

Romans 4:13-25 - The God Who Gives Life to the Dead
Ryan Patty / 8.28.22 / Christ Community Church

If you have your Bible I'd like to invite you to open up to the book of Romans. Romans 4 is where we will be this morning.

Have you ever been surprised? Truly surprised? Not the surprise that often accompanies my wife (or even Pastor Daniel) as I'm perfectly positioned behind a wall and step out at just the right time and greet them nicely with a loud voice...

I mean surprised at something in life. Now, I'll be honest. I'm one who guesses surprises. I would shake the presents under the tree and then look at my mom and tell her what she had wrapped for me. But one year, they got me. I was 13 and had been begging for an A.T.V. for some time, and I was hopeful that this Christmas would be the one. I checked the garage before we opened presents and nothing there. And then I had opened all but one of my presents on this Christmas morning and I knew by this time that I didn't get a fourwheeler. The present box was tiny, way too small... until I opened it up and there was a key. And I was shocked. It wasn't in the garage because my grandpa and grandma had it in the back of their truck a few houses down. I was genuinely surprised. I remember the feeling, for lack of a better word, the surprise! My young mind was blown away.

Fast forward a little over a decade and Laura and I are married, we are parents to a little boy, and we are expecting number two. I get home late from working and she has made me cupcakes and on the inside of the cupcakes was either blue or pink, she had found out the gender of our second child and was going to reveal it to me. I bit into the cupcake (expecting one thing) and lo and behold staring back at me was the color pink. I was shocked. A girl dad? I had always proclaimed that the Lord would give me 4 or 5 boys. Now in addition to my son I have 3 little girls and I am wrapped around their fingers.

Have you ever been surprised? This morning as we narrow in on the second half of Romans chapter 4, Paul is going to illustrate from the life of a man who was given the surprise of a lifetime; and this surprise, came in the form of a promise. Romans chapter 4 is where we will be, and I'm going to read our entire section this morning if you would follow along.

13 For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would inherit the world was not through the law, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. 14 If those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made empty and the promise nullified, 15 because the law produces wrath. And where there is no law, there is no transgression. 16 This is why the promise is by faith, so that it may be according to grace, to guarantee it to all the descendants—not only to the one who is of the law but also to the one who is of Abraham’s faith. He 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, the one who gives life to the dead and calls things into existence that do not exist. 18 He believed, hoping against hope, so that he became the father of many nations according to what had been spoken: So will your descendants be. 19 He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body to be already dead (since he was about a hundred years old) and also the deadness of Sarah’s womb. 20 He did not waver in unbelief at God’s promise but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, 21 because he was fully convinced that what God had promised, he was also able to do. 22 Therefore, it was credited to him for righteousness. 23 Now it was credited to him was not written for Abraham alone, 24 but also for us. It will be credited to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. 25 He was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

Let us pray.

The main point of this passage is as follows: The Promises of God have always been received (or obtained) by faith.

As a reminder to our context, Paul is spelling out that all have sinned and are guilty before God, Jew and Gentile alike, and now in God’s plan of redemption Gentiles are included in the family of God (there were foreshadowing of this in the OT and not it is realized). And so the Jewish side of the church has questions, what about the law? What about obedience? What about circumcision? And Paul is going to answer those objections. But for chapter 4 the focus overall is all about justification. How can we be justified before God? And Paul clarifies things and says no, (it’s not anything you do or follow) but let me show you how salvation has always worked, by grace through faith. And let me illustrate this through the life of Abraham, the father of the Jewish nation. Let me show you that his justification came before he was circumcised, and let me show you that the promise was received by faith and nothing else. And that’s what Paul proceeds to do.

In light of us walking through Romans, this main point is not new but it is vital for us to understand. **The promises of God have always been received by faith.** As mentioned before this surprise of a lifetime happened in the life of Abraham. A man that God called out of idolatry to come and follow him (that's the story of salvation). He calls this man, he promises to make this man the father of many nations and that his offspring would be as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore, but the question comes, how will this happen? Abraham and Sarah have no offspring. And that's the question.

