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The Book of Deliverance #13:
The Foundation, Fruit, and Fabric of Faith
Romans 4:13-25

Please keep your Bibles open at Romans 4 and look with me at the words of verses 13-25.

If you've been with us over the last several weeks, you will remember that Paul, in the opening three chapters of this great to the Roman Christians, has been explaining to us that we have a very serious problem indeed. We are *sinners* and stand condemned in the sight of God. "All have sinned and have fallen short of the glory of God," he said. Our sin problem renders us totally unable to escape that wrath on our own. We constantly distort and suppress the truth in unrighteousness. We are habitual rebels against God. If we are to have any hope at all, *God* must intervene and deliver us. And from about the second half of chapter three Paul has been outlining for us just how God has done exactly that. We are helpless and hopeless in our sin, but God *has*, in fact, acted to deliver and redeem us.

And that deliverance has two dimensions. There is an *objective and historical* dimension and a *subjective, personal* dimension. The objective dimension was Paul's primary focus in chapter 3, verse 21 onwards. God has provided a righteousness for unrighteous sinners in Jesus Christ. *He obeyed* for us, that His righteousness might be reckoned, or imputed to us, and *He died* for us, with our sins reckoned or imputed to Him. *God has acted* in His great love for us in giving His Son Jesus Christ to atone for sin and provide an alien righteousness, a righteousness that is not *in us*, it is not *our own*, it is *Christ's*, yet it is a righteousness offered to us *freely* by His grace in the Christian gospel.

That is the *objective and historical* side of God's provision for us. It focuses on the cross of Christ. But alongside that objective, historical provision, there is a *subjective and personal* element to God's saving provision, and in the second half of chapter three, and with growing clarity and focus moving into chapter four, Paul explains that *the way we get a hold of the righteousness that Jesus provides for sinners is by faith alone*. He sets up a series of antitheses, a series of contrasts, to help us see that, doesn't He?

Look at chapter 4. In verses 1-8 the contrast is between *faith and works*. We obtain the verdict of "righteous" or "justified" or "accepted" from the mouth of the heavenly

Judge, *not* because we have earned or worked for it, but simply by resting in and trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ, who *has* worked for it and earned it *on our behalf*. *Not works but faith*. Then, as we saw last week, in verses 9-12, Paul draws a second contrast, this time between *faith and the covenant sign of circumcision*. Some people wanted to narrow the scope of this great blessing of acceptance with God on the basis of mere faith alone to the circumcised. Only those who bore the badge of belonging to the covenant people of God could be justified, they argued. But no, says Paul, justification is a gift that is given freely in response to nothing but faith in Jesus Christ. Circumcision, like baptism, is merely a sign of that blessing. It is not itself the cause of it.

Not works, but faith. Not covenant signs, like circumcision, *but faith. Faith alone* is the instrument by which sinners take hold of the righteousness of Christ and find acceptance with God. Now this morning we are turning our attention to verses 13-25. Here Paul fills out for us his portrait of the *kind* of faith that justifies. If we are justified by faith alone, don't we need to know what that faith looks like? Well, in verses 13-15 we learn about the foundation of faith—what faith is based upon. In verses 16 Paul explains *the fruits of faith*—what faith results in and produces in our lives. And in verses 17-25 we focus on the *fabric of faith*—what faith consists of, the content of our faith.

Look with me first of all then at verses 13-15. The foundation of faith.

And the first thing to notice is that Paul establishes yet another contrast: this time it is a contrast between law and promise. Look at what he says, “For the promise that he would be the heir of the world *was* not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. For if those who are of the law *are* heirs, faith is made void and the promise made of no effect, because the law brings about wrath; for where there is no law *there is* no transgression.”

The law was not the mechanism by which Abraham or his descendants would inherit the blessings of God's covenant promise. Faith alone was that mechanism. If it were possible to become the heir of the promise and get hold of the blessings of the covenant by means of the provisions and stipulations of God's law, Paul says faith would be made void. The word he uses there means that faith would be rendered an empty thing and the promise would be useless. “Faith” and “promise” fit together; “law” and “promise” do not.

