



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of Dan Duncan

Romans 4:18-22

Romans

"The Nature of Faith"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] Our text this morning is Romans 4:18-22.

Beginning with verse 18, we read, "In hope against he believed, so that he might become a father of many nations according to that which had been spoken, 'So shall your descendants be.' Without becoming weak in faith, he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb; yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what God had promises, He was also able to perform. Therefore it was also credited to him as righteousness."

Let's bow in a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we thank You for this time together. It is a privilege to gather together with the saints and it's a blessing when we have as the focus of our gathering Your inherent word. So Father, we thank You for that. We pray Your blessing upon us. We pray You would bless this reading of Your word and then bless us in our study together. Well, we praise You for Your goodness, Your grace that brought us here, that has brought us to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ and the power at work within us to bring that about. And that's what the gospel is, the power of God and the salvation, and we thank You, that we who have believed in Him have experienced that power and power that does not stop, which continues on. In fact, the

blessings of it only increase as we progress in the faith and grow, and that's what we seek to do as we study.

So we praise You for that and praise You, Father, that you have sent forth Your Holy Spirit into our hearts, that at the moment of faith we're sealed with Him, and He not only protects us and keeps us secure throughout our pilgrimage in this world, but He teaches us and He builds us up in the faith. He sanctifies us, and we pray that that would be the result of our time together this morning, that as we study the scriptures that He would teach us, that He would apply these things to our hearts and that He would build us up in the faith and we would be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ and we would go forth from this place this morning encouraged by the things we have studied and go forth to be good and faithful testimonies in the midst of a dark and fallen world.

Bless us to that end, Father. Bless us spiritually, and we also pray for our material needs, because they're great. We are dependent upon You for everything that we have, every breath that we take. Every beat that our heart beats is a gift from You. We thank You for that and we pray that You'll continue to give us our daily bread, meet our daily needs.

We pray for those who are unemployed. We pray that You'd give them employment. We pray for the sick, that You'd give healing, give encouragement where there is discouragement. We look for bless from You, because You have given us the comforter, the Holy Spirit, who can comfort in times of distress.

Father, we pray for ourselves this evening when we return to this place to remember our Lord with the Lord's supper. We pray that our evening together would be edifying, that all who participate would have their hearts prepared by You and be guided by You.

So bless us this evening and bless us in this hour. Bless our final hymn; prepare our hearts with it. Prepare our minds, that we might study and think clearly together and that all things would be

done to Your honor and glory. We pray these things in Christ name.
Amen.

[Message] The Scottish commentator Robert Haldane, in his classic commentary on the book of Romans described the book of Romans as an abridgement of all that is taught in the Christian religion. It's a good definition of the book and it becomes apparent, I think, to the reader of the book of Romans of all that is taught in that book, one of the central themes and most important words in it is faith. Almost from the beginning Paul lays great stress on that word. The righteous man shall live by faith. It's not just Paul's emphasis. That's the emphasis of the prophets as well - Habakkuk in 2:4.

Christian life begins with faith. And it continues by faith. Apart from faith, there is no success in life, because without faith, it is impossible to please God. So do you know what faith is? Christian faith. I say Christian faith, because all men have faith, whether they are religious or secular. The atheist has every bit as much faith as the Calvinist has.

But there's a difference. What is it? What distinguishes Christian faith from all other faiths? You know the characteristics of true faith, of the faith that pleases God? It's very important to know that, to understand the differences, to understand these things, and that is the subject of our text this morning, in Romans 4:18-22, where Paul explains the nature of faith.

His model is Abraham, who is the central figure of Romans 4. He is Paul's proof of the gospel, his great example of what he has been teaching, that salvation is due to the work of Christ completely and it is received by faith alone. He explained that in 3:21-26, the righteousness that God requires for salvation is "apart from the Law." It is not produced by the Law. It is not produced by human works. It is a free gift; it is received by faith. That is the gospel. That has always been the gospel, and to prove that, to prove that people in the Old Testament were saved in the same way as people in the New Testament are saved, Paul gives the example of Abraham. He quotes

Genesis 15:6, "Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness," or, "it was reckoned to him for righteousness," for the obtaining for righteousness. No works are mentioned in that text, only faith. Righteousness is what resulted from it.

He's answered the arguments that had been set against that doctrine in the verses that follow. All of the arguments against his doctrine, he has addressed. And now he considers faith itself. He explains exactly what it is, what it means to believe, and we're going to look at this in four different aspects, because I think we can see it in that way. I think he brings out at least four aspects of faith.