Because as you read Abraham's story, this is the tension all the way from Genesis 12 to Genesis 20 (and in part what Paul is picking up in Romans 4), how will God make this promise happen? Abraham was already fairly old when he was called, and now he's only getting older. How will Abraham be the father of nations and have all these descendents? Month after month turns to year after year (those who have struggled with infertility know the pain here). But God through Moses wants us to see the importance of this promise in Genesis. It's amazing when you think about it like this, In the first 11 chapters of Genesis we have roughly the first 2,000 years of world history communicated, then in the next 10 chapters we focus in on about 25 years of one man's life and the main emphasis, the main tension, is what we have seen: will God keep his promise? And then we read in chapter 21 of Genesis, "And the Lord did for Sarah what he had promised. Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the appointed time God had told him."

Paul draws on this amazing and surprising story throughout Romans chapter 4 to paint the very clear picture that our justification and the promises of God have always been received by faith. It was true in the life of Abraham (he did nothing to earn them and when he tried to take matters into his own hands he just made it worse), it was true for the church in Rome that was trying to work this out, and it is true for us today.

So last week Patrick did a great job outlining what faith looks like and its relation to our justification, and this week we want to see how this promise, that God would make for himself a new people through the calling of Abraham, comes to pass and we get to be a part of it through faith. So Faith, just like last week, is the key here.

There are four truths from the text that help us to see the main point *and* understand why it must be true. Why God ordained it this way. The promises of God have always been received by faith. 4 truths that show that. First,

1. Grace, not obedience, is our guarantee (vv. 13-16)

13 For the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would inherit the world was not through the law, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. 14 If those who are of the law are heirs, faith is made empty and the promise nullified, 15 because the law produces wrath. And where there is no law, there is no transgression.

16 This is why the promise is by faith, so that it may be according to grace, to guarantee it to all the descendants—not only to the one who is of the law but also to the one who is of Abraham's faith. He is the father of us all.

This was the hardest part for the Jews to understand, obedience to the law could never bring justification before God. While the Law in and of itself is good, it arouses within us our sinful nature so that we hear, "you shall not do that" and we (because of that nature) desire to do that. The Mosaic Law here that Paul is referencing was a gate-keeper until the new covenant would come, but even in this example from Abraham, Paul is still spelling out it can't justify you! Obedience cannot justify a sinner before God.

If God had made the promise to Abraham in Genesis 15 and predicated it with "I am going to make a great promise to you, but only if you keep the Law" he might as well have not given the promise at all! No one can keep the Law. It highlights our sin so that we should recognize our fallen state and turn to God all the more. **There is nothing wrong with the Law, but instead something terribly wrong with us.** So in a way certain Jews here in Rome had it backwards, the promises of God and justification before God wasn't accomplished through obedience but faith. Faith in turn brings about obedience. And this faith, as we will see, brings about a righteousness that is not our own.

So faith, here, is intrinsically linked to the grace of God. That's his point here in these verses. Verse 14 - if the promise to be a child of Abraham, another name for being a part of the family of God, if that promise is given to those who follow the law, then faith is made empty and the promise nullified. Why?

V. 15 - because the law produces wrath. It tells us not to sin and we, in our sin, transgress it so that we incur the wrath of God. It's like when my dad told me 100's of times to get my clothes off the floor growing up, and you know what I did - I always left one piece of clothing on the floor. I heard the Law, and my sinful self still desired to break it. It's the same for the Mosaic Law.

And Paul's huge point, where truth number 1 comes from, is right there in verse 16. *This is why the promise is by faith, so that it may be according to grace, to guarantee it to all the descendants.* How can Gentiles be included as Abraham's offspring now, (not just Jew, but Jew and Gentile coming together in Christ who is the new Israel so that the new people of God are now one and the promise to Abraham is being fulfilled) How can that happen? How can it not be our works that achieve it or our obedience or anything else that justifies us or obtains God's promises for us? It's because grace is the guarantee here. The promise is guaranteed by God's grace, not our gifts or our works.

