

The Promise that Changes Everything

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[0:00] Welcome to this week's message from Faith Bible Church of Lake Charles.! We're excited to share a practical Bible-based teaching that we hope will encourage you! and strengthen your faith. Thanks for listening. Now, here's today's message.

All right, let me ask you a question this morning. Have you ever made a promise that you didn't keep? Maybe you promised one of your kids that you would make it to a game or you take them out. Tunding or fishing or to the park and work got in the way or sickness got in the way. Or maybe you promised to yourself that you'd get healthy this year and then here we are. I mean, it happens to all of us. What if somebody else made you? Has anybody else made a promise to you and just didn't follow through? Maybe a friend said they would be there for you and they just didn't show up. That happens. Here's the thing about promises.

They're only as good as the person who makes them. And that's exactly where the Apostle Paul is taking us here in chapter number four in the book of Romans this morning.

Because the burning question that was in the minds of the Apostle Paul's readers, his original readers, was how can anyone be sure that they are actually right with God?

[1:18] Is it by what we do? Is it keeping the law? Is it what family that we belong to? We've traced our roots back. Because for many of the Apostle Paul's readers, they were convinced that the answer was tied to the law and to their birthright. If they obeyed enough, if they performed enough, they measured up enough, or they were born into the right family, then God would accept them.

So that's what the Apostle Paul has been talking about from chapter three and also now getting into chapter number four. And Paul says, no, that's not the way we get right with God. It didn't work for Abraham and it doesn't work for us that way either. It's never worked that way before. And what Paul shows us in these five verses this morning that we're going to be looking at is possibly one of the most freeing portions of Scripture. And it's the truth that changes everything about how we become right with God. How do we receive the righteousness of God? And here it is. And it's really broken down to this. This is the main idea. God's promise to you doesn't depend on your performance.

It depends on His grace received by faith. In other words, His promise is not based on you. It's based on Him. It's based on the promise giver, not the promise receiver to deserve it or to be able to keep it. That's it. God's promise doesn't depend on us. It doesn't depend on anything we do. It doesn't depend on our performance. It's all on His grace, undeserved favor that He gives to us, and that we receive it by faith. It's very obvious that the New Testament teaches it. But Paul has been bringing the point across to his readers that the same was true all the way back to Abraham, their father in the faith. God's promise doesn't depend on our performance, but on His grace. Now, that sounds simple, doesn't it? Living it, though, is where it gets a little tougher to live that out.

Because everything in our culture, and honestly, even everything in our hearts, screams the opposite. So let's read our text. I'll read all the verses this morning. Then we'll go back, and then we will unpack them together. Romans 4, 13 through 17. Verse 13, for the promise that He would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. Remember, we had read a couple of Sundays ago that Abraham's faith, that's how God credited to him righteousness, not because He kept the law. The law came way later, and not because of circumcision, because circumcision came 14 years later. God accredited righteousness to Abraham's account, because Abraham believed the promise that God gave him. Verse 14, for if those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of no

effect.

We'll unpack that in just a moment. Because the law brings about wrath, for there is no law, for where there is no law, there is no transgression. Now that might sound a little bit unusual. Again, we'll unpack that as well, because that was made to Abraham. Verse 16, therefore it is a faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all. As it is written, verse 17, I have made you a father of many nations in the presence of him whom you believed, God who gives life to the dead, and calls those things which do not exist as though they did. Now let's set the stage for what the Apostle Paul is saying here. Paul has been building this argument since chapter 3, and he's already established that righteousness with God does not come through the law, does not come through birth, Jew or Gentile.

[5:52] It's made available to everyone, and everyone can be declared righteous before God, not on the basis of what they do, but on the basis of the promise. Because all have sinned. All have come short of the glory of God.

Paul made that very clear in Romans chapter 3, verse number 23. The law was never designed to save anyone. It was designed to show us that we need saving. That was the purpose of the law. Then Paul brings up Abraham.

Why Abraham? Because Abraham was the ultimate trump card for the Jews. They said, well, we are of Abraham. Abraham's our father. Abraham is the progenitor of our race. Abraham is the one who started all of this.

He was the father of the nation. He was the original chosen one. And if anyone had standing before God, it was Abraham, right? So that's where Paul is speaking from. And so Paul says, let's talk about that.

