

Romans: Unashamed; the righteous shall live by faith

Romans 4:20-25 prt 13

MPS: We grow strong in our faith through tests.

INTRO:

- Well today we finish up the first section of the book of Romans by completing chapter four.
- Chapters 1-4 is all about salvation by faith alone
- We will break for the summer with sermons from Psalms and resume Romans Sept 1.
- This is the 3rd week we've been in chapter 4 where Paul uses Abraham as an illustration that we are saved by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone.
- His argument is that because Abraham believed God he was counted righteous by God BEFORE circumcision and 430 before the law. It wasn't Abraham's works, law following, or rituals that saved him – it was simply his faith in God's promise.
- That is also true for us as we walk in the footsteps of the faith of Abraham believing the promise of God that he saves us through faith in Christ alone, not our works.

OPEN:

Romans 4:20 *No unbelief made him [Abraham] waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, 21 fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.*

- It is one thing for a person to start out with faith in God, but many expressions of faith fizzle out like a dud firecracker.
- Paul tells us that Abraham's faith remained steadfast, and it remained steadfast in the midst of a great test.
- Like we have been doing in this chapter, let's go back to Genesis for some context of Abraham's life.

Genesis 22:1–2 (ESV) *1 After these things God tested Abraham and said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am." 2 He said, "Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you."*

- First, notice God is testing Abraham

Hebrews 11:17 (ESV) *17 By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac*

- Paul said that Abraham "grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God"

- We grow strong in our faith through tests.

- A test shows you things about you, and it grows you in areas you're being tested.

ILLUSTRATION: History tests make you study, drive you toward getting the information memorized and even understood. So, tests grow you. The test also shows you what you have actually learned. You get a grade, you see what you missed and what you got right. So, tests shows you and grows you.

Abraham's already been credited as righteousness because of his faith BUT that doesn't mean his faith won't be tested.

- He will grow through this test – just like we grow through tests: (list some life tests)
- Tests of obedience
 - Lying, “If I tell the truth here, I lose everything”
 - Stealing – the opportunity arose, not a big deal, no one will know
 - Confession of sin – “if I open up, my life will blow up”
- Tests of uncertainty:
 - I'm in a place of limbo, I'm not sure what to do.
 - Uncertainty about your job or career,
 - A broken relationship
 - Uncertainty about where you will live or make ends meet
- Tests of suffering:
 - Severe loss
 - Death of a loved one
 - Great disappointment
 - Health issues – dangerous diagnosis

ILLUSTRATION:

In the late 80s and early 90s, scientists built something call the biosphere (or biodome). It was an experiment to see if they could create an ecosystem that would ultimately work in space. It was full of plants, trees, animals, bugs and all.

The project was a failure in many ways, such as all the trees died, but one of the things they learned was that the trees died because there was no wind in the biosphere.

In nature, wind causes trees to bow and creates micro tears and as the tree repairs itself, it gets stronger. We need the winds of testing in our lives to make us stronger.

- Usually, when you are tested, (not tempted) to obey God seems counter intuitive or maybe even foolish.
- God tells Abraham to *offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.*
- Tests feel like mountains to climb.
- Faith fuels us to climb the mountains of testing. Faith in God's promises...
- You know how this story goes, right? Abraham is determined to go through with this seemingly outlandish command God gives him – all the way to the end until the angel of the Lord stops him.
- Have you ever had serious questions about this story? Why would God ask Abraham to murder his child? Isn't this an immoral act? Isn't it contradictory that God would ask Abraham to commit a heinous sin like murder?
- Abraham didn't think that at all. We have to do a little work here to understand what Abraham understood in ancient days.
- Ancient cultures were not individualistic. Today, we have hopes and dreams of individual success, of individual prosperity. Back then, nobody thought that way. Your hopes and your dreams were for the *family's* success, the *family's* prosperity. They didn't think as individuals. They thought as a family
- Because Isaac was the son of the promise, he was considered the firstborn son
- The law of primogeniture was something that was universally practiced by ancient cultures.
- The law of primogeniture means the firstborn got all the inheritance. Here's why.
- Because a family had a certain amount of land and a certain amount of wealth. If it was divided into multiple pieces for multiple children, the family would immediately lose its status and its place in the community. Therefore, it was the firstborn who got everything. Then that firstborn had to be a benefactor [protector, support, patron] for everyone else in the family. That's how the family kept its place.
- All ancient cultures did look to the firstborn as the ultimate hope of the family

