



HICKORY GROVE

BAPTIST CHURCH

Saving Faith

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Romans 4:18-25

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¹⁸ In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, "So shall your offspring be." ¹⁹ He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. ²⁰ No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, ²¹ fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. ²² That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness." ²³ But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone, ²⁴ but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, ²⁵ who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

(Pastor prays)

Christianity can sometimes feel like a slippery thing, especially when sin is involved — and it's *always* involved.

I think I'm most troubled when I hear of leaders I once admired either falling into some immorality or, like this past week, renouncing their faith in Christ altogether. That can be bewildering, especially for those who once looked up to the leaders who have now abandoned the faith. It makes you ask the question: Were they *ever* Christians? And what does it mean to be a Christian? How do you know if you are or are not a Christian, and what is the nature of saving faith? I think that is what Paul is getting at in this passage.

Let's talk about what he's doing here. This is going to feel a lot like a Bible study today.

Paul has reached into the Old Testament and pulled out Abraham and lifted him up as an example of saving faith. He's using the promise that God made to him in Genesis 15:1-5. When Abraham was 100 years old and Sarah was 90, The Lord's promise was, "Your offspring will be

more numerous than the stars in the heavens.” And Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness. Paul is taking that story as an example and saying: this is what a saving faith looks like, this is what it means to believe in Jesus. So I want you to listen today to what a saving faith looks like, because I'm afraid there are many here who have a faith that is *not* a saving faith, a faith that is based in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

Saving Faith is the Only Faith that Matters

Saving Faith redefines hope

Hope is one of the most important words Paul uses. And he uses it all throughout Romans, and it's always grounded in Jesus. Let's take a look at this strange little sentence at the beginning of verse 18 as he describes Abraham's faith. ¹⁸ *In hope he believed against hope,*

When we use the word “hope,” we don't typically use it in a Biblical way. Human hope is wishful thinking: I hope it doesn't rain today. I hope this sermon isn't too long. I hope Connie will pick up some ice cream at the store. Human hope has no promise and no real reason to think the hoped-for thing is going to happen. Human hope is not the kind of hope that saves.

Verse 18 is telling us that Abraham had no real reason to hope and yet, the text says, he had hope. What was his hope in? Let's read the whole verse and see. ¹⁸ *In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, “So shall your offspring be.”*

Abraham was able to believe because he had God's word. Real hope rests only in what God says and not what you *want* to be true. Faith comes by *hearing* and hearing by the *word of God*. The cross of Jesus redefines hope for us. The hope we have is different from wishful thinking because it is grounded in what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. In light of the cross, God's people can have hope that God's purposes will work out in the end.

In Ephesians 2, we read of people who were without hope and without God in the world. But Abraham was not without God; therefore he was not without hope. Aren't you glad that when tragedy happens we don't grieve as those who have no hope, that our hope is built on nothing less than Jesus' blood and righteousness? Verse 18 tells us that Abraham's hope was grounded in God's word. He had no human basis to believe God's promise, only God's word. A saving faith in Jesus is a faith that realizes there is no human reason to hope and turns our eyes to Jesus, His

perfect life for your sinful life, His death for your pardon, His resurrection for your justification. Saving faith redefines hope.

Saving Faith takes a hard look at reality

Look at verse 19 and notice the dilemma and remember the promise. ¹⁹ *He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old) or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb.*

Abraham didn't weaken in faith as he looked at the reality. From a human standpoint, he had every reason to give up hope for a child. His faith in God flew in the face of all reason and reality. This is not a leap in the dark, and this is not blind faith. Faith doesn't overlook facts or close its eyes to reality. It recognizes that what is *dead* is *dead* and knows that *only God* can give life where there is no life. Paul is telling us that this is what a saving faith in Jesus is like.

Abraham faced the facts. J.R. Stott says: He couldn't beget a child. She couldn't conceive a child. And you get out of that a *double* death. God brought life. In the same way, we are doubly dead; we have sinful nature and sinful acts. When we have faith in the life and death and resurrection of Jesus, God brings life. Abraham believed in spite of his circumstances.