So grace and faith here go hand in hand. **God's grace towards his elect guarantees the promise, and faith is the reception of that promise (x2).**

The promises of God have always been received by faith because the grace of God guarantees it.

2. God's omnipotence grounds our faith (vv. 17-18)

17 As it is written: I have made you the father of many nations—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, the one who gives life to the dead and calls things into existence that do not exist. 18 He believed, hoping against hope, so that he became the father of many nations according to what had been spoken: So will your descendants be. Simply put, the object of our faith grounds our faith. Let me illustrate it like this, if I say to a random stranger off the street, “You see that sports car over there? That tan 2002 Buick Lesabre. I trust you to take my car and go wash it and bring it back to me.” Is my faith in this person grounded here? No. I don't know them, I have no reason to trust them. Honestly it could go either way.

Now let's say I tell one of the youth students here, “hey can you go wash my car and bring it back to me?” I know them. My car isn't getting washed. They'll take it for a bit and probably bring it back, but I know their nature...

Now, Let's say I say to my wife, “Babe can you go wash my car and bring it back here.” Other than a slight comment about why can't I wash the car myself, I know that she will take the car, wash it, vacuum it even, and bring it back to me. Why? Because I know her, I know her character and nature, the type of person she is.

You see for us, the degree of trust is dependent upon the nature of who we are putting our trust in. And in many ways it is the same with God. We learn to trust Him more and more as we walk with Him longer. But here, there is something specific about why we should trust God, and it's found namely in one of His attributes, it's a part of His very nature. And it is known as his omnipotence. **That's simply a word that communicates that God is all powerful.** He is in complete control of Himself and His creation. It doesn't mean he can do literally anything (God cannot act against his nature, he cannot lie for he is the embodiment of truth, he cannot do evil things since he is perfectly holy and good), but he has complete and total control over everything.

So look back at verse 17 - Paul quotes from Genesis 17 and God reissuing His promise to Abraham and says I will make you the Father of many nations. Paul is making a point here - Abraham was always held in esteem as the father of the Jewish nation, but Paul's saying, No, your scope is too small, look at what God is actually saying in Genesis. The Father of many nations so that we can inherit the world. It's a beautiful thing here! In the new

covenant now, the concern isn't so much with the lineage and the land, but now with the risen Son of God and His new covenant people who come from every tribe, tongue, and nation. The promise has been expanded! I feel like I could preach a whole sermon on that idea and I'm getting us off track. Look back at the rest of verse 17 - Paul is going to explain how this fits in with faith and what we learn from Abraham.

He says - I have made you the father of many nations - in the presence of God in whom he [Abraham] believed, the one who gives life to the dead and calls things into existence that do not exist.

This God, that Abraham believed in, is worthy of Abraham's complete and total trust, his complete faith. Why? Paul says - because this God gives life to the dead and calls things into existence that do not exist. That last phrase is a reference back to creation, is it not? The God who creates ex nihilo, out of nothing.

This God is all powerful. This God gives life to dead things and creates new things from nothing. So yeah Abraham you are old and growing older, And your wife isn't far behind you and is well past her child-bearing age, and you're not sure how it's all going to take place but you know one thing: This God, this omnipotent God who gives life to dead things and creates out of nothing, this God gave you a promise. And when He speaks it is so. So watch Abraham as he brings life from you and your wife Sarah (both figuratively dead when it comes to having children because of their age), and watch as he calls this promise into existence from that which shouldn't exist. That's your God, Abraham.

And the same is true for us. We have faith, we have a complete trust in this same God. The God who says He is working out all things for our good and His glory, even though we can't always see it right now. The God who promises to never leave us nor forsake us. The God who will not let us be snatched from His hand. The God who is with us in the valley and the mountain-top. The God who provided the ultimate and final sacrifice in the sending of His only Son Jesus Christ to be our propitiation, our appeasement of God's wrath. This God who gives life to the dead and calls things into existence that do not exist, HE is the God that you and I serve and HE is the reason that our faith has grounding. Not anything we bring, but everything that provides. The God who does these things is who

our faith is grounded in. Therefore it is a certain faith, a sure faith, because of the object of our faith. He is the God who gives life to dead things and calls things into existence that do not exist.