So in verses 1 through 12, Paul's already shown us that Abraham's faith, it was because of Abraham's faith that God credited righteousness to his account, not because of anything he did. Because circumcision came later.

[7:06] It was Abraham's believing of the promise that allowed God, by grace, to make him right before God, if you will. Not because of anything he did. Circumcision didn't earn Abraham any brownie points.

All it did was, it was an outward sign of what already existed in the relationship between Abraham and God. It was just an outward sign, excuse me, of that what already had happened by faith.

Now in verses 13 through 17, Paul goes a step further. It was not because of circumcision that Abraham was justified before God, but he says, excuse me, he was justified before the law was ever given.

We said circumcision came 14 years later, but the law came through Moses 430 years after Abraham.

So what does that tell us? Abraham was, that was already accomplished. Abraham was gone by the time Moses comes through and the law was given to Moses.

[8:19] So if Abraham was made right with God apart from the law, then the law was never the path of righteousness or the path to righteousness with God.

That was pretty explosive for the Jews who were reading what the apostle Paul was laying down. That doesn't make sense, Paul. We thought the law was where it was.

We thought circumcision was the sign that made us right before God. And Paul kind of blew that out of the water. He says, it was by faith. It was always my faith.

And it's still by faith. Abraham was made right with God, not by the law, not by circumcision, but because of his faith. They turned the entire Jewish religious system on its head, or at least the way they believed it in the first century.

So the point one this morning of where we are is, stop trying to earn what you've already been given. Stop trying to earn what's already been provided by Jesus Christ through his death on the cross.

[9:20] There are so many people around the world today and all around our neighborhoods that are trying to earn what Jesus already made possible. Jesus died on the cross, paying an eternal payment.

The one who was sinless became sin for us, the Bible says, so that we might be made right with God by faith, by grace through faith, by grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone. That's salvation. That's how it comes. So verse 13, let's look at it again. For the promise that he, Abraham, would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.

So Paul's crystal clear. Abraham's faith is what allowed him to be declared righteous, not the law. It came through faith. Abraham didn't earn his rightness before God.

It came through faith. Now, how did that come through? What did God give in verse 13? He gave a promise. That word promise is important.

[10:39] This isn't just a casual statement of intent. What it was, was it was a formal declaration. It was a binding commitment.

And when God makes a promise, what's he doing? He's putting his reputation on the line. If God gives a promise and he doesn't carry through, then he says, well, God, you're not good at, your word's not good.

I remember there was a time when there still were contracts, but I remember my grandfather who was a farmer back then, and he would go to the local bank if he needed a loan, and he would talk to the bank manager.

And basically on a handshake, he would agree to the loan. And he said, just come in, come in next week, and we'll sign the papers. But a handshake meant something.

And it should still. And so, but the promise is as good as the person who makes it. And there are those who we wouldn't trust their handshake because we know their character. So it depends.

[11:38] The promise depends on the one who makes the promise. God was putting his reputation on the line. Unlike human promises that fail, a God promise never, never fails.

It's backed by his character, and it's also backed by his power. And we see an unusual statement here. What did he say Abraham would be? The, huh?

The heir of the world. Now, did God promise Abraham the world necessarily? Not in so many words when he made the promise.

He said he would promise him a portion of land. He would promise him a certain area. But it's bigger, I believe, than Abraham ever, ever imagined.

Nowhere in Genesis did God explicitly say to Abraham, I'll make you heir of the entire world. God promised him the land of Canaan, and he promised that his descendants would be numerous as the stars.

[12:39] And he promised that all the people would be blessed through Abraham. But Paul, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, expands the scope of the promise.

So through Abraham's seed, all the nations will be blessed. Who specifically was that being spoken of? Hmm? Who was the seed that would bless the entire world?

The Messiah, Jesus, ultimately would come through the lineage of David, ultimately coming from Abraham. Through Jesus, the whole world would be blessed, and all those who trust Jesus Christ as their Savior became heirs of the promise.

So through Abraham, he was made heir of the entire world. The inheritance isn't just land. The inheritance is a kingdom. It is the kingdom of God. So the word heir means one who receives an inheritance.

Abraham wasn't told he would earn the world. He was told he would inherit it. We don't earn salvation. We receive it, and we become heirs of the promise based on our faith and trust in Jesus Christ.

