

Rebuilding the Foundations - Romans
Part 8
“Justification by Faith”
Romans 4:1-25
Pastor Charles Price

Romans 4, and if you've been here in previous weeks, you'll know we've been looking through this letter of thought to the Romans, and I'm going to read some verses from the beginning and the end of this chapter.

Romans 4:1, Paul says, "What then, shall we say that Abraham, our forefather, discovered in this matter?"

The matter, by the way, has to do with being justified by faith. That's what he talked about at the end of the last chapter. Now, he says, what did Abraham discover about this?

“If, in fact, Abraham was justified by works he had something to boast about, but not before God? What does the scripture say? Abraham believed God, and it was credited to him as righteousness. Now when a man works, his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation. However, to the man who does not work, but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.” (Romans 4:2-3)

Romans 4:16 – 25, “Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring - not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. As it is written: ‘I've made you a

father of many nations.’ He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed - the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they are. Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be.’ Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead - since he was about 100 years old and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had the power to do what he had promised. This is why, ‘it was credited to him as righteousness.’ The words ‘it was credited to him’ were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness- for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.”

That's as far as we are going to be reading. And you may wonder why the story of Abraham is sitting in the middle of the New Testament? Because this is an Old Testament story, Abraham, of course, is the father of the Nation of Israel. But also, Paul says he's the father of those of us who believe we have a direct line with him because Abraham was made right with God. Paul says here on the basis of faith and exactly the same way that we too are to be made right with God, and we enjoy the experience of God working in our circumstances on the basis of faith. And that's how we're going to talk about this morning from these verses here in Romans 4.

Several years ago, I did a bungee jump. Now, it wasn't something I'd actually planned to do, I was in New Zealand making several television programs for New Zealand television. I had been asked to go and do this. And there were 30-minute programs and one of them was on the subject

of faith. And while we were preparing this, I said to the producer, “We need some good illustration of what it means to exercise faith.” Well, we’ve been talking earlier about the fact that bungee jumping began in New Zealand. There’s a lot of bungee jumping in New Zealand, and I said, “Why don’t we get somebody to do a bungee jump? And that would be a great illustration of faith,” and we talked about how we could work that in. He said, “That’s a great idea. I know a beautiful place is about 100 or so miles from here, but I’ll see if we can get them to give us a free jump.” So, he went away, and we continued doing some recording. He came back a while later and said “It’s all fixed. It’s a place called Hanmer Springs in the mountains. They have some beautiful scenery. They’ve got this bridge that goes over a gorge. It’s a 35-meter drop from the bridge down to the bottom of the gorge. And he said, “They’re going to let us do it for free. And also, there’s a charter plane company at the airport who will fly us for free, because we’re going to include their plane on our film. And so, they’ll do it for free. A bit of publicity for them.” I said, “Great. Who’s going to do the jump? He said, “what do you mean who’s going to do the jump?” I said, “Well, we got the plane, we got the place, we got the cameras. Who’s doing the jump?” He said, “You’re doing the jump.” I said, “I’m not doing the jump. He said, “of course you are.” He says, “You’re making this film. You’re going to have to not only do the jump but make a commentary as you jump and we’re going to wire you up and record it.” I said “No, In the real world, they use stunt men for people like this.” He said, “We don’t have any stunt man. You’ve got to do it. It’s all booked. It’s all fixed.” I said, “I’ve got a wife and three children.” “I know, but you’ll survive.”

Well, I did it. And when I go onto this bridge, there is a plank. A bit like, you know, the way pirates used to make people walk the plank, I thought there’d be a sword just to push me out a bit

further. But a plank you walked out on. They wrapped the harness onto my ankles. I understand Reg in they like to do it standing up so they do it around the neck, is that right?

And before they put the harness from my ankles, they showed me the rope and they said, "this rope is made up of hundreds, if not thousands, of strands of elastic." They said, "If we drop the bus off this bridge on this rope, the bridge might cave in, but the rope wouldn't break. It would hold the bus. You're going to be safe." They said, "If one strand of this elastic breaks, we replace the whole thing." That's the law. So, you're safe. Now, let me tell you, if anybody else is going to do the jump, I would say to them, "Hey, come on, no problem. It'll be fun. You'll enjoy it. Go on." I'd encourage them. Totally confident. But it wasn't somebody else. It was me. And I had to walk out on the end of this plank, they said, "Don't look down. People who look down, don't jump." They said, "there's a tree over there on that hill, so keep your eye on the tree. Keep walking straight. We'll tell you how far to go and tell you when to stop. Don't look down. Then hold your arms up because we want to be visible for the television and in turn, slightly tangled because the camera's going to be on the side of the river down below. And then we'll catch you down, 321 and just fall, just fall off."