I would be remiss if I didn't take a moment and apply this to us. There are marriages here that feel dead, you wonder if there is any hope, you wonder if God even notices. He does. He brings dead things back to life. There are parent and child relationships that feel as if it is a lost cause. There will never be restoration. This God brings dead things back to life. **There are others who feel overwhelmed by all that life has thrown at them, struggling with bills or struggling with even getting out of bed in the morning. Does God even see me, you wonder? He does.** This God, as Abraham believed, brings dead things to life and calls things into existence that do not exist. Therefore, remind yourself that your faith is grounded in this God. Not you, not someone else you know and what they can do for you, not your circumstances and the fact that you have a good job or a nice house or whatever else. Our faith is grounded in God and God alone, for he alone is all powerful and able to bring new life. This is the omnipotence of God! The omnipotence of his grace! Death means nothing to omnipotence. Hopelessness and despair mean nothing to omnipotence. God gives life to the dead and calls into existence things that do not exist.

How do I know this firsthand? He did it for me, he did it for every Christian in here. He called a dead person to new life through the power of His Holy Spirit. Ephesians 2:1-9 - And you were dead in your trespasses and sins 2 in which you previously walked according to the ways of this world, according to the ruler who exercises authority over the lower heavens, the spirit now working in the disobedient. 3 We too all previously lived among them in our fleshly desires, carrying out the inclinations of our flesh and thoughts, and we were by nature children under wrath as the others were also. 4 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love that He had for us, 5 made us alive with the Messiah even though we were dead in trespasses. You are saved by grace! 6 Together with Christ Jesus He also raised us up and seated us in the heavens, 7 so that in the coming ages He might display the immeasurable riches of His grace through His kindness to us in Christ Jesus. 8 For you are saved by grace through faith, and this is not from yourselves; it is God's gift— 9 not from works, so that no one can boast.

Omnipotence does that. This all powerful God saved so many in here and he is able to save you who are still dead in your trespasses as well. Come to him in faith, trust in Him, and He will call you His own.

3. The glory of God guards against unbelief (vv. 19-21)

We have seen that the promises of God are received by faith. We have seen that these promises are guaranteed by God's grace and nothing else. We have seen that the very power of God, his omnipotence, grounds our faith and provides us assurance. But I mentioned earlier that Abraham wasn't perfect. He had some moments where he seemed to doubt. He seemed to not have faith, right? Let's look at how Paul describes it.

19 He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body to be already dead (since he was about a hundred years old) and also the deadness of Sarah's womb. 20 He did not waver in unbelief at God's promise but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, 21 because he was fully convinced that what God had promised, he was also able to do.

For those who struggle with doubt at times, struggle in your faith, I pray this connection is helpful for you. I don't want to offer you contrite or pithy sayings for you to help your own faith, but I want you to learn from Abraham and how, even when he doubted, his faith did not weaken or waiver. Because that's what Paul is getting at. He has answered every objection concerning justification by faith, he is moving to the end of this section where we see our need for justification by faith, but here he is going to teach us something about faith that is vital to understand.

The common assumption in the church today is that when you doubt, you are weak in faith. I don't agree. I think King David could be labeled a doubter at times, yet he was a man after God's own heart. The same is true of Abraham with Pharaoh and Abimelech and listening to his wife Sarah's solution for an heir. The same is true for countless saints throughout history. **But Paul here will say Abraham did not weaken, and he did not waiver in unbelief but was actually strengthened. How is this?**

Faith makes us strong in that it enables us not to be weak in unbelief. That seems obvious but bear with me. Paul says that Abraham did not weaken when he considered his own body. But Genesis tells us that he did at least doubt! Shall I indeed be a father of a son at my age? Shall Sarah bear a son at her age? Abraham did consider his age, although without being weakened in faith. This is what we must see. Abraham faced the facts. The facts of his own age, the facts of Sarah's age, he looked at them as they were and yet was not weakened. Why is that?