[13:46] But here's where many get it wrong. They said, okay, great. This is a, God gave me a gift. Now I need to earn my keep. That's not the way salvation works. That's not the way grace works at all.

We take the gospel of grace. Many people take the gospel of grace and turn it into a performance system. I got salvation by faith or by grace through faith, but if I want to keep it, I need to earn it to keep it.

Does that make sense? That's not how a gift works. Does someone give a gift, and then they come back along and say, you know, you're not using it right. I'll take that gift back.

God doesn't work that way. Some people might, but God doesn't work that way. It's a gift that he gives. We don't have to earn it. You know, sometimes people think if I pray hard enough, if I read my Bible enough, serve enough, give enough, avoid enough sin or avoid certain sins, then God will really love me and I'll keep my salvation.

Then I'll really belong. Then I'll have security. What does the Bible say? We have been sealed by the Holy Spirit until the day of redemption.

[14:58] God sealed us. We didn't seal the deal. God sealed the deal, and it was an unconditional promise that all who come to me in faith will receive salvation.

God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life. And he gives it as a promise. He gives it that he will remove our sin. He will forgive us, and he will bring us into his family. So the whole point of inheritance is you don't work for it. You receive it.

You only have to accept it. You obey because of who you are. Think about it this way. When your kids were young, did they have to obey you to earn their place in the family?

No. They already have a place in the family. They obey you, hopefully, because they love you. And they want to... Excuse me. Obedience is a response to belonging.

[16:01] It's not a pathway to belonging. And that's the way it works in the human system. That's the way it works with God. And here's what I think we need to understand. When we try to add performance to God's system of grace, we don't enhance the gospel.

What we do is we gut it. What does verse 14 say? For if those who are of the law are heirs, if we're heirs because we obey the law, we follow the Ten Commandments, he said, faith is made void and the promise of no effect.

So anyone today who's trying to keep their salvation by working for it or being good enough to keep it, in other words, the Apostle Paul says, then you make grace empty.

You empty, you gut grace of everything. So he says, if those who are of the law are heirs, then faith is made void, and the promise was made of no effect.

So Paul said, if salvation was by the law, then faith is made void. Now the word means emptied.

Then we empty the promise. We drain faith of all its meaning if we try to keep it.

[17:20] So that's the point Paul's trying to get across. So here's what we can do this week. Ask yourself, where are you trying to earn God's approval? Where are you trying to be good in order to rest or to earn God's approval instead of simply resting it?

Where am I performing for acceptance instead of living from acceptance? It's a trap that we can find ourselves in. To be good in order to stay right with God.

We just receive it and we live as a result of it. And we honor and please God. We simply obey Him.

So stop trying to earn what we've already been given if you trusted Christ as your Savior.

And secondly, we need to embrace grace because the law can't save us. Nothing that we can do will ever make us right with God. Look at verses 14 and 15 where we were.

For if those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made void, the promise is made of no effect. Verse 15. Because the law, what does the law do? If we just try to keep the Old Testament law, what does it say?

[18:28] It brings wrath. Now you say, well, do we make God angry? No. God's angry at sin. And God is going to pour out His wrath against sin.

He already did it when Jesus Christ was on the cross. Jesus Christ earned salvation for us. Him who knew no sin became sin for us.

And He took care of that. This is one of the most misunderstood sections, I believe, in Romans.

Paul isn't saying the law is bad. The law is holy. But the law reveals God's character.

The law also shows us what righteousness looks like. But here's the problem. The law shows us how far short we fall.

Because we cannot keep it. So Paul says the law brings about wrath. Why? Because the law exposes sin. And it turns vague moral failure into specific identifiable sins.

[19:36] This is where we miss the mark. This is where God says this is perfection. And we can't hit perfection. We can't get that high. Think of

it like a speed limit sign. Before you see the sign, you might be driving 55 in a 35.

Are you breaking the law? Technically, yes. But when the sign is there, we are shown and now it becomes a knowing violation. We know that we are breaking the law.

The sign didn't make you speed. It just made your speed an official offense. So that's what the law did. That's what the law does. It takes what's already there in our hearts and it kind of puts a spotlight on it.

It says, you see, you missed the mark. You are not perfect. It identifies it and it condemns sin because of that.

And here's the promise. Here's the problem. If the promise depends on keeping the law, then no one could ever receive the promise. Because no one can ever be good enough.

