

Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
Paul Gunn, Pastor

Sermon Title: Characteristics of Saving Faith, Romans 4:16-25

Date preached: March 4, 2018

For public use: See non-copyright comments at the end of the message

INTRODUCTION: Last week, we talked about the great example of a righteous man—Abraham. From his example, we see how God credits righteousness to us. This crediting is not anything we earned or did, but God calls us righteous through faith. We also saw how this righteousness from God is not given to us because of any prior privilege. Did he call us righteous because of all the things we did after we believed him? No, Abraham was called righteous the moment he believed God.

Let's review: What did God promise Abraham?

SCRIPTURE: Genesis 15:5 Here's the original promise found in Genesis: *...Look up at the sky and count the stars—if indeed you can count them.* Then he said to him, *“So shall your offspring be.”*

EXPLANATION: His promise was that he would be the father of many nations. Through this blessing, he would bring glory to God. How did he receive this promise? Through righteousness that comes by faith.

SCRIPTURE: Romans 4:13 ¹³ *It was not through the law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith.*

He's was going to be the heir of the world. What a promise! Now, we pick up again in Romans chapter 4, verse 16—

SCRIPTURE: Romans 4:16-17 ¹⁶ *Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring—not only to those who are of the law but also to those who have the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all.*

¹⁷ *That is what the Scriptures mean when God told him, “I have made you the father of many nations.” This happened because Abraham believed in the God who brings the dead back to life and who creates new things out of nothing.*

EXPLANATION: The scripture opens by saying this promise may be guaranteed to all Abraham’s offspring. His offspring is defined as those who have the faith of Abraham. Through this faith, he was credited righteousness. This carries with it a weighty implication. It makes me want to understand the faith of Abraham better.

Last week, we talked about two things that DID NOT characterize Abraham’s saving faith:

- He was credited righteous by faith apart from works.
- He was not credited righteous by any prior privilege.

Ultimately, his faith existed outside of his works or privileges. So, today, we are going to talk about the qualities Abraham’s faith DID have. Why was Abraham’s faith credited as righteousness?

There are three reasons:

1. Because he believed against all hope.
2. Because his faith never wavered.
3. Because he was fully persuaded God would keep his promise.

First, HE BELIEVED AGAINST ALL HOPE.

The scripture points to the not-so-good odds Abraham faced. It says there was no reason for hope.

SCRIPTURE: Romans 4:18-19 ¹⁸ *Even when there was no reason for hope, Abraham kept hoping—believing that he would become the father of many nations. For God had said to him, “That’s how many descendants you will have!”* ¹⁹ *And Abraham’s faith did not weaken, even though, at about 100 years of age, he figured his body was as good as dead—and so was Sarah’s womb (NLT).*

EXPLANATION: Abraham had no reason, apart from the Word of God, to believe in God’s promise. His body was “as good as dead” and so was Sarah’s womb.

Research has shown that the older a woman is, the harder it is for her to conceive and to bear a child. The risks of complications and miscarriages also increase with age. One research source said when a woman is 40-years-old, she only has about a 5% chance of getting pregnant. Do you see many 70-year-olds carrying around their newborn? There is a physiological reason.

EXPLANATION: Scripture says when Sarah heard the Lord promised her a son, she laughed. I leave it to you to determine why it was funny to her.

BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATION: Sarah is not the only mother who faced the odds in trying to have a baby.

- Rebekah, Isaac’s wife, was barren, but scripture says after Isaac prayed to God, God opened her womb, and she had twin sons, Jacob and Esau.
- Then, we have Hannah. She suffered from barrenness for many, many years, and she felt she was a disgrace to her husband. As she cried out to the Lord, he gave her a son—and a great man of God, too—Samuel.
- We also have Elizabeth—the mother of John the Baptist. She was barren because of her old age too before God gave her John.
- And, finally, we have another medical impossibility. The virgin Mary gave birth to Jesus—from the Holy Spirit. From all these examples, we see God defies our understanding of child-bearing when he wants to accomplish something.

EXPLANATION: The fact Abraham believed God against all hope goes to show he must have had a super high view of God. If we look throughout the Bible, we see God uses weak people in circumstances of unlikely victory, to show his glory. When it seems like there is no way, he makes a way, so we know he was the only hope.

Abraham’s faith was so strong and his faith remained in spite of the external hopelessness he faced. Abraham faced earthly challenges in his weakened, aging flesh. The scripture says, *even when there was no reason for hope, he kept hoping. His body was as good as dead—and so was Sarah’s womb*, but he trusted God would send him a son. He didn’t put confidence in his body, but he did put his confidence in the God who made his body.

APPLICATION: Paul applied this faith against all hope to us to—calling Abraham our father. Verse 17: *...He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed—*

the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that were not. He believed in the God who gives life to the dead and calls into being things that had never existed before.

Many of our sins or lack of faith are rooted in an incorrect or too-small view of God. We try to put him in a box or imagine him as whoever we want him to be.

EXPLANATION: But, Abraham's faith rested on what he knew about God to be true. If God could create the universe from nothing, God could give him and his wife a son. His faith was in more than a promise. It was in the identity of God.

