

Whose Telling your Story

Message 15

8.18.24

Romans Series

Romans 4:13–25 (CSB)

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.

Introduction:

A. George Whitefield, one of the greatest ministers and preachers of the last 300 years, wrote in the 1700s:

When I was sixteen years of age, I began to fast twice a week for thirty-six hours together, prayed many times a day, received the sacrament every Lord's day, fasting myself almost to death all the forty days of Lent, during which I made it a point of duty never to go less than three times a day to public worship, besides seven times a day to my private prayers, yet I knew no more that I was to be born again in God, born a new creature in Christ Jesus, than if I were never born at all ...¹

B. Some of us in the room can relate to Whitefield's striving.

1. This Church is full of hard-working, rule-following, disciplined people.
2. We are comfortable depending upon ourselves.
 - a. Give us a task, we will do it.
 - b. Give us the policy, we will follow it.
 - c. Tell us what to do, and we will make it happen.

C. At times, we bring this attitude to our relationship with Jesus.

1. Like Whitefield, we strive because we believe Christianity revolves around perfection and achievement.
2. We relate better to Law than we do faith.
3. Our relationship becomes anchored upon our ability to perform rather than on our capacity to receive.
 - a. We are more comfortable with a religion of wages than gifts.

¹ Packer, J I. Puritan Portraits (p. 43). Christian Focus Publications. Kindle Edition.

b. Karma makes sense, Grace does not.

4. The Apostle Paul understood this tension well.

1. Heirs of faith, not Law. Vs. 13-15

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.

A. Abraham wasn't saved by the Law, and neither are you.

1. Romans 4 explains that faith has always saved us.

2. The Law only revealed the impossible standard.

3. The Law produces wrath:

a. Because no matter how impossible the standard, it was still the standard.

b. Because no one could fulfill it, wrath and judgment are the result.

B. Under the Law, all are sinners.

1. But faith in Jesus opens doors of possibilities we never imagined.

2. Faith leads to righteousness:

a. Because of faith, we are not proclaimed sinners but saints.

b. Faith causes sons and daughters of the devil to be declared to be sons and daughters of God.

c. Enemies of Christ become co-heirs with Him.

3. Circumcision was a sign and reminder of what God could do.

4 But it was never a promise of salvation.

C. The Law shows us how far we are from perfection.

1. When we place all our trust in the Law and our ability to keep it...
2. Paul says that faith becomes empty, and promises are nullified and canceled.
3. Many of us know how it feels to have a faith that feels empty.
4. We know the pain of doing EVERYTHING right and still missing the promises and blessings of God.

2. Grace and Faith tell a different story.

Verse 20-21. 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.

A. Let me summarize Abraham's life. Genesis 12-21

1. Abraham, who was married to Sarah, tried to pass off his wife Sarah as his sister TWICE to two different kings so that Abraham would have favor and not be threatened by the kings.
 - a. This meant that a Pharaoh and a king both took Sarah into their harems.
 - b. Only by God's grace did these men not abuse her.
2. In between these instances, Abraham slept with Sarah's slave, Hagar, who produced a son named Ishmael. Then, when Ishmael was a teenager and Isaac (the son they wanted) was born, Abraham sent Hagar and Ishmael off deep into the desert with just enough water so they couldn't get back and would die far from home where Abraham didn't have to see it. (An Angel intervenes and rescues them.)
3. Each time God met with Abraham and told him of the Covenant that Abraham would be the father of many nations, Abraham questioned the Lord.
 - a. An excellent example of this is smack in the middle of the story,

b. Genesis 17:15–19 (CSB)

¹⁵ God said to Abraham, “As for your wife Sarai, do not call her Sarai, for Sarah will be her name. ¹⁶ I will bless her; indeed, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she will produce nations; kings of peoples will come from her.”

¹⁷ Abraham fell facedown. Then he laughed and said to himself, “Can a child be born to a hundred-year-old man? Can Sarah, a ninety-year-old woman, give birth?” ¹⁸ So Abraham said to God, “If only Ishmael were acceptable to you!”

¹⁹ But God said, “No. Your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will name him Isaac. I will confirm my covenant with him as a permanent covenant for his future offspring.

c. Genesis 17 is the 3rd time God told Abraham he would be fruitful and blessed.

B. That brings me to Paul’s declaration:

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.

1. Abraham (never) wavered?
2. Abraham wasn’t guilty of unbelief?
3. Abraham received credit for passing the test, really?

C. The way the Apostle Paul tells the story and how I would tell the story are TERRIBLY different.

1. This tells me that I do not understand the story like he does.
2. Because I believe that Scripture is inerrant, and I am not, then he must be right.
3. But it sounds to me that the Abraham Paul knows and the Abraham I know are not the same guy.

3. What does God do with a story like this?

A. What does God do with a story like Abraham's:

1. There is deception and lying.
2. Abraham takes a second wife, which feels sketchy.
3. Then Abraham approves of sending off that wife and her son with the full expectation that they will die in the desert!!!
4. What do you do with a story like Abraham's?