[20:37] The Bible says, all have sinned and come short or fall short of the glory of God. The first time Abraham sinned. Think about it. God gave Abraham the promise. The first time Abraham sinned.

The first time Isaac, first time Jacob would have sinned. Then the promise would have been taken away. If it depended on keeping the law. The promise would have been nullified.

But God didn't base the promise on the law. And he based it on grace. So here's what verse 15 really is talking about. For where there's no law, there's no transgression.

Righteousness wasn't based on the law. So sin can't nullify the promise. Because his righteousness was provided apart from the law.

So just because Abraham was a human being and he sinned, it didn't take away the promise because the promise wasn't based on the law. Well, Warren Wiersbe in his commentary on this passage puts it this way.

[21:37] He says, the law was not given to save men, but to show that men need to be saved. And like we've said before, the law was like an MRI. An MRI just shows us the problem.

An MRI never cured anyone. It just showed us how sick we were or what the problem is. And diagnosis is not treatment.

That's what the law is. The law diagnoses the Holy Spirit and what Jesus Christ did on the cross. Diagnoses or treats the problem. He died in our place. So why do many people keep trying to keep the law?

Because we misunderstand. That's not the way we receive righteousness. So this week, think about it. Identify one way maybe that we're trying to clean ourselves up before coming to God. Maybe trying to keep the law. Trying to be good. Just come to God as you are. Embrace grace because the law can't save us. And then number three, trust the God who brings everything into existence.

[22:43] Look at verses 16 and 17. Therefore, based on everything Paul said, Abraham wasn't made right with God through the law because the law came years after Abraham.

Because if we become heir of the promise through the law, then we make the promise of no effect because we couldn't keep it. God makes a promise, an unconditional promise.

Therefore, it is of faith that it might be according to grace so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only those who are of the law, all those who were under the law, but to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.

And then a parenthetical statement. As it is written, he said to Abraham, I have made you a father of many nations. In the presence of him whom he believed, God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did.

This is kind of the crescendo of the passage. This is where it's all leading to. Paul says the promise to Abraham came by faith so that it might be according to God's grace.

[23:55] We could never earn it so that it could be guaranteed. Look at the word there. He says in verse 16, that it therefore is of faith so that the promise might be sure, he says, to all seed so that it might be guaranteed.

Did you catch that? That it might be guaranteed. The word behind that word sure means firm. It means reliable. It means certain. God promised it and he gave this guarantee.

The promise, if the promise depended on our performance, then could the promise be guaranteed? No, because we would sin.

So in order for the promise to be guaranteed, it had to be based on God and his ability, his power, his character, and not on our performance.

It could never be certain. We'd always be wondering, did I do enough? Did I sin enough? Will God keep me if I don't keep my end of the deal? But because the promise was based on grace through faith, it's absolutely secure.

[25:06] This is another area where we can base the certainty of our salvation because the promise to receive righteousness from God or to get right with God is based on God's promise through faith, by grace through faith, not anything that we can do.

Now notice who the promise is for. The promise is not just for those who are under the law, ethnic Jews, whom Paul was referring to, but also those who are of the faith of Abraham.

Remember a few verses ago, those who were here, Paul said that God became the father of all those who would believe in Jesus Christ. Not just those who were ethnic Jews.

He said anyone who receives the gospel, who trusts in Jesus Christ as their Savior, becomes a child of Abraham. They would be, they would really be, and any Jews who believed in the gospel and trusted Jesus Christ as their Savior, would become a completed Jew.

Would become a true Jew. One who follows Christ as their Savior. So Jew and Gentile, everyone who believes in Jesus Christ, Abraham is the father of all who trust God, regardless of their background.

[26:20] Now that was radical for a Jew in their day. That would have been difficult for them to wrap their mind around. Without being Jewish, without being circumcised, it means someone could be made right with God. And they can share in the promise that we think is ours too.

But what Paul does is he grounds it in Scripture. He quotes Genesis chapter 15, verse number 5. I have made you the father of many nations, not just the nation of Israel.

So God made that promise all the way back in Genesis, that Abraham would be the father of many nations. And so the promise has always been bigger than Israel.

God included you and God included, isn't that good news? God included you and God included me when he made that promise. Because through Jesus Christ, all the world would be blessed.