Second, HIS FAITH NEVER WAVERED.

SCRIPTURE: Romans 4:20-21 ²⁰ *Abraham never wavered in believing God's promise. In fact, his faith grew stronger, and in this he brought glory to God.* ²¹ *He was fully convinced that God is able to do whatever he promises (NLT).*

EXPLANATION: Paul said he never wavered in believing God's promise. Instead, his faith actually grew stronger. He was fully convinced God is able to do whatever he promises. This was the faith through which God counted him righteous. This is powerful language. This is powerful faith.

But, we need to test this statement because if we look closely at the life of Abraham, I'm sure we could find a point in time when his faith wavered. How about when he got tired of waiting on God and took matters into his own hands?

SCRIPTURE PARAPHRASE: Genesis chapter 16 says Abraham and his wife Sarah had been living in Canaan for 10 years. She had not yet had a son, and she said to Abraham, "*The Lord has kept me from having children.*" They decided to try to fulfill God's promise through her slave, Hagar. If Abraham slept with Hagar, he could still have a son. And, they did—his name was Ishmael.

But, God had specifically told Sarah she would have a child. Even after Abraham's impatience, God still remained faithful. When Abraham was 99-years-old, God came again and told him Sarah would have a son the next year, named Isaac. Abraham laughed too.

EXPLANATION: God was still faithful even when Abraham decided to accomplish God's plan on his own. I am tempted say Abraham's faith did waver. If he really believed God, he would have waited longer, right? But, we also see here

his intentions when he had Ishmael with Hagar. He wanted to fulfill God's promise. He was just tired and confused. He thought he had to do something to make it happen. Does this sound familiar? Do you ever think you have to do something to make God's plan for you happen?

Look at Abraham:

- He didn't mess up God's plan.
- We are NOT saved by anything we do.
- We are saved by faith in Jesus.
- Abraham's faith did not waver, even though he was impatient and confused.

Not only did he believe against all hope, nor did his faith ever waver, but—

Third, HE WAS PERSUADED GOD IS ABLE TO KEEP HIS PROMISES.

Abraham's faith did not waver, but there had to be a reason for this. This was the reason—because he was fully persuaded? How? By God. God had proven he was able to keep his promises.

SCRIPTURE: Romans 4:21 ²¹ *He was fully convinced that God is able to do whatever he promises (NLT).*

EXPLANATION: God promised Abraham he would be the father of many nations. He would bless Abraham so he would be a blessing to all nations. God would use him in his plan of establishing a relationship with people throughout the earth for generations to come.

ILLUSTRATION: A science professor told her class a simple phrase: "Focus on the data." In other words, all that fluff you put in English papers doesn't matter when it comes to science. You need to focus on the data—why? Because your results must either back up and prove your hypothesis or disprove it.

APPLICATION: When we look at the promise of God, we must look at the results to see whether this faith was either backed-up or proven wrong.

EXPLANATION: God promised Abraham his descendants would be more numerous than the stars. Let's look at the results of this promise:

Through Ishmael, his first son, came the 12 Tribes of Ishmael and through Isaac, the 12 Tribes of Israel. Flesh descendants of Abraham live all around the world today. I Chronicles 1 gives us all the tribes of Ishmael. A 2016 poll claims 39.5% of Jews are in the U.S., almost 10% in Europe, and 2.7% in Canada.

And, those who are not direct, blood descendants of Abraham can be included in the family of faith—grafted in. Jesus was a direct descendant of Abraham. And, through faith we are included in this faith family. The blessing of the promise was not just for him—but for the nations and generations to come—and most of all for God’s glory.

CONCLUSION: If you hear God’s promise today and want to believe, God will call you righteous the moment you put your faith in him. Maybe you put your faith in him a long time ago but you need an urge to renew your faith. You need to see the greatness of God—the object of your faith—in the face of Jesus.

Are you in a hopeless situation? Believe against all hope.

Are you growing impatient with God’s timing? Allow your faith to stand in grace.

Do you need a reminder of why to keep trusting God? Remember all his promises.

Like Abraham’s example shows, our faith will continue to strengthen us in what God has planned for us—from now until eternity. Let’s keep our minds on his faithfulness and continue to be strengthened by his Spirit.

To preachers, teachers, students, and anyone else reading or using this message: I have posted this for all to use as you see fit. There is no need to cite me as the source. You are free to delete sections, add your own, or do whatever you want. There is no copyright. My request is that you do not copyright or sell my work. I am sharing my preaching notes in good faith with you because I know the challenges of putting together a lesson, especially when your week gets consumed with other things. Use it and enjoy!

I use the NIV translation of scripture because of its conversational nature. Feel free to go to Bible Gateway and copy and paste whichever translation you want to use. This transcript has been edited to an outline format that improves readability and therefore may not exactly follow the video edition.

Find me at www.thbc.com Click on sermons or YouTube channel: Pastor Paul Gunn
Thanks to Nancy Claire Smith for their editing assistance.

Sincerely, Paul Gunn
Tusculum Hills Baptist Church
Nashville, Tennessee
USA