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Sermon Notes

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How True Faith Glorifies God: Abraham's Example

Romans 4:17-22

I. What Kind of Faith Justifies Sinners?

A. Justification by faith alone: Paul's single-minded passion

B. James's NEGATIVE clarification: what kind of faith DOES NOT justify?

Dead faith: James 2:14 In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead.

Demon faith: James 2:19 You believe that there is one God. Good! Even the demons believe that--and shudder.

Useless faith: James 2:20 You foolish man, do you want evidence that faith without deeds is useless?

C. Paul's POSITIVE approach: Abraham's example of true faith

Romans 4:1 "What then shall we say that Abraham our forefather discovered in this matter?"

D. Paul's Purpose in Romans 4: A Word to Believers in Christ

Romans 4:23-24 The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone,²⁴ but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness--for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.

Paul uses Abraham's experience as a paradigm of saving faith for everyone... Jew and gentile both are saved the same way. Therefore, what Abraham discovered in this matter is extremely relevant to us now. The exact same faith that justified Abraham must also justify us... therefore, if we want complete forgiveness of sins, we must walk in the footsteps of the same faith that Abraham our father in faith walked.

II. Abraham's Example: True Faith (vs. 17-21)

- True Faith Contemplates God's Almighty Power (vs. 17, 19)

- True Faith Produces Supernatural Hope (vs. 18)
- True Faith Is Born and Strengthened by God’s Word of Promise (vs. 18, 20-21)
- True Faith Doesn’t Weaken at Massive Obstacles (vs. 19-20)

A. What is True Faith? A Definition

vs. 21 “... *being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.*”

1. “Fully persuaded” = complete assurance... utter confidence... no wavering
 - Word related in Gk. to “fulfill”... all doubt is gone, mind filled up with certainty
2. “that God” = faith zeroes on the person of God... His existence is without question; though He is invisible, faith acknowledges Him as the only absolute reality in the universe
3. “had power to do” = faith understands the power of God is all that matters; if God wills something, no power in the universe can make it not so... God is active and moves!
4. “what He had promised” = total focus on the word of God, believing that if God spoke it it MUST come to pass!!

Faith is confident assurance in the power of God to bring about His promises

Hebrews 11:1 “Now faith is being sure of what we hope for, certain of what we do not see.”

B. True Faith Contemplates God’s Almighty Power (vs. 17, 19)

vs. 19 “... *he contemplated...*”

1. Faith begins in the mind
 - a. “assurance”
 - b. “conviction”
 - c. “trust”
 - d. all these happen in the brain... the mind does all these things
2. Faith is NOT AT ALL contrary to reason

Hebrews 11:17-19 *By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promises was about to sacrifice his one and only son, ¹⁸ even though God had said to him, "It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned." ¹⁹ Abraham reasoned that God had power to raise the dead, and figuratively speaking, he did receive Isaac back from death.*

3. Faith totally contrary to Law
 - a. Law focuses on self-power
 - b. Asks, "Can I do this?"
 - c. If so, God gets NO GLORY
 - d. Faith totally focused on GOD and on GOD alone!!!
4. Faith fills itself up with the power of God

vs. 17 *"...the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were."*

- a. God's omnipotence overwhelms all doubt... "Can God do this?"
- b. creation testifies to God's "eternal power and divine nature"

Romans 1:20 *For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities--his eternal power and divine nature--have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made..."*

- c. God used this to help Abraham believe

Genesis 15:4-6 *Then the word of the LORD came to him: "This man will not be your heir, but a son coming from your own body will be your heir." ⁵ He took him outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars--if indeed you can count them." Then he said to him, "So shall your offspring be." ⁶ Abram believed the LORD, and he credited it to him as righteousness.*

- i) the stars were more numerous than could be counted
 - ii) every one of them created by the God who was now making a promise
 - iii) "If I can make these, I can give you a son from your own body!!"
4. Specific nature of God's power clear: resurrection power, calling power

vs. 17 “...the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.”

- a. essential to the promise... given Abraham & Sarah’s bodies!
- b. essential to the gospel... God is a resurrecting God, who gives life to dead things
- c. in the same way, all of us are spiritually dead before justification
- d. God also calls things that don’t exist BY NAME

Greek word means to call by name!!

Psalm 147:4-5 He determines the number of the stars and calls them each by name. ⁵ Great is our Lord and mighty in power; his understanding has no limit.