And I did, and I began racing down towards this river. Now they told me, "We can take you down as far as you like and want to go. You can touch the river. He can go into the river." I said, "I don't get anywhere near the river." They said, "We'll take you three feet from the river." They weighed me and they said, "we'll give you enough rope to not hang yourself. But to go three feet above the river." And as I sped down towards that river, I thought, this is what suicide people experience, and maybe I'm one. And as I got close to the river shielding myself to stop myself

hitting it because you're coming for it. Suddenly, the rope began to tighten and stretch, and back up I went, and thought I was going to hit the bridge. But three quarters of the way up, lost momentum and down I came again. Back up, down, back, up, down, back, up, down until I was suspended upside down about two thirds of the way down.

Now why am I telling you that story? I'm telling that story because it's one thing to look at the elastic and say, "Yes, If anybody else wants to jump off this bridge, I'd have no fears for them. But if I have to jump off, this is going to involve a courage I'm not sure I've got at the moment. But I had to have it.

You see in the book of Romans this is the point Paul comes to. He says, 'I've talked to you about the fact that we were created to be a display of the moral character of God, but we've become separated from God. As a result, we're under the wrath of God. We're facing the judgment of God. We've talked about that in previous weeks. But he says wonderfully, although that is an unnatural state, a righteousness from God apart from the law has been made known to us.

And he talks about how that Jesus Christ on the cross satisfied all the just requirements of a holy God. We talked about that before and now in Romans 4, he says, 'If all that is true, how is this going to become experienced in your life? And how are you going to live with a God who's not just the sort of patron of your theology? We do it in his name, not just the name that you call on once in a while, but how are you going to experience God working in you, both for your justification, that is making right with God, that enabling you day by day to live a life that you intended to live? How is this going to work?'

And Paul says, 'I want you to know first of all, it has nothing to do with your human ability. Nothing to do with that.' Now that's reassuring to know because if it was, some of us might feel, you know, I could just about manage. I'm pretty holy as it is. But most of us would say, 'Listen, count me out because I'm a nonstarter, because I know what I'm like. I know my mess. And so, he says, "I want you to understand all of this is about a gift and not about works, something you earn." In fact, he says in Romans 4:4, "When a man works his wages are not credited to him as a gift, but as an obligation." He's talking about God crediting righteousness. That's a financial term, isn't it? You credit something to your account.

Now, he says, "righteousness is credited to you." It's not on the basis of your works. When a man goes to work and he works hard all day, and then at the end of the day or the end of the week goes to his boss. His boss doesn't say, "Hey, I've got a gift to give you." He would say, "That's an insult. This is an obligation. I've earned this." But if you don't work and you can't work, can you go and they say, "Here's a gift." There's no obligation. You couldn't do anything to earn it. You receive it with an open hand. And he says it's like that with our salvation, we come to God, not with any contribution we can make ourselves, not with any innate ability, but recognizing this is totally impossible for me to earn.

And therefore, if I am to know anything of God working in my life, not just in becoming a Christian, but also in being the Christian I become every day, every week, every month, it's going to be on the basis of faith. Letting God do something in me and for me.

You see sometimes you hear people say, “Christians are so self-righteous, they're so pleased with themselves. They think they're so much better than everybody else.” Actually, the truth is the total opposite. To be a Christian is to recognize my righteousness, even if it exists, is like filthy rags. That's the description given of it in the Bible. And I'm coming to Christ because I recognize my lack of any goodness in myself because I recognize my failure. I recognize my sin. And the only possible way of being right with God is when God credits something to me. He put something into my account. That's what crediting is.

My daughter is a student, one of my daughters, away in DC. I paid some money into her account. That's what fathers do once in a while, unfortunately. I credited to her account. So, when she goes to open her account, “Oh, Dad's been so kind. Look at this. \$15.” Now says Paul, he uses a language of finance crediting righteousness, but on what basis? Is this a universal righteousness? That because Christ died, everybody in the world is covered? No, it has to be appropriated and has to be appropriated on the basis of faith. And Abraham has given to us here as the example of that.