Because while Abraham looked at the facts as they were, he did not keep looking at them only. He looked at them, then he looked at something else, actually Someone Else.

As Martyn Lloyd-Jones says, “the trouble with unbelief is that it only looks at the difficulties.” It is unbelief to look at the difficulties only and only consider them and nothing else. But, Lloyd-Jones says, faith does not do that. He says, “Faith does not turn its back upon problems, it surmounts them. It looks at them, straight in the face, and then rises above them.” And is this not true of Abraham, friends? He considered the difficulties, then turned to the omnipotent God of the promise.

So, back to my original statement, just because you have doubts, does not mean you don't have faith. That's a fallacy. After Adam and before eternity, this is the reality of our existence. Doubt is the seedbed of faith (Yancey?). What do I mean here? **Our natural disposition in our sin is to doubt the truth of God, to doubt all the things of God, to actually actively be against the things of God.** Doubt is the disposition, yet God in His grace gives us faith that springs up in that seed bed and belief comes about. Some of the greatest saints throughout church history would testify to the fact that they were assailed by doubts all their lives. But here's the key difference: they were not overcome by those doubts, but instead overcame them. They considered the difficulties, and then overcame them by looking to God. So doubt does not mean no faith. I want us to get that.

But look at my point, it says that the glory of God guards us against unbelief. (The glory of God, his majesty, his infinite glory and worth) It guards those doubts from settling down deep into the soil of our hearts and causing thorns and weeds to grow there. It helps us to have faith. Where do I get this in the text? 20 He did not waver in unbelief at God's promise [as we established the doubts didn't take hold] but was strengthened in his faith [how did this strengthened faith manifest] and gave glory to God, 21 because he was fully convinced that what God had promised, he was also able to do.

What was the secret to Abraham's strengthened faith? He gave glory to God. “Faith, ultimately, is that which gives glory to God.” As we give glory to God we are made strong and our faith will be strong.

So if the glory of God guards against unbelief, and if I'm struggling with doubts and want to guard against them becoming unbelief, the question has to be asked, what does it mean to glorify God? What does that look like? If my faith glorifies God how do I glory in God all the more to bolster my faith?

I think this is what it means when it says that Abraham gave glory to God: He rightly recognized who God is and what He is. Abraham dwelled on who God was. He didn't do anything special, for Abraham to glorify God doesn't mean he said something specifically or performed anything specifically. No he considered God. Considered who He is. Considered His attributes. That he is eternal, namely that God is. He has no beginning and no end. He is the Great I Am. Nothing was before God. He considered his omnipotence as we highlighted earlier. That God brings life to dead things and speaks and things come into existence. "Let there be light," he proclaims, and it is so. He considered God's omnipresence, that he is everywhere. We cannot escape him nor hide from his eyes. It is as Psalm 139 says, 7 Where can I go to escape Your Spirit? Where can I flee from Your presence? 8 If I go up to heaven, You are there; if I make my bed in Sheol, You are there. 9 If I live at the eastern horizon or settle at the western limits, 10 even there Your hand will lead me; Your right hand will hold on to me.

Abraham considered God's holiness and His majesty. His righteousness and justice, his truth, his aseity, his unchangeability and so on. So he faced the facts of his situation, he faced the doubts but did not stare at them, instead he, in faith, glorified God by dwelling on the God who is. The God who is all of these things and in so doing Abraham glorified God. The main thing that mattered to Abraham was that this God had spoken a promise, and in faith he turned to that God and glorified him.