Isaiah 40:25-26 "To whom will you compare me? Or who is my equal?" says the Holy One. ²⁶ Lift your eyes and look to the heavens: Who created all these? He who brings out the starry host one by one, and calls them each by name. Because of his great power and mighty strength, not one of them is missing.

- e. so God calls things that don’t exist by their name before they come into being!
- f. so he also does with Abraham’s children... who are also Jesus’ sheep

John 10:3-4 He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice.

God calls us each by name, and He called us by name before we even existed... in calling our names, He does so with POWER... He calls things that do not exist as if they did exist; and when He calls them, they suddenly do exist!

Genesis 1:3 “And God said, ‘Let there be light,’ and there was light.”

Before light existed, God had the idea of light in His mind... He also gave light a name “light”... when he spoke that name “light,” light suddenly sprang into being; in the same way, God knew each of the stars by name... when He spoke their names, each of them sprang into being; so also, with Abraham’s descendants... when he calls them each by name, they spring into existence! Because they are dead spiritually, he also gives life to the dead by speaking their name

John 11:43-44 Jesus called in a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" 44 The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said, "Take off the grave clothes and let him go!"

g. Faith gazes at God... His glory again at the center of everything

- Sinful exchange reversed... glory of God back at the center again

Our God is a powerful God, and the power of God is the darling of faith... faith gazes adoringly again and again at what God can do... faith is totally God-centered

C. True Faith Produces Supernatural Hope (vs. 18)

vs. 18 "Against hope, in hope Abraham believed..."

1. Confusing expression: "hope against hope"
2. General distinction between faith and hope

Faith: trusts a person... "We have faith in God"

Hope: expects a thing or an outcome... "We hope for heaven..."

3. Two types of hope: natural vs. supernatural

- a. natural hope: something good in the future that may or may not happen... natural hope feeds on circumstances; favorable circumstances strengthen natural hope; unfavorable circumstances weaken natural hope

Illus: "I hope my team wins the championship this year"... If the team is good, hopes are raised... if the team looks unbeatable, hopes get sky-high; BUT if the team goes through a long losing streak, hopes dim; if the star player goes down with a season-ending injury, hopes are dashed! THIS IS NATURAL HOPE... a product of circumstances!

- b. supernatural hope: something good for the future that is absolutely guaranteed by the power of God... not tied at all to circumstances

"Against all natural hope Abraham received a supernatural hope and believed..."

Abraham's old body, Sarah's barren womb made natural hope IMPOSSIBLE

God's promise made supernatural hope UNSHAKABLE!!!

4. Christian hope utterly unshakable, not founded on circumstances

a. like having a solid rock for a foundation which cannot be shaken

Isaiah 54:10 Though the mountains be shaken and the hills be removed, yet my unfailing love for you will not be shaken nor my covenant of peace be removed," says the LORD

b. like planting a tree by never-failing stream

Jeremiah 17:7-8 "But blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD, whose confidence is in him. ⁸ He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit."

Supernatural hope is like that... it can never be shaken since its foundation is the word of God; it can never dry up, since its roots are in the never failing river of God's covenant of love!

Earthly hopes constantly disappoint us... great sin occurs when we confuse the one hope for the other and call a supernatural hope a natural one

[The resurrected Jesus talking to two downcast disciples on the first Easter]

Luke 24:21, 25 "...we had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel." ²⁵ He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!

Our hope is secure and certain... we will never say, "We had hoped God would fulfill His word, but now our hope has failed."

True faith results in supernatural hope... a hope not rooted in earthly circumstances but in the timeless character and plans of God!

D. True Faith Is Born and Strengthened by God's Word of Promise (vs. 18, 20-21)

1. Faith came to life in Abraham when he heard God's promise

a. when God spoke the promise, "So shall your offspring be," Abraham believed

b. In this way, he demonstrates the origin of faith

c. WORD IS EVERYTHING!!!

- i) God “calls” things that are not as though they were... WORD
- ii) Paul’s entire program here in Romans 4: this gospel rooted in Scripture
- iii) Abraham an Old Testament example of faith... reading his story gives you saving faith as well

vs. 17 “As it is written: ‘I have made you the father of many nations...’”

vs. 18 “According to what had been spoken, ‘So shall your offspring be...’”

