatever it is that is threatening your faith, your trust, your hope in the Lord. I'm not denying you may be facing insurmountable circumstances, but I believe for you this morning that God is greater than whatever circumstances you maybe be facing.

Here's what I want you to hear.

Trusting God doesn't mean you overlook your circumstances or pretend they aren't real. Abraham didn't do that — Paul tells us he faced the facts. He knew his body was as good as dead. He knew the odds.

He just didn't give the circumstances the final word.

And neither should you.

However loud your circumstances are this morning — God is louder. However big your impossible is — God is bigger.

That's what saving faith looks like. It looks beyond the circumstances and fixes its eyes on the God who is greater than all of them.

But let me ask you this morning...Did you ever consider why?

Why did God wait? Why did He let it go so long? Why did He wait until Abraham was a hundred years old, until Sarah was well beyond childbearing years, until every natural possibility was completely exhausted?

Why would God wait until the situation seemed absolutely impossible before He acted?

Could it be that God waited intentionally? That He allowed the odds to stack up against them so that when the promise was fulfilled it would be crystal clear to everyone — this was not Abraham. This was not Sarah. The only possible explanation for this is God.

Could it be that God wanted to bring them to a place where they could not trust in themselves, where self-reliance was no longer even an option, so that the

only thing left was to trust in the power of God at work in them and through them?

And I wonder — I wonder if that is what God is doing in your impossible situation this morning.

Maybe, just maybe, God has brought you to this moment for that very same purpose. He has brought you to a place where you cannot fix it yourself. Where you cannot rely on your own strength, your own wisdom, your own resources. Where the only explanation — when He moves, when He works, when He fulfills His promise — will be that God did this.

Not you.

God.

And maybe that's exactly where He wants you.

But I think it's important to note. Abraham's faith wasn't perfect faith.

Abraham struggled. He struggled at times to want to take matters into his own hands and make the promise happen on his own, like he did with Hagar. He struggled with obedience. He struggled to trust perfectly.

And maybe that sounds familiar.

Because we do the same thing, don't we? When God seems slow, we get impatient. We try to fix it ourselves. We take matters into our own hands.

But here's what Paul says — through all of it, Abraham never wavered on the promise. He never let go of what God had said. He never stopped believing that God would do what He promised He would do.

But there's one small key I think we need to take note of, notice at the end of verse 20 it says... ***but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God.***

Notice that, through the struggles, through the waiting, Abraham's faith was strengthened through his worship, through his honour to God.

That's an important note to make, like Abraham didn't wait until the promise was fulfilled to start worshipping, Abraham worshipped and gave glory to God in the waiting.

Maybe that's a message for us this morning... Abraham's faith was strengthened because he praised, worshipped and gave glory to God in the waiting.

Don't wait until the promise is fulfilled to worship, but worship in the waiting, that's what gives strength to your faith.

And here's what that means when it comes to the promise of God's salvation.

Maybe this morning you're struggling to believe that God could truly forgive you. That He could take your sin, your failures, your history — and declare you righteous. It seems too good to be true. It seems impossible.

Or maybe you've been following Jesus for years and holiness still feels like a distant promise. You're struggling with the same sin, the same patterns, the same failures. And you wonder — is God actually working in me? Is change actually possible?

Trust the promise. Worship in the waiting. Give glory to God before you see the full picture.

Because the same God who fulfilled an impossible promise to a hundred-year-old man — is the same God who is faithful to complete what He started in you.

And that leads us right to where Paul takes us next.

Because in verses 22 through 25 Paul makes the turn — he stops talking about Abraham and he points directly at us.

Saving faith isn't trusting in an abstract promise, or simply faith that God exists, no.

FINISHED WORK OF CHRIST

Saving faith is trusting in the finished work of Christ. Notice verses 23-25.

Romans 4:23–25 ESV

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.

This has been Paul's point since back in verse 1 of this chapter — he's making the connection here.

