

The Promise Made Sure

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[0 : 00] Open up your Bibles to Romans chapter 4.

Romans chapter 4. We are going to be covering just a couple of verses in Romans this morning. We're going to be looking at verses 16 and 17. And then next week, we will try to finish out Romans chapter 4 before we begin to talk about the Christmas season and what it means for Christ to have come as a baby in Bethlehem.

And so this week, we are right in the middle of the chapter, verses 16 and 17, just taking our time to try to understand these pivotal verses, particularly verse 16 and what it means.

So I want you guys to look along in your Bibles, stand together as we read here, beginning in verse 16. The Apostle Paul writes, 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.

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.

[1 : 31] Thank you for this word, Father. Give us understanding, we pray in Christ's name. Amen. You know, I am amazed at the world in which my kids grow up.

And I don't just mean, you know, sort of the world in general and things that are happening. I mean that, but I mean, just consider the technology that they're aware of. They don't know what rotary dial phones are.

That makes no sense to them. Those are just things that they play with that are laying around their grandparents' houses because they're just there to be looked at. And so they play with them. They don't know what those are. They don't know how those function.

They don't think of smartphones with screens, touch screens and all that. They don't think of that as odd or unusual. It's just a part of their life. What's amazing is how rapidly those sorts of things change.

How rapidly the cares and concerns of one generation disappear and are replaced by the cares and concerns of the next generation. How quickly pop culture changes.

[2 : 25] And what's popular and what's favored in one decade is old and passé in the next decade. In fact, if you were to travel back 100 years to 1914, if you were to travel back to 100 years ago, and you were to read the headlines of 1914, most of the headlines would be about what was happening in Europe.

As World War I, the Great War was getting started. It had started in the summer. And by November it was moving along rather quickly and nations were beginning to declare war against nations.

Of course, the United States wouldn't join it for about three more years. But those were the headlines of the day. If you looked in popular culture of the day, it was Charlie Chaplin had his first sort of major movie come out.

I mean, he'd had other pictures, but now he was starring as his sort of titular character there for the first time in 1914. I mean, that was the pop culture. And I look at Charlie Chaplin movies now and I think, I don't get it.

I mean, I know people are supposed to be artsy, and you know, the film buff, and you watch those, and you get it. I watch old movies like that and I just go, I don't get it. What's going on here? I don't understand. I mean, the things that were popular a hundred years ago just don't always connect with us and make sense with us anymore.

[3 : 36] But if you stretch it out beyond a hundred years, beyond decades, if you stretch it out to centuries, and you end up even millennia ago, it becomes even harder to relate at times.

And I think that is sometimes why we find the Bible to be difficult. In particular, why we find some of the Apostle Paul's letters to be difficult for us to connect with.

Because he's sometimes riveted on things that aren't at the forefront of our thinking. And he has been riveted upon this idea of who constitutes the true children of Abraham.

Who constitutes the real offspring of Abraham. He has been talking about that really since chapter 2. He has hit upon that subject. And he's gone back to Abraham over and over again throughout Romans chapter 4.

And we don't always understand that. We don't always connect with and understand why are you so concerned about the old covenant people? Why are you so concerned to connect people in your day with people who lived centuries before?

[4 : 38] What is all this concern with circumcision? What is all this concern with Abraham? What is the deal, Paul? Because sometimes we think, Paul, it's the new covenant. Just tell people that God loves them and sent his son to die for them and leave it at that and let them believe in that and that should be enough.

Why are you going on and on? Why do you keep going back to Genesis? Why do you keep talking about these things? Why are you so obsessed with these things? And sometimes we think that way because there's so much distance between us and Paul.

Not just chronological difference, not just geographical distance, but there's a distance of thinking. We don't think the way that Paul thinks, but Paul thinks in a way that is shaped and formed and fashioned by the Scriptures, what we call the Old Testament.

And Paul can no more set aside concerns from the Old Testament and what the Scriptures say. He can no more do that than we can set aside the New Testament as Christians. He can't do that.

And we shouldn't do that. We shouldn't be able to do that. We should want to know how does the Gospel of Jesus Christ connect with the story of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the other heroes of the Old Testament.

[5 : 49] How do these things connect? What significance do they have for us? And we should want to know what connections the Apostle Paul is making for us here in this passage. In fact, I want you to take a look and notice that he mentions something again that he talked about that we looked at last week.

He mentions the promise. Look there at the end of verse 16. In the middle of verse 16. He says that in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring.

So those are two key words that we talked about last week. Promise and offspring. And this term offspring or seed has been cropping up over and over. And we know that it refers to the descendants of Abraham.