2. Faith is born in human hearts by God’s word of promise

- a. we aren’t born with faith
- b. not everyone has faith

2 Thessalonians 3:2 *And pray that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men, for not everyone has faith.*

- c. faith is given to us as a gift

Ephesians 2:8 “For by grace are you saved through faith—and this not of yourselves, it is the gift of God...”

- d. God gives birth to faith through the Word of promise

Romans 10:17 “Consequently, faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ.”

3. God also SUSTAINS and STRENGTHENS faith through the word of promise

vs. 20-21 *Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, ²¹ being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.*

- a. the more you hear the word of promise, the stronger your faith gets
- b. God not only gives faith through the word, He strengthens it the same way
- c. the promise energizes faith the way water and sunshine energize a plant

Application: daily times in God’s word nourishes your life of faith

E. True Faith Doesn’t Weaken at Massive Obstacles (vs. 19-20)

vs. 19-21 *Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead--since he was about a hundred years old--and that Sarah's womb was also dead.²⁰ Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God,²¹ being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.*

1. Abraham CONSIDERED the obstacles closely... faith doesn't bury its head in the sand

Gk. word means: "to fully consider", to gaze at the evidence... Abraham pondered the obstacles to the promise... he didn't forget them but took their weight fully under advisement, AND BELIEVED GOD ANYWAY!

2. Abraham's obstacles

a. personal inability: "I CAN'T DO THIS!! SARAH CAN'T DO THIS!!"

i) considered his own body: "As good as dead, since he was almost 100"

ii) considered Sarah's womb: "Past childbearing years... womb is dead"

b. previous history

i) 70-80 years of marital relations, not one hint of a pregnancy

ii) 100 years of walking on earth, never experienced anything like this even second-hand... no record in history of this ever occurring

3. Abraham's steady, strengthened faith

vs. 20 *Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God*

a. "waver" means to stagger, to be tossed back and forth within the mind

b. James speaks of doubt like a wave of the sea & a divided mind

James 1:6 *"...he who doubts is like a wave of the sea, blown and tossed by the wind.... He is a double-minded man, unstable in all he does."*

Part of the mind believes, part argues back... Abraham had no such doubts, but simply believed in the power of God to fulfill his promise; the obstacles meant nothing to Abraham's faith

3. Faith delighted in obstacles because God's glory can be shown all the more

4. God's promise & power far greater than these obstacles

III. The Outcome of True Faith: Glory for God, Righteousness for a Sinner

Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God. vs. 22 "This is why it was credited to him as righteousness."

A. Glory for God: The Goal of Creation

1. The universe created to display God's glory

Psalm 19:1 The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

Habakkuk 2:14 "The earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."

2. Humanity created to glorify God

Psalm 8:1-2 O LORD, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. ² From the lips of children and infants you have ordained praise

Psalm 96:7-8 Ascribe to the LORD, O families of nations, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. ⁸ Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name

Isaiah 43:7 "...everyone who is called by my name, whom I created for my glory, whom I formed and made."

3. Humanity exchanged the glory of God for an idol

Romans 1:21-23 For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images

B. Glory for God: The Goal of Salvation

Ephesians 1:12-14 "...in order that we, who were the first to hope in Christ, might be for the praise of his glory. ¹³ And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him

with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, ¹⁴ who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession--to the praise of his glory."

C. How True Faith Glorifies God

1. The Origin of Faith Glorifies God:
 - a. faith is a gift from God
 - b. faith comes from hearing the promise of God
2. The Sustaining of Faith Glorifies God
 - a. God sustains our faith moment by moment
 - b. He does so by means of the word of God
3. The Focus of Faith Glorifies God
 - a. faith gets eyes of self and onto God
 - b. faith trusts that God will do what He has promised
 - c. faith conquers self-focus
 - d. therefore the focus of faith glorifies God
4. The Victory of Faith Glorifies God
 - a. faith succeeds where everything else fails
 - b. why? Because faith is all God wants from us... simple trust in Him and denial of self power
 - c. faith will always succeed... faith alone wins the victory, and the victory is God's

1 John 5:4-5 This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. ⁵ Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God.

5. The Outcome of Faith Glorifies God
 - a. when faith has finished its work, we will see God face to face
 - b. then, we will give Him all glory for our entire salvation

c. we will not sing a hymn of praise to our faith but to the Lord who gave us our salvation from beginning to end

D. Therefore also true faith JUSTIFIES a sinner

vs. 21-22 Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, ²¹ being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. ²² This is why "it was credited to him as righteousness."

IV. Summary and Application

A. Summary

B. Application