Too many people put their faith in their *faith* instead of putting it in *Jesus Christ*. And this morning I'm asking you to believe and not doubt. Take a hard look at reality. I want you to believe and not doubt.

Let me tell you the difference between doubting faith and saving faith. Doubting faith puts your situation between you and God. So you can't get to God because of your circumstances. Saving faith puts Christ between you and your circumstances so you can't be bothered by these circumstances because you are shadowed by the cross of Jesus. Faith isn't ignoring facts; faith is believing God the holy creator. He created you in His image but sin has separated you from God. Jesus brings a saving faith. A saving faith redefines hope. Saving faith takes a hard look at reality.

Saving Faith is strengthened through worship

Notice what the text says in verse 20, how Abraham didn't waver but, more importantly, how he did grow strong. ²⁰ *No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, He grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God.*

“No pain, no gain” isn't Christianity. He grew strong. That's a passive phrase. “He was strengthened” or “he was given strength” is a better way of saying it. He was the recipient of strength from an outside force. This is what grace is. God was giving him a strong faith, and verse 20 tells us how he was doing it.

How was God strengthening him? At the end of verse 20 we see he gave glory to God. *The secret of Abraham's faith is that he acknowledged God's glory and goodness and grace and power. He trusted God's ability and not his own inability.* Do you remember at the beginning of Romans when all those sins are listed? Do you remember that, above all, the foundational sin was *not giving God glory*? This is “Big God” theology, and you need to get some. God doesn't need *us*, we need God. Faith in Jesus glorifies God because it acknowledges that life must be lived in complete dependence on Him! The supreme way to glorify God is not to work for Him but to trust in the work that He has done for you at the cross of Jesus. A saving faith redefines hope. It takes a hard look at reality. And it is strengthened through worship.

Saving Faith focuses on the *object* and not on the *amount* of faith

See what Paul says in verses 21-22. He was fully convinced that God was able to do what He promised. In verse 22, that is why his faith was counted to him as righteousness. Paul didn't believe in *faith*. Paul believed in *God*. *Faith* is not powerful, *God* is powerful. The focus is not the strength of your faith but the glory of the One believed in. Saving faith is not a display of human effort, it is a confidence in divine power. The strength is not in your ability to *believe*, the strength is in God's ability to *deliver*. Our faith and God's grace are both involved in salvation, just not in equal measure.

According to verse 22, the faith that resulted in righteousness is not a vague abstraction. It is a belief that God has fulfilled His saving promises through the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. You get to verse 23 and Paul turns his eyes away from history and makes some application. ²³ *But the words “it was counted to him” were not written for his sake alone,*

This is the doctrine of the Bible. This is for you. And in verse 24-25, he closes with two necessary elements of saving faith. I'm going to give these to you and then give you a chance to respond.

Saving Faith submits to the lordship of Jesus

²⁴ *but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord,* ²⁵ *who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.* It's found in The Apostles' Creed. Jesus was conceived of the Holy Spirit, born of the Virgin Mary, was crucified under Pontius Pilate and died. He descended into death and on the third day rose again and ascended into Heaven. He will judge the living and the dead. That is lordship.

Have you given over your dreams and desires and destiny to the One who died for sinners? He is *only* savior if He is actually Lord. Are you willing to release your sin to receive grace and have a saving faith in the lordship of Jesus?

Saving Faith believes in substitutionary atonement

No Christian is without this: ²⁵ *who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.* This verse is probably a creed. It is a comprehensive statement of the Gospel based on Isaiah 53. God the father Himself has taken the initiative of giving up His son to go to the cross in the place of sinful people. Jesus is handed over to the cross so that those who believe will be forgiven, and He raised Jesus from the dead so that believers would be covered in righteous victory. Grace says "the work of Salvation is done" and faith says "I believe." God has extended grace in Jesus Christ. Do you have a saving faith in Jesus? Because a saving faith is the *only* faith that matters.

(Pastor prays)