Who are the true descendants of Abraham? Who are they? Who can be counted as a descendant of Abraham? Because that's one of the most important questions we can ask. Abraham was chosen by God.

Abraham was selected out of all the people on the face of the earth. Not because of anything in Abraham, but because of God's grace. He selected Abraham. And he told Abraham, I will bless you. I will give the promises to you and to your offspring.

[6 : 57] And so it matters. If you want access to the promises made to Abraham, you need to be counted as one of his offspring. And then, when you begin to consider as we did last week, what the promise actually was about, then you really become interested in this issue of who belongs to the household and family of Abraham.

Because we saw last week that the promise concerned not merely the land of Israel, although immediately it concerned that. The promise concerned something much larger than that. The Apostle Paul says that Abraham was promised that he would be the heir of the world.

And so we said last week that the promised land was always pointing to something greater and the seeds for that kind of thinking were sown in the Old Testament where Abraham was in fact told that he would be the father of many nations.

Where he was told that through his offspring all the families of the earth would be blessed. And so Paul summarizes that all together and says, Abraham was to be the heir of the world.

That's what the promise was about. The promise was not simply about the land of Israel. The promise was not simply about the borders of Canaan. The promise was about Abraham and his offspring inheriting the entire world.

[8 : 09] And we see that coming to fruition in the book of Revelation where there's a new heavens and a new earth just as Isaiah had predicted in Isaiah 65. We see that. A new heavens.

A new earth. A recreated, reformed, refashioned earth in which there's no more death. No more pain. in which God's people live and reign and rule with him forever.

That's a massive promise. That's good news to know that no matter what's happening in this world and in our lives here there's a better world to come. And it's not just this living in the clouds as a bodiless sort of entity.

It's a real life in a resurrected, glorified body in a recreated and renewed earth. It's real. It's physical and it lasts forever. That's good news because we do see on the news today we see all sorts of terrible things happening.

And then terrible things happen in the midst of our lives. We get a phone call about cancer and it feels as if everything's just falling apart. What are we going to do? How do we face this sort of thing?

[9 : 16] And the answer ultimately is that there is coming a time when these things will be no more. Or maybe maybe you face a period of time in which it seems like it feels like your marriage is crumbling and it's just falling apart.

And it looks like there's no hope for this. Maybe you've lost your job. Maybe everything. Maybe things have piled up and all sorts of things have gone wrong at a season of life all at the same time for you and it feels hopeless in that time.

That's when you need to remember that there is a promise of a better world. It matters. It's not just pie in the sky type of theology. It's real. It matters. And it's really coming. And it belongs to those who are the offspring of Abraham.

He would be heir of the world and we can be heirs along with him if we are his offspring. And we have seen over and over and over that those who are the offspring of Abraham are those who have the kind of faith that Abraham had.

Those who simply believe the promise. Not those who obey the law. Not those who do all the good things. Not those who check off the list but those who trust in the promises made to Abraham about the coming Savior.

[10 : 27] Those who trust in Jesus. In fact that's exactly how Paul defines the offspring here in this passage. Take a look again at verses 16 and 17. He says, he refers to the offspring and then he says not only to the adherent of the law that is not just to the Jews who have the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham who is the father of us all.

As it is written and now he's going to quote Genesis 17 I have made you the father of many nations. So that promise that Abraham would be made the father of many nations comes true now under the new covenant when all those who have the faith of Abraham that is all those who simply trust as Abraham did before he was circumcised before the law had been given to Moses apart from all those considerations faith and faith alone in the promises of God makes you the offspring of Abraham.

It makes you a child of Abraham. So that the promises now belong to you. They belong to you if you've trusted in Christ.

But this text does more than restate that promise. This text does more than remind us of what we've been talking about for the last few weeks. This text answers the question why does God count those to be children of Abraham who have the faith of Abraham?

Why not do it another way? Why are we justified? Why are we declared right by God on the basis of faith and not on the basis of something else? Why not on the basis of obedience to the law?

[12 : 07] I mean we have the law. We have the Ten Commandments. We have all the other laws given to Moses. Why not use those as a basis for determining who the children of Abraham are? Why not do that?

Why couldn't that be an acceptable way of doing things? And Paul answers that sort of question here in this passage. Take a look. The very beginning of verse 16 I think this is pivotal to our understanding of the doctrine of justification by faith alone that we've been talking about.

Now the ESV translation, the English Standard Version which I've been reading from is usually a pretty good translation but I don't like the way that they've rendered verse 16 here and so I'm going to do something that's really kind of strange for me but I'm going to give you a more literal translation.