Law cannot bring us the blessings promised in the covenant with Abraham. Verse 15 explains that all the law of God can do is condemn us. The law brings wrath. Where

there is no law there is no transgression. Question 14 of the Westminster Shorter Catechism asks, “What is sin?” The answer makes the same point as Paul in verse 15, “Sin is any want of conformity unto or transgression of the law of God.” That is what sin is. It is a failure to be or do what God requires in His law or any overstepping the boundaries proscribed by God’s law. The law shows us sin and reminds us of wrath and renders us guilty. We cannot find the blessings promised by means of law keeping.

The basis of faith is the promise of God, not the law. We are not to rest our hope of right standing with God on the basis of legal conditions or attempted obedience to the moral norms of God’s law. R. C. Sproul in his commentary on Romans put it like this, “Just as Dante posted above the entrance to hell the words, ‘Abandon hope all ye who enter here’, so we should abandon all hope of entering the kingdom of God by virtue of our obedience to His law.” (R.C. Sproul, *New St Andrews Commentary, Romans*, 128)

Faith rests entirely on the promise of God in His covenant of grace to accept all who trust on Christ alone for salvation. Faith looks for no other foundation other than God’s promise. Like the Titanic, the ship of Adam’s race has sunk in the icy waters of human sin, but in the promise of God, faith finds a life raft and climbs in. Countless thousands perish who wait for some other mode of rescue, who think they can survive alone without any rescue at all, who dare not trust what at first sight might appear so flimsy and fragile a vessel as the mere promise of God. But all who cling to the simple promise of free salvation in Christ are immediately justified and accepted in God’s sight, plucked as it were from the city waters and brought infallibly home to safe shores.

There is no safe harbor for your faith other than the promise of God in Jesus Christ.

Then secondly, look with me at verse 16. The foundation of faith is the simple promise of God in the gospel. Those are, if you like, the roots. In verses 16 Paul moves to consider the outcome of such a faith. Here are the fruits of faith.

“Therefore *it is* of faith that *it might be* according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.”

Now that is a long and complex sentence, and we need to break it down to make sure we follow Paul’s message. First, Paul draws his conclusion from his argument of verses 13-15 that the promises of the covenant come by faith alone, not by means of legal obedience. “Therefore it is of faith,” he says. God has so ordained that salvation should

be of faith “that it might be according to grace.” Faith is the solitary instrument by which sinful people get right with God and receive the blessings God has promised so that salvation should be a matter of sheer unmerited grace alone. God wants salvation to be a gift from beginning to end. Isn’t that beautiful? The reason God has connected His salvation with faith alone is so that everyone might recognize that salvation is a gift, not a reward. God delights to give the gift of salvation to all who take Him at His word, believe His promise and trust Christ.

But Paul goes even further than that. He tells us next that one reason why God would have salvation to come to us as a sheer gift of grace through faith alone is so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only those who are of the law, but also to those who are the faith of Abraham, who is the “father of us all.” Salvation is a matter of grace alone through faith alone so that it might be sure to all who believe and have Abraham as their father. The fruit of faith is assurance. It is of faith that it might be of grace so that the promise might be sure to all who are of the faith of Abraham.

It is this way so that you might have confidence in the gospel.

If salvation were a matter of law, how sure of your salvation would you be? The law, with its demand for perfect moral obedience, says “do this and live.” Can *you* do it? It says, “Thou shalt not..” Can you resist temptation? If salvation rested upon something *in you*, how secure would you be? Would you be sure?

I have a friend who, shortly after coming to the United States, was asked to teach a Sunday School class. He chose as his subject the Christian doctrine of assurance. He tackled the topic of how can we be sure of our salvation. He had come from a context where that was a very real and very live issue. People needed help with assurance. However, at the end of the class, he was asked why he chose to teach on this subject. No one here has a problem with assurance he was told. Our problem is with over confidence. Our starting assumption is, well, of course, God would want me. We have been trained by a can do culture to prize self assuredness.