Genesis 25:5 (ESV) *5 Abraham gave all he had to Isaac.*

- Now, Exodus 13 tells us that God requires the life of every firstborn male whether beast or human. They would be given as a sacrifice. Only firstborn donkeys and humans could be redeemed and they were redeemed by the sacrifice a lamb.
- Every time God said the life of the firstborn is forfeit, what he was really trying to say is, "There is a debt of sin every family owes to me.
- There's a debt every family owes to justice. There's a debt every human being owes: the debt of sin.
- A God of justice can't overlook it.
- In a family-oriented, not individualistic, society the forfeiture of the firstborn was God's way of saying, "No one is righteous. No, not one." There's a debt of sin everyone has to pay.
- When God says, "Offer up your son Isaac," Abraham realized God was calling in his debt.
- If Abraham had heard a voice that said, "Abraham, go kill Sarah. Then I'll know you obey me," he would have never done it. If it was murder God was asking Abraham to commit, why travel all the way to Moriah and offer him as a burnt offering? Why not just take his life while he slept in his tent?
- Notice its says "your only son" which means the son of the promise
- Isaac has become Abraham's center.
- Son in old age, promise of God,
- Isaac was Abraham's only – what are your 'onlys'?
- "When sin takes a good thing and turns it into your only, your bottom line. *"If only* I was married, everything would be great." You don't say that out loud, but at a deep level you believe it. What happens to you if you do? *"If only* my career would just get to this place. *If only* my achievements got to this place. *If only* I had a certain kind of beauty. If only ... If only ... Then my life would be fine." Tim Keller
- Tests expose your 'onlys.'

But **We grow strong in our faith through tests.**

- Abraham's faith in the promise of God, glorified God. (makes much of God)

- In contrast, unbelievers exchange the glory of God for idols (1:22–23). Faith-filled saints believe in God and live to the glory of God.
- When we come through the tests with our faith intact, we too glorify God and in so doing live out our purpose. (Is 43:7)
- We will make much of someone – either God or ourselves. One leads to joy and satisfaction and the other leads to disintegration because our ‘onlys’ are ruling our life and they are powerless to give eternal hope.

22 *That is why his faith was “counted to him as righteousness.”*

- Paul now bookends the section (see v. 3; Gen 15:6) by saying, “Therefore, it was credited to him for righteousness” (v. 22). God justifies a people for himself by grace through faith, as the story of Abraham illustrates.
- We are not being called simply to admire Abraham here; we are being called to believe in the life-giving God of Abraham
- God knew that Abraham’s faith was not a one-time thing that faded – Abraham’s faith was tested and it turned out to be genuine.

23 *But the words “it was counted to him” were not written for his sake alone, **24** but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord,*

- We are not being called simply to admire Abraham here; we are being called to believe in the life-giving God of Abraham.
- Faith involves trusting in God’s divine faithfulness.

25 *who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.*

- When God the Father raised Christ from the dead, it was a demonstration that he accepted Christ’s suffering and death as full payment for sin,
- The Father’s favor, no longer his wrath against sin, was directed toward Christ, and through Christ toward those who believe.
- Since Paul sees Christians as united with Christ in his death and resurrection, God’s approval of Christ at the resurrection results in God’s approval also of all who are united to Christ, and in this way results in our “justification.”
- WHEN WE BELIEVE. But our faith needs to be tested to see if it is true faith.

