Romans 4:16-25 The Promise of God

Romans 4:16-25

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, 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. 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. 20 No unbelief made him 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. 22 That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness." 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, 25 who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

Introduction

● Have any of you ever had to wait for months, or even years for God to fulfill a promise to you? When I graduated from seminary, I went to pastor a church in Yokohama, and within a few years we planned to build a new sanctuary. The whole congregation felt that God had made a new promise to us in making the plans for this building.

● However, it took 10 years for us to see that promise fulfilled. We failed to purchase the land next to ours, and the plan to renew the ground we were currently on was stuck in a deadlock. We prayed for new land and for our new building, but despite all the ups and downs it wasn't coming to fruition. We had just given up when in 2004 God finally made his promise to us come true.

● The Bible says that if we believe in Jesus, God has promised to bless us. This promise of blessing was first given to the man Abraham around 2000BC. (It was probably around 1800BC, but archeologically ancient times are counted by the 1000s.) Then in the 1st century (AD), Christ came and fulfilled that promise.

● Why did Abraham and his descendants have to wait to see God's promise to them brought to fruition? There are probably many among you who are also in that season of waiting and long to believe in the truth of God's promises to you. What we learn from today's passage is that God always fulfills his promises, exactly as he says.

Romans 4:16-25

● Let's take a look at the wonderful promises God makes to Abraham in this passage. First we will look at the content of what God has promised. He made a covenant with Abraham that through his descendants all the nations of the world would be blessed. Secondly, we will see the

process of how God fulfills his promise. How does he accomplish what he promised to Abraham? We will look with the eyes of faith at how God shows his abundant mercy and power.

● Thirdly and finally, we will talk about the key to enduring faith in God's promises. I hope this will encourage our oft-doubting hearts. God's mercy has the power to strengthen our weak faith. **1. The promise of God 2. The power of mercy 3. The key to faith**

1. The Promise of God

● In the passage we just read (Romans 4) the apostle Paul refers to Abraham who is often considered a champion of faithfulness and even called a "Father of Faith". People reading this would have thought in order to receive this great blessing that Paul is talking about, they must follow the example of Abraham.

● But Abraham is not just an example to be followed. He is of course an example of faith for us to observe and admire, but he is not the model we are to seek to imitate. The promise of blessing for all the nations was given to Abraham, but as is written in the Old Testament, the promise is constantly renewed until at last Christ comes and by his death and resurrection finally fulfills it.

● What Paul is trying to say here is that God's promise to Abraham has never changed. Just as Abraham was given a promise based on the covenant between himself and God, we in the 21st century receive blessing based on that same God, that same covenant. What has been accomplished through Christ and remains true for us, so that through faith we are given the same rights and blessings as Abraham.

> ○ 4:16 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".

● So if Abraham's faith in the promise of God was counted to him as righteousness (meaning through faith he received salvation and blessing) then on the basis of the same covenant both these first century Gentiles in Romans as well as us here in the 21st century are also saved through faith. Through faith, we are seen as righteous and receive blessing from the Lord.

> ○ In 2012, "The Treaty of Trade and Navigation between the Netherlands and Japan", was rediscovered 100 years after having first been established. In the city of Rotterdam, there is a Japanese culture center named the "Shofukan", and in 2012 they invited a Japanese architecture specialist to come and build a traditional tea house and garden for the center. However according to the Dutchb authorities, this transaction was illegal and the group was fined a large sum for the offense. The group filed a lawsuit and in court the treaty of 1912 was rediscovered which said that Japanese workers were guaranteed the right to the Netherlands to work without an official work permit. Both the Dutch authorities and those in Japan had completely forgotten about this treaty, but through the resurrection of this 100 year old treaty, Japan was able to receive what is referred to as a "most favoured nation" status within the Netherlands.

● In the same way, generations may come and go, but God's promises and his covenant remain the same. Even if people forget and hardships come, God's promises are true. Through

faith in Jesus, all who believe may receive the blessing of God. This is what Paul is trying to emphasize here in Romans 4.

● However there will be many people who will say something like this, "If God has given this promise of blessing to all people, why is there so much suffering and hardship in this life? There is no way I can believe that his promises are true and the privileges he says we have are really mine." But this promise to Abraham has in fact already been proven true. Just like that Holland-Japan treaty was resurrected after 100 years, if you are able to discover and believe in God's promise, you may receive that blessing too!

○ 4:17-18 "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 and calls into existence the things that do not exist. 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'."

● From the very beginning, God's promise wasn't only to the people of Israel. It was to "many nations". To every tribe and nation, language and culture, all different lifestyles, customs, and history, to every nation God gives his promise of blessing. You could also say it this way:

● Even those who break the law and practice immorality, even those who aren't religious like those who have the sign of circumcision, all are recipients of God's blessing. Even if you have no interest in the promises of God (although by doing this I think you lose out on so much), He still makes this promise of blessing to you.

2. The Power of Grace

● So what was that original promise to Abraham? Genesis 12:2-3

○ "I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."

● Shockingly, at the time he was given this magnificent promise, we don't actually know if Abraham was a believer. There is no proof as to whether at this time he believed in God as the one and only Creator of all things. In actuality, Abraham's beliefs were likely very similar to many Japanese people who at some level believe in 8 million gods, and though they may not ascribe to any one religion they show interest in spiritual things. His spiritual context in that way was very similar to ours today.