1. The Object of Abraham's Faith

Now let me talk about three things regarding Abraham, Abraham's faith. And out of this to learn three things about you and about me and how we are to live, if we're going to live effectively.

I want to talk first about the object of Abraham's faith. What do I mean by that is this, that faith has to have an object because faith has to be in something. You can't just have faith. It's got to be in something. And the object in which faith is placed is the all-important thing that determines

the validity of the faith. If you put faith in a weak chair, maybe it's got a wobbly leg and you sit with all the faith in the world on that weak chair, you're going to end up sitting on the floor. Not because your faith was weak, but because the chair was inadequate. Because all the faith in the world won't make up for a weak chair. Does that make sense? It's no good to say, "Well, this chair has certainly got three legs, but that's okay. I've got plenty of faith, I believe this chair will hold me." You sit in it and it won't, because your faith is as valid as the object. So, the all-important thing about faith is to understand what is its object, what is my faith being placed in?

Now let me just say that sometimes I think we tend to think that faith is a sort of Christian word or religious word. It isn't. Faith is an everyday activity. Many of you came here this morning by car, and that means that you placed faith in your car, which means you said to yourself, "I live too far away from the church to walk. Therefore, I'm going to put my trust in something else to get me there". You got into the car, started the engine, put it on the road and putting faith in the car means you let the car bring you here. Faith is letting the object do something for you. Some of you came by bus. That means that you said again, "It is too far to walk, but here comes the bus and I put my faith in the bus." What that means is, I'm going to let the bus do something for me. I'm going to let the bus take me to the church. If you put faith in a plane, what do you do? You allow the plane to do something for you. It flies you through the air.

Yesterday morning I was in Vancouver, I needed to be back here in Toronto for today so, what do I do? I don't start walking, I say I can't get there in time. There's a plane. I'm going to trust the plane. Put my faith in the plane and let the plane get me to Toronto. And it did.

Because faith is a disposition of trust in an object which allows that object to work on our behalf. Faith is a disposition of trust in an object that allows the object to work on our behalf. Faith is not evidence for what I do for the object. But by letting the object do something for me. Now that defines what faith is.

How did Abraham exercise faith? How did Abraham let God do something for him? Which is the point he's making here. Well, let me tell you the story very briefly of Abraham. Many of you know this story, of course, and some of you may not be as familiar with it becomes in the Book of Genesis.

And we're told that when Abraham was 75 years of age, God spoke to him. As far as we know, Abraham had no dealings with God before his seventies, a year or two earlier. God had said to him in a place called Ur of the Chaldees where he lived, which is in present day Iraq, "Leave the Ur of the Chaldees and go to a land that will show you when you get there." And Abraham went off not knowing where he was going, got the land of Kanan, and God said, "This is where I want you to stay. Now I'm going to make a promise to you."

This is what he said. I'm quoting from Genesis 15:5, "He took Abraham outside and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars, if indeed you can count them." Now, I don't know what Abraham did, what he said, 'just hold on, 1,2,3,4,5,' but I doubt he did that. He probably said, 'Well, all I know is that there's lots and lots and lots. In fact, we can't count them.' and God said,

All right, “So, shall your offspring be Abraham, you're going to have as many descendants as the stars that are in the sky.”

And it says, “Abraham believed God, and he credited to him as righteousness.” (Romans 4:3) When it says, ‘he believes God,’ it means he says “God, you said it. You have to make it work. I'll trust you.” Well, so far, so good, but there are some problems. Abraham, as I mentioned, is 75 years of age at this stage. He is married to Sarah. Sarah is 65 years of age and although they've been married for many years, they have no children, not for want of trying. But she was unable to conceive. In fact, it says Sarah was barren and in any case, even if she hadn't been barren, she is 65, which means she's long past the menopause. But Abraham believed God. God, I understand I'm 75. She's 65, I understand that, but you made a promise. And then he went home to tell his wife. I'd love to have been a fly on the wall because God didn't tell Sarah.

Abraham had to tell Sarah, and the Bible is not complimentary about either one of them. It says about Abraham here in verse Romans 4:19, it says “he was as good as dead.” So he wasn't a healthy 75-year-old.