- Let's finish the story of Abraham and Isaac

Genesis 22:7–8 (ESV) **7** *And Isaac said to his father Abraham, “My father!” And he said, “Here I am, my son.” He said, “Behold, the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering?”* **8** *Abraham said, “God will provide for himself the lamb for a burnt offering, my son.” So they went both of them together.*

- God will provide the lamb.
- The word ‘provide’ is most often translated as ‘see’ (739 of 1308 times)

Genesis 1:3–4 (ESV) **3** *And God said, “Let there be light,” and there was light.* **4** *And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness.*

- Faith is trusting what God sees when we can't see.

Hebrews 11:1 (ESV) **1** *Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*

- Abraham could not see God's provision
- God sees – the mountain is a cone, Abraham could only see one dimension, but God was sending the answer to Abraham on a dimension he couldn't see.
- His faith is tested.
- But Hebrews gives us even more insight with what Abraham was thinking.

Hebrews 11:17–19 (ESV) **17** *By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up Isaac, and he who had received the promises was in the act of offering up his only son, **18** of whom it was said, “Through Isaac shall your offspring be named.”* **19** *He considered that God was able even to raise him from the dead, from which, figuratively speaking, he did receive him back.*

- You have not been tested until you see that to obey God looks like it will lead to a kind of death and it will require some resurrection. Abraham was walking along and he was saying, “If I obey you, this will mean death. How in the world can death bring blessing?”

Genesis 22:11–12 (ESV) **11** *But the angel of the LORD called to him from heaven and said, “Abraham, Abraham!” And he said, “Here I am.”* **12** *He said, “Do not lay your hand on the boy or do anything to him, for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your son, your only son, from me.”*

- “I see you will give up (exchange, trade, trade-in) your ‘only’ to have me.”
- The ram in the bushes caught in the thorns (picture of crown of thorns.)
- God saw His answer coming up the mountain before Abraham did, God provided this substitute for Abraham so he wouldn’t need to sacrifice his son as a payment for his family’s sin debt.
- But it points to a truer story

Keller says it this way:

If Abraham had been at the foot of Calvary the moment Jesus died, do you know what he would have done? He would have taken the words of God to him in verse 12 and turned them around.

He would have looked up at the Father, and he would have said, “Now I know! Now I know! Now I know that you love me, because you did not withhold your Son, your only Son, whom you love, from me.” How do you know God loves you and values you and delights in you so much that you can really rest in that and be free from the enslavement to people, enslavement to situations, enslavement to circumstances? How can you know? How can you know he loves you like that?

Not abstractly. Not by saying, “I’m just going to trust in him.” By the Spirit, you have to see Abraham and Isaac going up the mountain was a picture of the price the Father paid at Calvary. It has to move you, and it has to change you. You have to, from the bottom of your heart by the power of the Spirit, say, “Now I know. Now I know! Now I know that you love me, because you gave your Son. You did not withhold your Son, your only Son, whom you love, from me.”

- And then, God’s ONLY not only took our place on the cross, but he was raised from the dead – the Bible calls him the first born from the dead (Col 1:18). (also first born of all creation).
- He is the only son that represents our whole family of faith. Jews and Gentiles.
- He is the firstborn son that gets the inheritance and is our benefactor – and praise be to God for all who persevere to the end – keep the faith in the testing, a glorious resurrection will be given to us by our ultimate Isaac, our ultimate benefactor who was sacrificed for the whole family that we may live.

who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

- We can look forward to this resurrection one day too – but in the meantime, there are mountains of tests we must climb – keeping our eyes on Jesus and His promise.

CONCLUSION:

- We begin the Christian life by faith and continue by faith. Your faith will be tested. Do you just want God to bless you with your 'onlys' or do you want God?

QUESTIONS FOR GROUPS:

- 1 Discuss a time when your faith was tested.
- 2 How did/does the gospel give you growing faith in times of testing?