Now, maybe you’ve found yourself asking, as we’ve worked through the first part of Romans, why we took so long with Paul’s emphasis on human sin and depravity? Well, this is why. The reason we struggle with over confidence and misplaced self assuredness and false assurance is because we have a weak and anemic doctrine of sin. We do not realize how lost and broken and utterly unable to obey we really are. So when it comes to assurance, we think we are good enough, and all we need from Jesus is a

helping hand along the way perhaps. But once Romans 1-3 and the true depths of the wickedness of our hearts begin to penetrate, the question Paul addresses here becomes critical.

When we know we are as lost as we really are by nature, then we need to know as a matter of utmost importance, how can I be sure of salvation? And to this Paul answers simply that salvation is a gift of grace. It rests on the promise and is guaranteed by the character of the giver, not the receiver of the gift. It is unmerited, so you don't need to be good enough for it. It is free, so you needn't earn it. God promises to give it to any and all who trust Jesus to save them.

So often our doubts arise because we have allowed the sinfulness of our hearts, the unworthiness of our own lives, to so fill our vision that there is no longer any room in our thinking for the free grace of God. Paul wants you to see that salvation is of faith that it might be according to grace so that the promise might be sure to all who are of the faith of father Abraham.

Get a hold of this best news of all: God *will* save you, dear sinner, by simple faith, resting on promised grace, focused on Jesus Christ. He does it all. You are right to despair of worthiness in yourself. You *are* unworthy. So am I. But *God is gracious*. Therefore the promise is sure. Grip grace firmly and wield it like a broom to sweep away the accumulated dust of introspection, unbelief, and despair.

So faith's foundations rest on the covenant promises of God. Faith's fruit is assurance. The promise is sure to all who believe. And then thirdly, look with me at verses 17-25. Here is the fabric of faith. Faith has *content*. Look at the passage. Paul speaks first of all about Abraham as the *model* believer in verses 17-22, and then in verses 23-25 Paul connects Abraham's example with *our practice*.

Well, let's think about Abraham as a model of faith. The first thing to see about his faith is its object. Paul speaks of Abraham's being "in the presence of Him *whom* he believed- *God, who gives life to the dead.*"

Before we can think about the "*what*" of faith, we need to focus on the "*who*." We are not simply told that Abraham believed *in* God. As James 2:19 reminds us, even the devil believes *in* God and shudders. Christian faith is not just a matter of believing certain facts. It *is* that. It can never be *less* than that. But it is *much* more. Saving faith does not

simply believe *in* God, as a doctrinal commitment, it believes *God* as the heart-response of a child to the word of their Father.

It is God Himself that we believe, speaking by His Spirit, in His Word and promise, in the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is one of the great markers that distinguish authentic and vibrant and living Christian faith from its empty moralistic imitations. True Christians believe *God*. Their faith is expressive of communion with God Himself. They *know* Him, and so they *trust* Him. They take Him at His word and rest on His promises. While self righteous moralists, self-deceived hypocrites, and empty religionists merely believe *in* God, *Christians know Him*.

Now ask yourself, with judgment day honesty, which best describes you? Do you believe *God*? Do you hear Him speak in His word, read and preached, and delight to rest the weight of your soul on Him and His promises? Is faith for you expressive of a *real* and *living* relationship of intimate, childlike trust in your heavenly Father's love, or is it merely an intellectual assent to truths about God and Christ and the gospel? *Eternity* depends on how you answer. Do you believe God, or do you merely believe *in* God?

Well, Abraham believed God. But he had many reasons, at least outwardly, not to, didn't he? Look at verses 19-20, "and not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, *already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb*. He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God." He was old—a hundred years old. Sarah, his wife, was unable to conceive. Yet God had said to him that through his seed all the nations of the world would be blessed, that he would be that father of many nations. The promises of God seemed to fly directly in the face of logic and the facts. Yet, we learn that Abraham did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief.