He was as good as dead. It says about Sarah and Genesis 18:12, “she was worn out.” Now I don't know why she had no children, but she was worn out. And I can imagine Abraham coming home, 75, as good as dead, coming into the house, hobbling into the house. And that's Sarah all worn out, lying on the beanbag, wherever she used to lie. And Abraham says, “Sarah”, “yes?.”, “God spoke to me today.” “And what did he say?” “You'll never, you'll never believe it, Sarah. He made a promise.” “Oh, a promise, I like promises. What did he promise?” “You won't believe

it, Sarah. it begins with B.” “B? Another beanbag?”, “No, not another beanbag. Sarah God said, “We’re going to have a baby.”

And do you know what it says? She believed him. I don’t think my wife would believe me in similar circumstances. She would want a second opinion, I think at least. But she believed him - probably started painting the room, that’s what people do when you tell them that kind of information - and waited, and nothing seemed to happen.

Three months went by, six months and by, nine months went by and twelve months went by. I imagine Abraham saying, “Sarah, are you feeling sick in the mornings at all?” “No.” “Are you putting on weight at all?” “Are you eating, you know, strange combinations like onions and bananas at the same time? You’re not? Okay. Well, keep trying.” Two years went by, three years went by, five years went by, seven years went by, ten years went by. Abraham is now 85, presumably even dead, she’s 75, presumably more worn out and there’s no baby.

So, in Genesis 16, you can read this sometime, Sarah brought up the subject. It’s usually the wives who bring up the difficult subjects. “Abraham?”, “Yes?” “Did you tell me that God told you, we’re going to have a baby?” “Well, yes, he did.” “Are you sure it was God who told you that?” “Well, sure it was God who told me that.” “You sure that wasn’t the night you were eating some Danish blue cheese or something?” “No, no. It wasn’t the cheese. God told me.” “Well, where is the baby Abraham?” “I don’t know Sarah. Maybe God didn’t know how worn out you were?” She probably said, “Maybe he didn’t know how dead you were Abraham.”

But whatever the problem, the promise of God is ringing in the ears, there's no baby, ten years have gone by and at this point, they make their big mistake, which Paul doesn't talk about in Romans 4. That is, Sarah made the suggestion, 'have the babies, with our maid Hagar, a young, probably fertile Egyptian maid.' And he did and called him Ishmael, that's another story. But then, as the years went by when Abraham was 99, now this is 24 years after the first promise, God said "Abraham." "Yes?" "You remember I promised your son." "Well, yes, yes of course I remember that." "Well, this time next year, your wife will give birth to a son." And it tells us that Abraham laughed. "Oh, come on, we've been playing this game for 24 years now." He told Sarah, she laughed, probably at Abraham, she probably said, "Abraham, you silly old twit. You're eating too much cheese at night." But it tells us in Genesis 21:2 that Sarah gave birth on the very day that God had planned. It tells us. And in Romans 4:18, it says "that against all hope Abraham in hope believed."

Now how can Abraham believe in hope against all hope? Meaning: it's hopeless. We've been to see the gynaecologist Sarah. "Yes" "What did he say?" "It's hopeless." "I thought he would." "Did you talk to your neighbours?" "Yes." "What do you tell them?" "Well, I told them what you told me, and they said it's hopeless." Of course it is for a woman at that age and a man - that dead.

So, what kind of God is the object of Abraham's faith? What kind of God? Well, let me read you Romans 4:17, "as it is written, I have made you a father of many nations", is what God said to him. "He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed - the God who gives life to the dead."

Let me pause there a moment. What kind of God is Abraham putting his trust in? “The God who gives life to the dead.” What is Abraham's problem? He's got two problems. Romans 4:19 says, “he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead.” That's the first problem, “his body is as good as dead.” Second problem, Romans 4:19, the second part says, and “Sarah's womb was also dead.” And I can imagine Abraham and Sarah sitting around the fireplace one night and say, “you know, God made that promise all those years ago?” and he says, “Yes, it doesn't work, yea I know.” “ Well, why doesn't it work?” “Well, because I'm as good as dead and your womb is dead.” “What kind of God was it that you talked to Abraham?”, “Oh, well, he's a God who gives life to the dead.” “Beg your pardon?” “Oh, I said it. It's a God who gives life to the dead.”

So, what's the problem of being dead? Well, it's a problem of the womb that's dead. What's the problem with a body that's as good as dead? If the God in whom we're trusting is the God who gives life to the dead? You see, it doesn't matter what your problem is. It doesn't matter how big the obstacle is to God bringing about what he intends to bring about in your life. As long as you realize that the God in whom you trust is equal to, in fact, he's bigger than the problem that you face. “What kind of God, Abraham?” Well, He gives life to the dead, so hope against hope.” “Why?” “Because although I'm as good as dead and her womb is dead, God specializes in what's dead.”