We're going to put it up on the screen here. Give you a much more literal translation of this verse so that you can follow and see what Paul's line of argument is. So this verse says quite literally that on account of this it is by faith so that it might be according to grace for the promise to be made sure to all the offspring.

So on account of this on account of what he's about to talk about on account of the promise being made sure it is by faith so that it might be according to grace. I want you to notice the word it.

[13:24] We have to ask the question to what does it refer? What is by faith? What is according to grace? Because there's no word in the original Greek there.

There's no subject in those phrases so that it's not made absolutely clear in the text. And so most translations like the English standard in looking around for a subject to put in there reach ahead and grab the word promise.

So you can see it in ESV where we're told verse 16 that is why it depends on faith in order that the promise may rest on grace. But the word promise doesn't come until the very end of the verse.

So they've taken the word promise towards the end and they've put it in the middle so that the word it they're saying refers to the promise. That's what the ESV is saying and many of our modern translations are saying.

But I don't think that that's right and I think that it in some measure affects the way that we understand what Paul is arguing here. I think that it refers to righteousness or justification.

[14:31] Now I say that for two basic reasons. I know that I don't want to lose you guys here.

We're talking about translations. I hope you don't zone out on me or tune me out but I want you to hear this. There are two reasons why I think that it in this text refers to righteousness or justification.

The first reason is simply because the phrase of faith or by faith or from faith that can be translated any of those ways that phrase occurs a number of times in the first four chapters of Romans.

And every other time it occurs with one exception it refers it has a reference to righteousness being by faith or justification being by faith.

So every time we come across this phrase by faith or from faith and you say what's by faith? What's from faith? The answer is either righteousness or justification. Either righteousness or being declared righteous.

I'll just show you two examples of that. The first time that we come across this phrase in Romans is in one of the most crucial verses in the entire book verse 17. So turn back a page in chapter 1 verse 17 and we see what Paul says.

[15:38] He says for in the gospel the righteousness of God is revealed here it is here's the word from faith or by faith for faith. So the first sentence of faith where it's translated in ESV from faith is the exact same phrase that we find in chapter 4 verse 16.

That's the first time it's used and what is from faith? What is by faith in this verse? Righteousness. The righteousness of God is being made known is being manifested by faith.

I'll give you one other example from chapter 3 verse 30 where we're told that God is one who will justify the circumcised here it is by faith and the uncircumcised through faith.

That first instance where it says by faith same phrase that we find in chapter 4 verse 16. And here it's justification. God will justify or declare righteous the circumcised by faith from faith through faith.

That's what the text says. So when we find this phrase used elsewhere where we have an actual subject where we know exactly what is attached to faith what is it that's happening by faith in almost every other instance it is righteousness or justification.

[16:57] One other reason why I think that the word it refers to righteousness or justification is because if you just look up ahead a little bit to verse 13 that we looked at last week in chapter 4 it says that the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith.

So there's a connection here in the immediate context something is connected with faith and it's righteousness and in fact the order of events here in verse 13 it goes like this you trust in Christ and thereby have his righteousness credited to you therefore you're justified and then because you have that righteousness the promise belongs to you.

You see that sort of logic the promise to Abraham and to his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law it came through what? It came through righteousness and how did that righteousness come? It's the righteousness of faith.

So faith results in being counted righteous and being counted righteous results in being allowed to participate in the promise. That's the order of events and I think that that's how we're supposed to understand verse 16 as well so that it here is justification righteous.

So now return to verse 16 and just read that into it. That is why righteousness or that is why justification depends upon faith in order that it may rest on grace or in order that it might be according to grace and also for the promise to be made sure to all the offspring.

[18:40] That's the argument. So there are two reasons given here for why justification is by faith. Why by faith and not some other way? So that number one it could be according to grace and so that number two the promise could be guaranteed to all the offspring.

So I just want us to spend a couple of minutes this morning this is our goal is to understand those two phrases. How does justification by faith magnify grace and how does justification by faith enable the promise to be made sure made certain or guaranteed to all the offspring?

That's the only thing I want us to do this morning. So the connection between justification by faith and grace is not a complicated connection because faith is really simply an empty hand reaching out to God.

That's all faith is. Faith doesn't bring anything with it. Faith does not come with a handful of good works. Faith does not come clutching on to a list of things that we have done to give that list to God. Faith is an empty hand that comes with nothing. Faith has nothing to offer. Faith is simply trusting in what someone else has done on your behalf. You don't bring anything if faith is the key ingredient.