Abraham believed God's promise and it was counted to him as righteousness. But those words written way back in Genesis 15 were not just for his sake, but for all who would follow in his example of faith.

Notice — 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.

It's not just believing that God exists that saves you. It's not just believing that God will help you out of your struggles.

Saving faith is believing with the faith of Abraham in the promise of Jesus' death and resurrection.

Believing and trusting that Jesus Christ went to the cross bearing the sin debt that we owe to God. That He was our substitute on the cross, paying the penalty that we deserve, facing the wrath and judgment of God on our behalf, dying so that our sin, our trespasses, are forgiven.

Trusting in the promise that when Jesus died and he cried out from the cross — it is finished — that there is nothing further that needs to be done.

And trusting in His resurrection. That He didn't stay dead. That He is alive, and His resurrection has reconciled us to God, given us new life, eternal life.

When we trust, believe, rely, stake our eternity on that promise — the same way that Abraham staked his life on God's promise — we are counted righteous.

It's the same faith.

Abraham believed that God was able to bring life to a dead womb. We believe He brought life from a dead tomb.

Abraham believed that God was able to bring forth a son, a nation that did not exist. We believe that God is able to bring forth righteousness and holiness that does not exist in us.

It's the same faith.

Believing that through Jesus we have eternal life, forgiveness of sin, a relationship with God.

This morning, as you hear about all of this, maybe something in you wants to say — that sounds too simple. Surely there's more to it than just believing.

But that's exactly what Paul has been dismantling since chapter 1.

Because here's what I love about this.

The gospel is simple.

Believe. Trust. Rely on the finished work of Jesus Christ. That's it. That's the gospel.

But here's what makes it hard. Not complicated — hard. Because what the gospel asks you to believe seems just as impossible as what God asked Abraham to believe.

To believe that God can bring life where there is no life and things into existence that do not exist.

It asks you to believe that even though your body is aging, decaying, moving toward death — you will live forever. That death does not have the final word. That eternal life is yours through faith in Jesus Christ.

It asks you to believe that even though you still struggle with sin — even though you've been following Jesus for years and you still find yourself falling, failing, fighting the same battles — that God has declared you righteous. Fully. Completely. Right now.

It asks you to believe that even on the days when God feels distant, when the promises feel hollow, when doubt creeps in and faith feels thin — that He is still faithful. That He is still working. That He will complete what He started in you.

That's hard to believe isn't it?

Not because it's complicated. But because it looks impossible from where we're standing.

It looked just as impossible for Abraham.

And yet — Abraham believed.

He was fully persuaded that God would do what He promised He would do.

The question is — are you?

Because that same God is making a promise to you this morning. He is the God who gives life to the dead.

John 11:25–26 ESV

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?"

Do you believe this?

Because that's what saving faith looks like.

It's not a vague belief that God exists. It's not a general hope that things will work out.

Saving faith is being fully persuaded that God will do what He promised He would do.

Your faith doesn't have to be perfect.

Abraham's wasn't perfect. He struggled. He stumbled. He tried to take matters into his own hands. But he never let go of the promise. And as he worshipped the Lord in his waiting his faith grew stronger.

So here's what saving faith looks like.

Saving faith trusts in the right person.

Not a vague higher power, not a religious system, not yourself.

But the God who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. Is your faith in the right person this morning?

Saving faith looks beyond the circumstances. It doesn't ignore them. But it refuses to give them the final word. However loud your impossible is this morning — this God is louder. However big your circumstances are — this God is bigger.

And saving faith trusts the finished work of Christ. That Jesus went to the cross bearing your sin, your debt, your trespasses. That He was raised from the dead for your justification. That it is finished — nothing to add, nothing to earn, nothing to prove.

That's saving faith.

And the question Jesus asked Martha outside that tomb is the same question He is asking you this morning.

Do you believe this?

Saving faith believes that God will do what He promised He would do.

He has. In Jesus — He has.

Let me pray for us.