He gives life to the dead. And the second thing also in Romans 4:17, is that the last part of that verse, “the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they are.” God calls things that are not as though they are. Now from a human perspective, they are not, there

things that are not. From God's perspective he talks about them as though they are. So, he says, “Abraham, you're going to have a child. Not only that, you're going to have grandchildren.” “Not only that great grandchildren, not only that great great great grandchildren. Not only that, a nation will come from your body. Not only that, you'll be the father of many nations. Look at the stars in the sky Abraham, you have as many descendants as the stars in the sky.”

Now, Abraham's problem is this: that I'm old. If only God had said this to me when I was 30 or said it when I was 20. Supposing to have said this when we're young and fit and fertile and all the rest of it. No problem. But he said it to us when we're old, when we're barren, anyway, when I'm as good as dead anyway. And Sarah's womb is dead anyway, and she's worn out. And he calls things that are not. So, he doesn't say, “Abraham, now you can have a baby and I know it will be unusual, but you going to have a baby, That's all what I'm going tell you so far.” He doesn't. He tells them the whole story. Nations - plural - nations will come from your body. In fact, Jesus said, I think in John's gospel, he said, your father, Abraham, saw my day and was glad. (John 8:56)

So, what Abraham understood included Christ the Messiah coming from his own seed, his own race. So, the things that are not things that don't exist yet, things if you talk to neighbours about then will think you're crazy. But what kind of God are you trusting? Well, he is a God who gives life to the dead. We got lots of death, so that's okay - He's capable. He can bring life out of a dead womb and is the God, who calls things that are not as though they are. We know these things are not, but to God they are. And so, we're going to trust God and say, “God, you said this, we're going to believe you.”

Now, let me ask you, is this the God you trust? Because if this is a God you trust, you will face anything this week that need frighten you. You will face things this week that are bigger than you. You will face things this week, which may threaten to overwhelm you, but you will face nothing this week which need frighten you. When like Abraham you say, “The God I trust is bigger than the circumstances I face, bigger than the problems I am coping with.” Notice God didn't take away Abraham's problems, as we'll see in just a moment. He won't take away your problems. But in them, he'll work out his purposes and work out his intent.

2. The Obstacles to Abraham's Faith

So, if that's the object of Abraham's faith, first of all. Secondly, let me talk about the obstacles to Abraham's faith. Because there are some big obstacles, and Abraham fully understood those obstacles we've already mentioned. His body was as good as dead, and Sarah's womb was dead, and she was worn out and all that. But you see, when he looked at these obstacles, it tells us in Romans 4:19 “without wavering in his faith, he faced the fact his body was as good as dead.” Romans 4:20 – “Yet, he did not waver through unbelief.”

Now, Paul is being very kind to Abraham, because we know that there were times when Abraham did actually waver, but that's being real. So will you, so will I - there are times we do. But he came back on track and God always tells the good story about your life, and he does here. And he says without wavering, ‘Yes, there were times Abraham began to doubt the times he

produced Ishmael. There was a time he produced Ishmael out of disbelief.' But he said, 'he did not weaken in his faith, he did not waver in his faith,' but had every reason to.

You see, when he came to Canaan and God said, "I'll give you this nation, stay in this land." Within a couple of years, a famine came to the land. And Abraham, because of the famine had to leave the land. God told him, "Don't leave it, stay here," and went down to Egypt, got into trouble, almost traded his wife for his own safety and eventually was able to get to her and bring her back to Canaan. But he faced the obstacle - God made a promise, now everything seems to have gone wrong. 'There's a famine in the land he told me to live in.' 'Why didn't God organize the weather a little bit better?', we might say, Abraham might have said.

When he got back they waited, as I've told you, until he was 100 before the baby Isaac was born and as Isaac began to grow up Abraham must have been thrilled to bits, 'at last I've got this little boy that God has promised me.' And one day God spoke again, 'Take your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love and take him to the region of Mount Moriah and there sacrifice him as a burnt offering. Actually, in the culture of Abraham's day, that kind of child sacrifice did take place, it was a pagan culture.