[19:52] You don't offer anything. You don't add anything to justification. You come empty handed by faith. And if that's the case, if you come empty handed, that means that you don't get the credit in any way.

That means that if you are in fact going to be saved, it's going to have to be by grace and by grace alone. Faith magnifies grace because faith doesn't come offering anything on our part to the deal. Faith offers nothing on our part. Faith has nothing to give. Faith is an acknowledgement that I don't have anything to give. Faith is realizing and acknowledging that I need God by His grace to do it all on my behalf.

That's why faith connects to grace. That's why faith magnifies grace. Which is exactly what Paul has told us earlier in this chapter.

Take a look up in chapter 4 to verse 4. Now Paul says, Now to the one who works, that is not the one who trusts, not the one who believes, but the one who works.

[21:00] Now to the one who works, his wages are not counted as a gift, and that's the same phrase. It's according to grace. Exact same phrase we find in verse 16. His wages are not counted as a gift, but as his due.

And to the one who does not work, but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness. So working, doing, is opposed to trusting and believing.

In fact, in this passage, in this verse, working is the antithesis of grace. Earning is the opposite of receiving simply by grace.

Because Paul says, if you want to be a doer, doers get their due. And your due is the wrath of God. But if instead of being a doer, you will be a receiver, you will simply trust and receive what God gives away for free at no cost to you.

You will receive righteousness credited to your account. So that justification is by faith and not by some other means, be it faith plus works or works or be it sincerity or anything else.

[22:22] Justification is by faith and by faith alone because faith magnifies grace and grace magnifies the giver of grace.

So the justification by faith ultimately results in the glorification of God because it is all of grace and works have no part in your justification.

If God were to devise some other way by which we might become right before him, then God would be depriving himself of the glory that he receives by saving us by grace alone.

And God will not do that. Justification is by faith because God in all that he does longs and aims for the magnification of his own glory.

glory and grace magnifies glory. Secondly, justification is by faith here so that or for the promise to be made sure to all the offspring.

[23:34] Now there are two key terms here that we need to focus on and that is the offspring which we've already seen. The offspring are those who are of the faith of Abraham. It's not just the Jewish

people, the adherents of the law, those who possess the Mosaic law anymore.

Now it's expanded beyond that and the offspring are those who trust in the promises just as Abraham trusted in the promises. That's who the offspring are.

And Paul is zealous to make sure that we have confidence that we are a part of the offspring so that all those who are counted as Abraham's children, both Jew and Gentile alike, so that we can know, so that we can be sure, so that we can be guaranteed the promise.

So that this is ultimately, this passage is about assurance. And that's a perennial question in every generation and in every age. How can we know?

How can we be sure that we're going to receive the promises? How can we have any level of certainty about that? What sort of guarantee can we get that will give us confidence in our receiving the promises?

[24 : 51] This is not about whether or not the promises are true and real. It's not about that. It's about whether or not I get to be a participant. How can I know that?

This is not aimed at making non-Christians feel secure. This is not even aimed at drawing non-Christians in. This is aimed at the seed. This is aimed at the offspring.

This is aimed at those who have believed in the promise. How can they be sure? How can they have? How can you and I have some level of certainty that the promise actually will belong to us? And Paul's answer is that's why it's by faith. That's why you're justified not by anything you do. You're justified by faith alone through God's grace.

That's why. So that your certainty, your assurance does not hinge upon your performance. Your assurance ultimately does not hang in the balance of your life.

[25 : 47] Your assurance hangs on one thing. Have you trusted in Christ? Because if you've trusted in Christ and in Him alone then you have been declared righteous.

And if you have been declared righteous by Him then the promises made to Abraham belong to you and you now are an heir of the world.

And if the word of God is true if Genesis chapter 17 verse 5 is true I have made you I have appointed you a father of many nations.

If that promise is true then the promise that we get to be included and the promise that we are a part that we become the offspring of Abraham by faith is just as certain.

And now we see now we look we look at the church around the world composed of people from every tribe and every people and every nation. We look and we see Abraham father of a multitude father of many nations as people from every ethnic background as people from every nation speaking every different language trust in the one true offspring of Abraham Jesus and then are reckoned to be his brothers and counted then as Abraham's children by connection to the true seed.

[27 : 13] As that happens we began to see the promises made more sure and more firm and more certain so that we we now can trust not only have we been declared righteous by God but all those declared righteous by faith will receive the promise.

no matter the difficulties in your life no matter the struggles you face no matter the frustrations that might plague you at times you can be sure you can be certain that because justification is by faith alone the promise belongs to you if you have trusted in him.

Let's pray. Oh yeah.