● Yet God chose Abraham to receive his promise. Why? Because his promise was made on the basis of grace alone. It was not because of any faith that Abraham had. It was not because he was a loyal follower of God's laws. We do have his family tree, but we don't know much at all about his family of origin or his lineage. Whatever kind of person he was, whatever his nature, God did not see this as a problem. God's promise was his mercy, and he was going to accomplish it by his own power. Ephesians 1:4

○ "Even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and blameless before him"

● What I desire for you to know is that God's salvation and blessing of his people is something that originates from God himself. Before we acknowledged him, before we felt our need of him, God had begun his work of salvation. But it wasn't just that we didn't believe in him. We ignored him, made him an enemy, and ran away from him. Despite all of this, God chose us and fulfilled his promises to us.

● Abraham did not have within himself the power to fulfill God's promise. There was no way that Abraham could fulfill his side of the covenant through his own efforts.

○ 4:19-21 "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, cully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised."

● God made a great promise to 99 year old Abraham and 90 year old Sarah that Abraham would be the "Father of many nations". This is both scientifically and medically an absurd statement. However the Lord said this:

○ Genesis 17:1-2 "When Abram was 99 years old the Lord appeared to Abram and said, 'I am God Almighty; walk before me, and be blameless, that I may make my covenant between me and you, and may multiply you greatly'."

● If you were to ask "How do God's covenant blessings and promises come to fruition?" the Bible would answer "By God's own omnipotent power He has the power to accomplish everything he promises!". In verse 17 it says that God "calls into existence things that do not exist". In this small phrase, we are reminded that God created the whole world out of nothing.

● A phrase that is often repeated in seminary is "Creatio ex Nihilo", or "creation from nothing". In a world where there was absolutely nothing, he gave life to all creation by the power of his words alone. The same power that brought this whole world into existence is the power that is at work in bringing you salvation and blessing.

○ Recently, there have been reports that many young people with great potential who had pinned their hopes on the future have been committing suicide. The pro-wrestler who starred in a reality TV show, the young actor who was a rising star. In fact, the number one cause of death for people in their 20s is suicide. That these young people would face such crushing anxiety, deep conflict, and pain that it ultimately led to death is utterly heartbreaking.

● Brothers and Sisters, the promise of God made real in Christ is offered to you. It is not a dependent upon your own strength or your current situation. The power of God that created the heavens and earth is at work in you to bring about salvation and blessing in your life. Even if it means a long period of waiting, the powerful mercy of God is at work.

3. The Key to Faith

● Therefore, brothers and sisters, the most important thing is to believe. This belief is given to us from God just as freely as a birthday present from a loving father to his child. It is belief in and acceptance of the Lord Jesus Christ through whom the promise to Abraham was fulfilled and the whole world received blessing.

○ 4:23-25 "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."

● There are probably some among you watching who don't yet believe in Jesus. Maybe some of you have accepted Jesus, but you are struggling with faith and continue to have doubts about what is true. How can you believe, how can you have assurance of these things I have been talking about? Look at verses 18-21 with me.

○ "In hope he believed against hope...he did not weaken in faith. 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."

● Are you someone who longs for this kind of faith? Or have you given up on having the kind of faith Abraham seems to have had? The truth is that in Genesis 17-18, when Abraham and Sarah were given the news that they would give birth, it wasn't so easy for them to believe either. When God promised to the almost 100 year old Abraham that his wife Sarah would have a child,

> ○ Genesis 17:17 "Abraham fell on his face and laughed and said to himself, 'Shall a child be born to a man who is a hundred years old? Shall Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child.?'"

● We see through his reaction here that he didn't truly believe. Also, when the messenger from God told 90 year old Sarah that this time next year she would be pregnant,

○ Genesis 18:12 "So Sarah laughed to herself saying, 'After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?'"

● Not only did they lack assurance, they doubted the very words of God. If this is true, it is a glaring contradiction to the "Father of Faith" title Paul gives to Abraham. What does this mean, then? Let's take a minute to think about two things. First, Abraham trusted the Lord his God. His faith in the person of God did not change. However it seems it was hard for him to accept the specific words of God's promise to him.

● Secondly, through testing they were able to move to a place of assurance in their faith. There is a process by which our faith matures into assurance. When we are tested by

God, our faith is trained, strengthened, deepened, and brought to maturity. There was a time I was challenged by God's words and my weak faith was knocked down. But through the process of this I was changed, and I grew to a place of assurance and deep faith.

○ Last year, I was in the process of studying the Bible with a new Christian in preparation for his baptism. We were having a conversation about this question, "What do you value, in what ways have you seen growth in your faith recently?" This man's job was as a producer and coordinator for construction projects. Before becoming a Christian, his main purpose in his work was his own success, money, honor, and pride. Because of this, he constantly feared making mistakes, wondered what value he had in himself, and often battled frustration and anxiety.

○ But since coming to trust in Jesus, and receiving forgiveness of sin and eternal blessing, he had begun to feel a deep peace and stability. Since he had begun to believe in Jesus, his former anger and frustration had gone away. His mental strain and insecurities had minimized, and everyone said he had become a much calmer man.

○ Additionally, he was being asked by those around him questions about how to do well at their jobs, and how he was able to seem so calm and at peace in his work. He was even asked for his advice on leadership issues. Because of all this, he said that to be seen as a leader who supports those around him was truly what he valued and saw as his treasure now.

● Brothers and Sisters, we see in verse 25 of our passage today that what makes our faith a reality is not our own heart or our own efforts. It says that "[Jesus] was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification." Our Lord Jesus who died to forgive our sins and give us his righteousness, who was raised to life for our blessing, he is the one who gives us true faith.

● If there are those among you who don't yet believe in Christ, think for a moment about what wonderful things God promises to those who believe. For those of you who believe, but still struggle with doubt, gaze upon Christ in faith. Recognize the foolishness of looking only to yourself and look in faith upon the one you died and was raised to life for you.