But now God is saying, "Abraham, this son, you've waited all these years. All my promises are wrapped up in him. Take him and offer him as a sacrifice." And it says early the next morning, if you read in Genesis 22. "Early the next morning, Abraham got up and left." There wasn't much wavering. Why was he doing this? Because he was learning something. My God is the God who gives life to the dead. So, he reasoned, it tells us in Hebrews 11, even if I slay him, God will raise

him from the dead. But you know the story, he tied him, put him on the altar and was about to slam when God intervened and said, “Stop - now I know you fear God.”

But Abraham faced this obstacle. God told me there is going to be a nation now he's telling me to offer my son. And then when Isaac grew up, as he came to maturity, it became pretty evident he wasn't very interested in girls. How do we know that? Because when he was 40, his father employed a servant to go and find a wife for him. Now, if everything about Isaac is, he's going to be the means of a nation coming, then Abraham's expectation is probably when he's 20, he will marry, have a child every year for the next 20 or 30 years and we'll get this nation on the road.

But at the age of 40, “Have you thought about settling down, Isaac?” “No.” “Have you found any nice women you like?” “No.” “You're interested?” Not particularly, I'm quite happy by myself, thanks so much.” “Yeah, but you know there's a nation supposed to come. Which means you have to become a daddy someday - you need a wife. Okay, I'll employ somebody to do it. Go and find him one.” He came back with a girl called Rebecca. Isaac said, “She's fine, she'll do.”

And out of all the women in the Middle East, it says, “and Rebecca was barren.” Why didn't he bring back some fertile young woman? He brought back a girl and she was barren, and for 20 years, she did not conceive. After 20 years when Isaac was 60, she conceived once. The only time she conceived - produced twins Esau and Jacob. What a mess those two were. You know their stories, I'm sure.

Now this is 85 years from the promise, 25 years before Isaac was born, God made a promise, “Look at the stars,” and then another 60 years before Isaac became a father - 85 years. Abraham probably thought to himself, “Okay, in 85 years: I’ll have a child in a year, God made this promise, and then maybe in 20 years, we’ll have a grandchild and 40 years a great grandchild and 60 years of great, great grandchild, 80 years a great, great, great grandchild. And boy, by 85, we have this nation half here!”

But it didn't happen. And as obstacle, after obstacle, after obstacle, that's what it says in Romans 4:18 “against all hope, Abraham in hope believed.” Romans 4:19, “without weakening in his faith,” Romans 4:20, “he did not waver through unbelief.” Romans 4:21, “being fully persuaded God had the ability to do what he promised.”

And I want to ask you that this morning. Do you have that confidence in God? Because there may be things that you think God has promised to do in your life, that His Word promises. And you say, ‘Well, these aren't happening very quickly.’ He has promised, for instance, that I will be one day like Jesus. You say, ‘this is a slow, slow process because I am still tripping over the same sins I've been tripping over the last 20 years, but I'll trust him.’ Because the day is actually going to come, you will be like Jesus. It really will come, because you are predestined, Romans 8 says, “to share his glory, his righteousness fully.” Maybe that's some of you and you say, ‘well, you know, I wanted to become a Christian, I'm trying to become a Christian, I thought I'd become a Christian, but things don't seem to be changing very well.’ Well if your heart is right before God, you're living in that spirit of repentance before him and trust in him, He is at work. Other people will probably see it more clearly than you do, but he is at work and you trust him.

If God has put you in a situation, you feel that he has shown you something, and God has that prerogative, he can show you all kinds of things. He wants to do with your life. He gives us vision and dreams, you say these aren't coming to pass. Give him his time. God never works quickly, actually, and there's a verse and Isaiah 5:19, which says, "Woe to those who say, let God hurry let him finish his work that we might see it." God doesn't hurry, He takes his time.

And very quickly, if that's the object of Abraham's faith, the object of his faith was God - a God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they are and the obstacles to Abraham's faith were all these events in his life which seem to get in the way of God's promise.

3. The Opportunities Released by Abraham's Faith

And the third thing, very quickly, is the opportunities released by Abraham's faith. And I love Romans 4:21, "He was fully persuaded God had the power to do what he had promised." Now, notice that. God has the power to do what He promises. God does not have the power or God is not promised the power to do what you claim. I know people that go around claiming things, they'd like something. I'd like a new car, let's claim it. God is obligated only to his own promises.

