

Romans: Unashamed; the righteous shall live by faith
Romans 4:13-17 prt 12

INTRO:

We will have a prayer service this Wednesday at 630pm. Consider fasting that day as we pray together.

- In Romans chapter 4, Paul is using Abraham as an illustration of salvation comes through faith alone and not our works.
- Last week we looked at Abraham's belief in God that was counted to him as righteousness from Gen 15.
- Abe was in fear and he was doubting. God, in His kindness, doesn't get on to Abraham but instead turns his gaze away from his circumstances and onto the starry night sky and reiterated the promise to Abraham again – Abraham believed God.
- Paul's argument was that when Abraham believed God and God transferred righteousness to Abraham at 80 years old (Gen 15), it was BEFORE circumcision when he was 100 years old (Gen 17).
- Paul will continue on using Abraham as an example of salvation through faith alone for the rest of chapter 4

Romans 4 Vs 13 *For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith.*

- We looked last week at the covenant God made with Abraham by walking through the cut pieces of the animals – God did it for both of them.
- Let me be cut to pieces if I don't hold up my end of the bargain – and if you don't hold up your end of the bargain. And... He was several years later cut off, cut to pieces on the cross fulfilling the promise made in Gen 15.
- In Gen 17, God commands Abraham and all the males in his household to be circumcised as a sign of the covenant God made with him – to make his descendants as numerous as the stars and to give them a land.
- Then in chapter 18, God visits Abraham and Sarah.

- God has already spoken the promise several times to Abraham – Abraham has fully believed God.
- But now it seems He is there for Sarah, “Where is Sarah your wife?”
- She has heard this promise before – it’s not new news – she’s heard it from Abraham. Now God wants her to hear it from Him.

Genesis 18:9–15 (ESV) **9** They said to him, “Where is Sarah your wife?” And he said, “She is in the tent.” **10** The LORD said, “I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son.” And Sarah was listening at the tent door behind him. **11** Now Abraham and Sarah were old, advanced in years. The way of women had ceased to be with Sarah. **12** So Sarah laughed to herself, saying, “After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?” **13** The LORD said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Shall I indeed bear a child, now that I am old?’ **14** Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son.” **15** But Sarah denied it, saying, “I did not laugh,” for she was afraid. He said, “No, but you did laugh.”

- Sarah does NOT believe. She laughs – it’s a cynical and bitter laugh. It’s a laugh of unbelief.
- Not many people get a visit from the LORD and she gets one and laughs in God’s face.
- Notice He doesn’t get on to her. He doesn’t berate her – “Don’t you know who I am ... how dare you...” He doesn’t do that.
- Instead, he says, “Is anything too hard for the LORD?”
- Even when Sarah lies (she laughs out of unbelief and now lies out of fear) God simply corrects her – ‘oh no, you laughed’
- Her fear and doubt does NOT stop the Lord from being faithful to his promise.

Genesis 21:1–5 (ESV) **1** The LORD visited Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did to Sarah as he had promised. **2** And Sarah conceived and bore Abraham a son in his old age at the time of which God had spoken to him. **3** Abraham called the name of his son who was born to him, whom Sarah bore him, Isaac. **4** And Abraham circumcised his son Isaac when he was eight days old, as God had commanded him. **5** Abraham was a hundred years old when his son Isaac was born to him.

Look back at Romans 4:13 – notice it says that *he would be heir of the world*

- If the promise of the land was just Canaan land, then why does Paul say the whole world here?
- It has to do with the culmination of the land promise to Abraham. Canaan was a *type* of the new creation to come.
- Often in prophecy there is escalation; the fulfillment is greater than what was originally given.
- Consider what that must mean about the resurrection and the new creation (explain)

You will have resurrection bodies

You will be loved – what’s the most love you’ve ever experienced? It will be MORE.

You will reunite with loved ones

You will have a forever family

He makes all things new

- In the new creation, colors, textures, sights, sounds, smells, tastes all heightened to the full intensity of their potential forever.
- Paradise Lost will become paradise regained. But without the serpent and the pain he brings.
- The city – the new Jerusalem – will be grander than you can think or imagine
- Suffering will be the means for your glory God is working an eternal glory for you...you can’t see it yet, you can only see a dark streak of pain and suffering.
- The power of contrast – today’s suffering is the backdrop of our future glory. It makes our hope and longing for the resurrection and the new creation so much stronger. Diamonds laid on black felt displays the beauty of the diamond. Bob Ross’ black streak becomes the centerpiece of the glorious masterpiece God has created our lives to be. We MUST widen our perspective when it comes to hardships – that something greater, escalation is on the horizon when the butler of death serves us by opening the door to eternal life in His new creation.
- The point of this verse is, however, that the law isn’t what gives us the ultimate new creation – faith is. Israel didn’t get the law for another 430 years.
- Similarly, how Paul debunked the belief that circumcision saves people, he also debunks keeping the law will save you.

Vs 14-15 *For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. 15 For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.*

- Adherents of the law is speaking of the Jewish Christians.

- Transgression is defined as the violation of a revealed command, which means that the Jews, who had the written law, had even greater responsibility for their sin.
- We are given two options for our eternal destiny:
 - (1) inherit the world through Christ by faith, or
 - (2) inherit wrath by trying to earn salvation by the law.