B. What do you do with a story like David, whose Psalm is quoted in Romans 4?

1. David started off really well.
2. But he had a MAJOR moral failure when he slept with a married woman and then had her husband killed and covered it up.
3. David also provoked the Lord by counting the soldiers.
 - a. Even though he was warned, he did it anyway as a point of pride.
 - b. This decision cost the lives of 70 thousand Israelites in a God-ordained, Angelic-led purge.
4. What does God do with stories like this?

C. He redeems them.

1. The Law speaks of our sinfulness.
2. Grace speaks of Jesus' goodness.
3. When I Survey the Wondrous Cross, I am forever reminded of how Jesus changed my story.

4. Jesus: Better than any Fairytale.

A. How can Paul declare that Abraham never wavered?

1. Because Abraham's belief and faith were perfected in Jesus.

a. Because of Jesus, the story can be told in a different way.

b. If you and I tell the story, we can only speak of what we messed up, what we did wrong, and how weak we are.

2. But when Jesus tells the story, we can speak of unwavering faith and unbelief.

a. God speaks into our story what isn't.

b. He speaks to things that are not as though they are.

c. He makes possible what is impossible.

B. Because of Jesus, we can tell a better story.

1. My life does not have to be defined by the mistakes and sins I made.

2. Because of Jesus, I'm not defined by my failures but by God's grace.

3. Because of Jesus, my life's story is different, my future is different, and my eternity is different

4. Because of Jesus, the interpretation of my life takes on a different meaning and purpose.

a. My failures testify of God's goodness.

b. My faults magnify God's grace.

c. My behaviors become redeemed.

d. My life is transformed into His likeness.

5. When Jesus saves us, we are able to point people through our sin and failure to God's goodness.

a. We are not good, but God is.

b. We are not perfect, Jesus is.

c. We deserved eternal death, but were gifted eternal life.

C. It's all because of faith and belief in Jesus.

1. The sign of my salvation is the blood of Jesus, not a bloody foreskin.
2. Salvation is by grace, not law
3. My faith does not have to be perfect because Jesus is.

D. Biblical, Jesus faith, doesn't depend on my strength but God's.

1. The Covenant to Abraham was never about Abraham.
 - a. It was God initiated, God sustained, and God empowered.
 - b. Abraham just had to be a willing participant.
2. Biblical faith depends on the power of God, not ourselves.
 - a. Biblical faith looks like a child taking her father's hand at the theme park while walking through a crowd.
 - b. The parent knows that it isn't the strength of the child that will keep them safe but the strength of the adult.
 - c. For the kid's part, It's the reach that matters as feeble as it is.
3. Faith matters, even when it's feeble.
 - a. If faith the size of mustard seeds can move mountains, then why are you so hard on yourself?
 - b. The mustard seed of faith isn't about what we can do, but what God can do.
 - c. When we place even a small amount of faith and belief in God, He can do anything.

Apply: What does this teach us?

#1. Law and Grace tell different stories.

- a. If we live by Law, we are all failures and sinners and we have no part in him.

b. If we live by grace, our sins are remembered no more.

1. **Micah 7:19** (CSB)

¹⁹He will again have compassion on us;
he will vanquish our iniquities.
You will cast all our sins
into the depths of the sea.

2. **Psalms 103:12** (CSB)

¹²As far as the east is from the west,
so far has he removed
our transgressions from us.

#2. Because of Jesus, sin is no longer our identity.

a. If you have confessed and repented of your sins to Jesus, that sin is no longer your identity.

b. Does this give us permission to go on sinning?

1. Romans 6 says absolutely not; Heaven forbid.

2. We are set free from the law of sin and death.

c. But because of Jesus, we are the only ones who remember our sin.

1. It's like going back to your high school reunion and a friend reminds you of the stupid things you did 20 or 40 years ago.

2. Even though it was true, it feels like a lifetime ago, a different person ago, and you can't imagine the current version of yourself doing that!

3. Abraham and David had some big sin in their lives but grace didn't let those moments define them.

#3. You get to choose who narrates your story.

1. Abraham kept believing, even after failure.
2. David knew the power of repentance and the loving grace and mercy of God.
3. Who do you want to tell your story?
 - a. Law? or Grace?
 - b. Law speaks of all the wrong we have done.
 - c. Grace tells of how Jesus' love covers and forgives all our sins.

Prayer Points

- #1. Jesus, Help me to live by grace instead of law.
 - a. I know how to live by law;
 - b. I'm learning how to live by grace and faith.
- #2. Jesus, help me to see my life with your eyes.
 - a. If I'm living in sin, then help me to see how lost I am.
 - b. If I'm living in sin, show me my need for forgiveness.
 - c. If I'm forgiven, help me to stop judging myself by what I did when I wasn't a believer.
- #3. Jesus, increase my faith and belief.
 - a. Jesus does amazing miracles with just a little faith.
 - b. But don't stay way you are, instead grow your faith by trusting Jesus in every situation and circumstance.