How come? Was this a blind leap of faith? You've heard it said, I'm sure, that faith is a "leap in the dark." People think of faith as a kind of irrational jump from the cold, hard light of the facts into the subjective darkness of the mysteries of what is really in the end an *illogical* religious conviction. Richard Dawkins, the well known apostle of the new atheism, likes to say that there is as much support for faith in God as there is for the Flying Spaghetti Monster. "Faith," for him, is a wild leap in the dark.

Is *that* what Abraham is doing here? *Is* his faith in God an irrational leap into the dark that ignores the facts and believes anyway? Not at all. Abraham has a *basis* for his faith.

Faith, remember, believes **God**. Abraham knew **God**. He knew **God** is the one who gives life to the dead. **God** is the one who calls those things which do not exist as though they did. **God** is the one who spoke into the darkness of the beginning, “Let there be light,” and there *was* light. It was *this* God who had promised. And out of the fellowship he had with *this* God, despite circumstances that seemed so contrary, Abraham *believed*.

Listen to Sproul again, “Jesus never calls people to jump *into* the darkness. *He calls them to jump out of the darkness*. He never asks us to crucify our intellect to become Christians. Faith is not believing the absurd or the foolish. Faith is ultimately trusting *what is preeminently trustworthy*.” (R. C. Sproul, *New St. Andrews Commentary, Romans*, 130, emphasis added)

That is the point of verses 21-22, isn't it? Abraham was “fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform.” And therefore “it was accounted to him for righteousness.” Justifying faith, faith that obtains the righteousness of Christ and acceptance with God, is a faith that believes **God**. It trusts Him *to do what He says He will do in the gospel*, even when our sin, like Abraham's age or the deadness of Sarah's womb, seems like an insurmountable obstacle. Saving faith trusts God to save because of *who God is*. That is *not* an irrational leap in the dark. It is the only truly rational thing to do in the face of the great need of our souls. God can be trusted because of who He is.

He is the God who raises the dead and speaks light and life into being when they did not exist before. That is who Abraham trusted. And that, finally, is who we are to trust. Look at verses 23-25 with me quickly. We're going to come back to these verses again next week because they are important and packed with truth. But simply notice here for now how Paul picks up the great notes that comprise Abraham's faith and shows us how they are to find their counterpoint and echo in our own faith.

Abraham believed the God who raises the dead, and it was imputed to him as righteousness. He was counted righteous because he believed the gospel promise. He was justified by faith alone in the promises of God. And so, in the same way, verse 24-25, “It shall be imputed *to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead*, who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.”

The focus and fabric of our faith, the *content* of faith, is **God Himself** the supremely reliable one. It rests on His power and faithfulness. And while Abraham had to look *forward* to the fulfillment of promises still to come, we have the great privilege of

looking back **at promises already kept**. Faith for us has this great and unassailable foundation. It is not just that we believe that God ***is able*** to perform what He promises. **It is rather that God has already performed what He has promised** when in fulfillment of the covenant made to Abraham, in the fullness of time, his Seed, the Lord Jesus Christ was born. He was delivered up because of our offenses. He died for our sins on the cross and then He rose again for our justification. The God whom Abraham believed could raise the dead, ***did*** raise the dead, when the stone rolled away, and Christ stood forth in victory over sin and death and hell, as our triumphant and conquering Savior.

Now we need never wonder if God ***can*** do what He promises. It no longer stands in any doubt if God ***can*** save you from your sins. There is now ***no*** question whether, in the worst extremity of your own doubts, or the darkest excesses of your own depravity, you can be put right with God. That question has been settled once and for all. **Jesus lives. The tomb is empty. He was raised for our justification**. God keeps His promises. He can save you. He promises to save you. The proof is the empty tomb.

Therefore, dear friend, learn from father Abraham. Since Christ is risen, do not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but be strengthened in faith and give glory to God. Do not be unbelieving but rather believe. Place your faith, not in law, but in the gospel promise. Place your faith, not merely in truths about God, but in God Himself. Focus your faith, not on an irrational hope, but on the empty tomb.

Believe the gospel, and it will be imputed to you for righteousness.

Amen.