So the glory of God guards against unbelief. And real quick, let me say this, unbelief must be guarded against. Why is that? **Because unbelief at its very root is the most heinous of sins.** That's a strong statement. Remember doubt and unbelief are different here. If you are struggling with doubt with the intention to believe, that's not unbelief. But unbelief, fails to take God at His Word. It's the creation shouting back to the creator "you don't matter, you're not important. "There is nothing so insulting to God as to not believe Him." That's why unbelief is so terrible, it is insulting to God. It looks at creation, it considers who God is and what he has done and then states self-righteously, "I don't need that God. I don't need him."

But pastorally, if you are struggling with feeling overcome by doubt, wanting clarification on doubt and unbelief, any of the pastors or elders would love to talk to you. Questions aren't bad. Be like the father of the sick boy in Mark 9 who cried out "Lord I believe, help my unbelief!" So we have to ask ourselves in the midst of those questions, "what's my heart truly seeking here? Am I seeking to ask with the goal of belief? Or have I focused so much on the doubts and never looked to Christ that I am in a dangerous spot?"

Faith ultimately is that which gives glory to God by seeing the truth about Him and trusting Him no matter the costs (paraphrase of Lloyd-Jones). Allow yourselves, brothers and sister, to be awed by the glory of God in order to guard against unbelief.

4. An imputed righteousness is given by faith (vv. 22-25)

22 Therefore, **it was credited to him for righteousness**. 23 Now **it was credited to him** was not written for Abraham alone, 24 but also for us. It will be credited to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. 25 He was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

Paul arrives at the conclusion of his argument, and wants to apply it to his readers. For sure there has been application throughout, but now he is going to make it more explicit.

In our section today, he starts with the promise given to Abraham, that he would be the father of many nations. That he would "inherit the world" Paul says. And Abraham believed in the God who resurrects the dead and it was counted to him as righteousness. He didn't work to make the promise happen. **He didn't obey a law to make it happen. He trusted the only one who could make it happen.** The progress of revelation shows us and Paul makes clear time and time again that we too believe in the God who raised Christ from the dead, vindicating him and showing all that he has triumphed over sin and death. And we are called to have faith, to believe, and it will be credited to us as righteousness. We now, those to whom God calls and who believe, are the offspring of Abraham too.

The beauty of the doctrine of justification by faith includes the reality that faith credits to us the righteousness of Christ. What does it mean that it was credited? Or your translation might say counted to him. Simply put it is ascribed to us as if it was ours. The word that's been used for hundreds of years to describe this doctrine is the imputation of Christ's righteousness. It's not imparted. Christ gives us gifts by His spirit, those are imparted, no it's imputed. Our faith in Christ unites us to Christ so that when God sees us, because of our union with His Son, he sees the righteousness of Christ. It's an imputed righteousness given to us, brought about by faith and realized in our union with him.

And the beauty of this is it's available to you who are still resting in your own righteousness. Did you see what Paul says? **He says this, that "It was credited to him was not written for Abraham alone but for our sake!" That righteousness will be credited to those who believe in the God who raised our Lord Jesus from the dead.** He was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification. Praise God! That good news, that righteousness can be given to you. And as it says in the beginning of chapter 5, from this great news comes the result: we have peace with God through Christ. Is that true of you this morning?

We want you to know this doctrine and rest in this doctrine Christ Community, that we are justified by faith alone in Christ alone, because it is the foundation of the Gospel. We want you to understand that your righteousness is not your own, but an alien righteousness, the righteousness of another that has been given to you. Why? Because it affects every part of your life. It allows us as your pastors to go to the hospital bed of the saint who is about to pass away and remind them of this truth: their righteousness is in Christ. They have peace with God, it's okay. There is nothing to fear. It allows one mother to tell another struggling mother here, don't keep comparing yourself to others, your worth and righteousness is in Christ. It allows the teenager here to not care when they are ridiculed for their faith or for not fitting in, your righteousness is in Christ. You belong to Him. It allows the husband to not have to feel as if he constantly has to prove himself at work or he amounts to nothing. Your righteousness is in Christ. He has already proven your worth. This doctrine that Paul is hammering at throughout Romans affects all areas of life.

May we rest in this righteousness, remembering that all the promises of God and our justification before him are ever only received by faith.