Sometimes we get the idea that we decide what we'd like God to do. In fact, I heard somebody speaking about this a while ago, he said, "You decide what you would like God to do and then have the faith to do it, and he will do it." That's like saying, you write the check and get God to

put his signature on it. No, God has the power to do what He has promised. That's why God is committed only to His agenda in your life. Not to our agendas, but His agenda in our lives.

May be quite different to our own, but he was “persuaded He had the power to do what He had promised, and therefore, it was credited to him as righteousness.” Because righteousness before God is living in dependency on God and allowing God to work out his purposes in us and through us. And the reason why Paul tells the story is because it is Abraham's God that is your God. And you can know the facts about God, but that's got to come the time you got to jump off the bridge and say, “if God is God, then everything's going to collapse unless God is at work.” And as you jump, you discover he's there. He's real and he works.

Let me read you part of a letter I received a few days ago. Actually, addressed to you, as well as to me, it says to Pastor Charles Price and the believers of the People's Church in Toronto. I can only read just a very small part of this letter, it's a wonderful letter. Very articulate, seven pages long.

“I visit your church every Sunday, through your television services. God has used your voice for the benefit of my spiritual growth and by growth I mean that my confidence in God, in his love, his mercy, his grace, his discipline has increased in proportion to the revelation of Jesus Christ, to me and in me.”

Now he's writing from prison serving a sentence, and he tells me his story.

“By the time I was 15, I was a drug addict, a drunk, a thief, a vandal, a sexual predator, desecrating sacred things and places in churches, a God hater and declared myself a child of Satan and dared God to strike me dead. I lived in a perpetual cycle, (more like a cyclone) of fear, rage, self-hatred, guilt, shame, feelings of helplessness, loneliness, trapped, suicidal, despairing and blind to everything, but the chaos that my mind, I trusted no one, not even myself.”

And goes on to tell how that one day in his prison cell, “I found myself on my face in a segregation cell pouring my heart out to God, whispers of doubt and unbelief for like, trumpet blasts in my mind. I used every ounce of energy I had to press through them. I cried out for mercy. I wept. I pleaded. I shouted. I wept some more. I was exhausted of strength, unaware of the passage of time and then an assurance so still so quiet from the very depths of my being I heard the simple words, ‘rest in my grace.’ The words were simple, but their significance was not lost on me. Something had changed, something was happening within me, maybe seconds, maybe minutes, I don't know, but I became aware of a stillness within me, a quietness of soul, and a peace that I had never known before. I could not contain the flood of joy that then passed over me as I realized my prayers had been heard, that I would know his forgiveness, his mercy poured out on me, his love, his grace. And began realizing I live in utter dependency on God and I'm at peace.”

He says so much more. He says a group of them watch on Sunday morning on television and the prison, then they switch off the TV and sit around and they go around in the circle and they say what God has said to me today. One by one. But you see, here's a man who from every human

perspective - broken, damaged, you might feel pity if you were to see him in that condition he described himself.

But he hoped against hope. He discovered a God who gives life where there's death. Who calls things that are not as though they are - that declares a man righteous when he knows he's full of failure and sin. And maybe some of us here this morning need to know that too, because you can know all the language but never know the life. You can believe in the reliability of the bungee rope, but never jump.

And there many of you here this morning and there may be things in your life and your circumstances where God has been working or circumstances have changed, and your temptation is to panic, not to turn to him, but if you turn to him, you discover he's a God who is equal to everything in your life and you trust him and you obey him and you give him his time and he works at his purpose.

And if you're not a Christian this morning and some of you may need to come, which is what Paul is really talking about - how to discover justification, how to be rid of your sin in the first place. Your sin is bigger than you. You can't deal with it. It's a burden on your back. But it's not bigger than Jesus, because in giving life to the dead, he also gives cleansing to the repentance.

Let's pray together.

Father, we are grateful this morning that you're a God who is alive and gives life to the dead, you're a God who calls things that are not as though they are. We can trust what you have promised, even when we can't see it. Thank you, God, who is able to do all that you have promised. And as we find the promises of your word. We don't come with any sense of self ability and say we will try and work this out on God's behalf, we come with empty hands and say, Lord, this has to be your work in my heart.

Thank you for this man in prison. Thank you for transforming his life. That you stepped into his circumstance, you stepped into his life, into his heart, and you filled him with joy instead of bitterness, peace instead of turmoil with holiness instead of sin.

And I pray for many of us who know this in increasing ways, we pray in Jesus name, amen.