And you and I would be able to share in that promise through faith in Jesus Christ. And then what Paul describes here is the God in whom Abraham believed.

[27:21] Here's where it gets really, really personal. Abraham believed in the God who brings dead things to life. If you know anything about Abraham and Sarah, when God gave the promise, he calls things into existence that never existed before.

Think about Abraham's situation. He was nearly 100 years old. Sarah is 90. Their bodies, reproductively speaking, were for all intents and purposes dead.

And there was no way that she could have conceived. And so Paul says in the next verse that they were as good as dead, reproductively. And God says, you are going to be the father of many nations.

This is the same God who noticed, we notice who did what? Who spoke everything to his existence. Before God said, let there be light, there was no light. Before God said, let there be land, there was no land.

Before God said, let there be animals, there was no animals, no plants to the field. And so God spoke everything into existence that before did not exist. So when God gave the promise to Abraham that you're going to be the father of many nations, it was kind of not a stretch, was it?

[28:34] Because God had already brought into existence something out of nothing. And so it was a small thing for God to follow through on the promise for Abraham and Sarah to bear a child.

So he says, through you will be bearing a child. And this is the God who speaks over your life as well. The God who created everything into existence.

So think about it. What's dead in your life right now that God can bring back? What situation looks possible? What relationship that you're concerned about that you think is beyond hope?

There's nothing with God that is beyond hope. Abraham had to believe God and the promise that he gave him. The God who created the cosmos. The God who created everything and spoke it into existence.

So here's what we need to see. Our faith isn't powerful because of us. Your faith is powerful because of the object of your faith. That's something that we need to get.

[29:36] Our faith isn't powerful because we have enough faith to believe. Our faith is powerful because the mustard seed faith that we have is based in someone who can never, ever do it wrong.

And he will always follow through on his promise. So when our faith is placed in God, that faith is sure. We're not trusting in our ability to believe hard enough.

We're trusting in the God who calls everything into existence. So whatever it is that we're facing now, it could be a health issue. It could be a job issue. It could be a relationship issue.

You're trusting in the God who calls things into existence. Your faith is not based, or your faith is not limited by your failure. He speaks life into dead things.

So here's the thing. Identify this week one area in your life, maybe where you stopped trusting that God can accomplish something. It might be in the salvation of a loved one.

[30:39] It might be in something in your life. Trust God and ask him to renew your faith and ask him to help you trust again, not because we're strong, but because of who he is.

Trust the God that calls all things into existence. So here's what we've seen in these five verses. God's promise to us isn't based on our performance.

It depends on his grace that we receive through faith. We don't have to earn our way in. The law is not the way. Obeying God is not the way. Going to church, becoming a church member, getting baptized is not the way.

It's faith in Jesus Christ. Everything else is an external that just is there to show what's already happened inside by faith.

So stop trying to earn what we've already been given. So maybe you're here this morning and you've never actually placed, or you're listening to this message and you've never actually placed your faith and trust in Jesus Christ.

[31:44] Well, I have good news for you. You can stop trying to earn it. Just simply receive by faith that Jesus Christ died on the cross in your place and that he paid for your sin and that all we need to do is trust what he did on the cross and you will receive forgiveness of your sin.

So if we believe that we have to work or be good enough or clean up our lives, that's not the gospel. That's religion. God says, That's it.

Simply believe the promise. Maybe you're already a believer, but maybe you've drifted a bit. God says, Come back. I am always there waiting for you.

Come home to grace. Maybe you're facing a situation right now that seems in your life insurmountable. Trust God. Remember who God is. He gives life to that which is dead.

He brings things into existence that did not exist before. Will you trust him? Let's pray. Father, this morning as we've seen in your word that rightness with you, righteousness didn't come through the law, but it came through faith in the promise.

[33:07] So help us today to trust in you that you can accomplish, that you can complete everything that you promised to us.

And we just simply need to trust you. Lord, be with each one here today. Father, please be with those who are ill today. We pray that you would bring healing into their lives.

We thank you for what you're going to accomplish in us and through us this week. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Thanks for joining us today.

We hope this message encouraged you and gave you something to apply to your life this week. If you'd like to learn more about Faith Bible Church or connect with us, visit our website at meetfaith.org.

We'd love to hear from you. Have a great week, and we'll see you next time. Thank you.