And what makes the difference is believing in the son. You believe in the son, you inherit the world. You don't believe in the son, Wrath is the result.

- God didn't say to Abraham, "Obey this law, and I will bless you forever." He said, "Believe this promise, and I will bless you forever."
- God is saying to the world now, "Believe on Christ and you will be saved and blessed forever."
- All believers, by being in Christ, become heirs of the promise (Gal. 3:29; cf. 1 Cor. 3:21–23).

Vs 16 *That is why 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, who is the father of us all,*

- In other words, if it depends on any of our works, then there is no guarantee.
- I would even go as far as saying that the only guarantee that we would miss the mark – not follow the law.
- The only way for God and mankind to be united is through HIS GRACE alone through faith alone in Christ (the offspring) alone.
- Also notice the familial language Paul is using.
- Justification by faith is not just a doctrine for individual salvation (though it is). It is also a doctrine for the community of faith.
- Believing leads to belonging.
- The church is the community of the justified.
- It is this sense of belonging that enables us to flourish as individuals and even as whole communities.
- Our faith is not a privatized affair. It is a family event
- Paul is basically arguing here, that the Gentiles are part of the family and that has been the purpose from the very beginning.

Vs 17 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.

- Quoting Gen 17:5

Romans 4:18–19 (ESV) 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.” **19** 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.

Hebrews 11:11–12 (ESV) 11 By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised. **12** Therefore from one man, and him as good as dead, were born descendants as many as the stars of heaven and as many as the innumerable grains of sand by the seashore.

- God not only literally created the world out of nothing; he also figuratively gave Abraham and Sarah a child “out of nothing.” He formed a people out of nothing! And he continues to bring spiritual life out of nothing. We believers belong to this people

CONCLUSION:

- Why did God come to Sarah?
- Tim Keller says, “He came to transform her laughter.”

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- Is anything too hard for me?
- The Hebrew word for ‘hard’ is usually translated ‘wonder.’ It’s used throughout the Psalms. “tell of his wonders or his wonderful deeds”
- God literally says, “Is anything too wonderful for me?”

- Here's what he's saying. Sarah is filled with disdain and filled with bitter, cynical laughter because her laughter is devoid of wonder.
- What is wonder? We see it in kids. When they discover something new, a joyful wonder fills their little hearts. You will never see a child miserable when they are in wonder.
- Not only do we need child-like faith, we need child-like wonder. We all need it.
- But something happens when we get older – we lose wonder.
- One of Will's first words was 'plane.' We would be outside and if an airplane flew over, he would stop what he was doing and point to the sky and yell 'plane.' He was in wonder. Now he has a job where he has to fly in airplanes a lot – and guess what... he hates it.
- It takes more and more to fill the heart with wonder.

Gen 21:6-7 *And Sarah said, "God has made laughter for me; everyone who hears will laugh over me." 7 And she said, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age."*

- What filled her with this joyful wonder? What changed her cynical laughing to wonderful laughing?
- It's the gospel story.
- We see this story pointing to a greater story. In Luke 1, an angel comes to Mary with a promise that she would give birth to Jesus.
- As impossible it was for Sarah to have a son with an old husband, how much more impossible was it for Mary to have a son, as the angel said she would, with no husband at all? When Mary says to the angel, "How can this be?" the angel says, in Luke 1:37, "For nothing is impossible with God."
- Why does the angel say the very same thing to Mary that he said to Sarah? Because Jesus is the true Isaac. Jesus is the ultimate Son of Promise.
- "Jesus is the ultimate one in whom we hear the laughter of God's grace triumphing over the impossibilities of our situation, because our situation is far worse than Sarah's" Keller
- We are dead in our sins – we are totally depraved; spiritually bankrupt. It is impossible for us to save ourselves – we need someone to save us. Sarah's dead womb is a

metaphor for our dead souls – yet the God of the impossible makes a way for us – we are simply to believe it.

- The ultimate Isaac, Jesus, comes in to deal with sin and death itself.
- Jesus was living in a world of laughter, but he came into this world and he became a man of sorrows.
- He was always weeping. On the cross, he cried out and he was forsaken. Jesus Christ lost the divine laughter and received the sorrow and the mourning and the weeping and gnashing of teeth we deserve so that we could have the laughter.
- He took our place. He took the condemnation for our sin so we could have forgiveness. He took our death so we could have life.
- Because what's impossible is that you and I should live forever... that you and I, in spite of the way in which we live, would be adopted into the family of God, and yet that's exactly what happens through Jesus Christ, the ultimate Isaac, the ultimate Son of Laughter.
- When we believe the gospel – we get life AND we get wonder. We go from darkness to light, death to life, and bitter laughter to wonderful laughter.
- We believe in a God who raises the dead, who gives life where there is no life who calls into existence, the things that do not exist. He created a people out of nothing. He gives us life when we are spiritually dead. And I think this, this birth of Isaac certainly foreshadows the resurrection of the Lord Jesus

QUESTIONS FOR GROUPS:

- 1 Do you feel like you have lost your laughter – your wonder in life?
- 2 How did God change Sarah's cynical laughter to wonderful, joyful laughter?
- 3 How will God change your cynical laughter into wonderful, joyful laughter?