The first is its object. Faith always has an object. And the object of true faith is the promise of God. Second, faith has vitality. It has assurance and stamina. It does not waver. It does not fail. Third, faith has a source. Men believe; women believe; people believe, but the source of that faith, the reason they believe, is supernatural. The source is God. That's the third point. And fourth, faith responds. Faith obeys. Faith gives glory to God and that's what Paul says that Abraham did.

Well, as I said, everyone has faith, faith of some kind, the religious and the non-religious alike. But the first aspect of true faith is that which distinguishes it from all others, and that is its object. So often people think of faith in terms of something that is subjective. They think of it in terms of that which we do alone, as an inner quality. It certainly is that in part, but they tend to think of it in this subjective terms and measure its value in its sincerity or in its intensity, ignoring what the faith is in, just if it's sincere, if it's intense, if it's firmly held.

But in the scriptures, in Paul and all of the Bible, the value of faith is not seen in that alone. It is seen primarily in its object, in what is believed. Someone has said that a person can have strong faith on thin ice and won't live to tell about it. He can believe very firmly that this ice is going to hold me up, skate out on it, and that's the last of one's faith. The object of one's faith is what makes the difference.

If the object is wrong, if it is false, then it won't benefit to believe at all. In fact, it will do great damage.

So Paul begins at the essential place in verse 18, with the object of Abraham's faith, which was the promise that God gave him, the promise that he would be the father of a multitude of descendants. This was the promise that God repeated throughout Abraham's life and each time the promise challenged Abraham's faith. It challenged his willingness to believe. We see that as we look over his life. He was about 70 years old when God called him out of Ur of the Chaldeans. He and his wife at that time were without children.

But in addition to promising Abraham the land of Canaan, to which He called him, He promised that He would give him children, that He would make him a great nation, that He would make him not only a great nation, but through that great nation He would make him a blessing to all the nations. That was in Genesis 12, when his name was Abram, exalted father.

In Genesis 15, God again appeared to Abraham and He repeated the promise. He calls Abram out of his tent. He tells him to look up at the night sky and to count the stars if he is able to do so. And then He says, "So shall your descendants be." In other words, you're going to have many descendants. You're going to have a multitude of descendants.

But comprehended within that promise is something more than just a multitude of descendants. That promise had to do with a particular descendant, the Redeemer to come, who was promised long before, who was promised back in Genesis 3:15.

Now, when we read anything in the Bible, we have to read it within its context. And when we read Genesis 15 and the promise that God made to Abraham, we must read it in light of chapter 3, where this original promise was given of a deliverer. And that deliverer was comprehended in the promise that God gave Abraham of descendants, because it is through those descendants, plural, that the singular descendant, the great deliverer, would come.

Now I think that is born out by the context of the book of Genesis, but Paul makes that very clear, because Paul, in Galatians 3:16, explains that very point, that the promise of seed which was given to Abraham, the promise of descendants was also of a seed, singular - of a descendant. That is, Christ, he said.

And Abraham understood that to the heart of the promise, that it involved the coming of Christ. Of course, he didn't see it as clearly as we see it. He didn't know that the promise of the seed of the descendant would be named Christ, or that would be His title. He didn't know these things. He saw it vaguely. We see it much clearly. But he saw it and he believed it. He had faith, and that's when his faith was reckoned for righteousness. Christ himself said to the Jews in John 8:56, "Argumentative essay rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad." He saw it there in Genesis 15:6.

And so when we talk about the promise God gave to Abraham, we must include Christ in that. The promise that Abraham believed was essential the gospel, when he was declared righteous. But still, he and Sarah and no son. They had no heir. He was 86 at the time and time was running out. Fourteen years later, in Genesis 17, God again appeared to him. Abram was not 99 years of age, still the exalted father and still without the child of promise.

Some years earlier he had had Ishmael by Sarah's slave Hagar, but God had informed that Ishmael was not the child of promise, that the child of promise was Isaac, who would be born from Sarah. So he's still without a child.

When God tells Abram that he will be the father of a multitude of nations, then he changes his name to fit the promise, from Abram to Abraham, which means father of a multitude. Now Abraham was to believe that.

And everything depended upon that promise being fulfilled. Abraham's eternal destiny, your eternal destiny, rested on that promise, on the fulfillment of it. But Abraham was 99 years old. He's almost 100 years old. His power to produce children was gone. He

knew that. Sarah was 90 years old. She was barren. But God said he would be the father of a multitude of nations. That's the promise that Paul is referring to here in verse 18. That's the object of Abraham's faith and those are the circumstances in which it was given.

Genuine faith, true faith, has an object. It's not simply a subjective response to some idea, but it is a genuine response, a belief in the promise of God. Just any idea, but the promise of God. It is belief in the promise of God in spite of the circumstances. And that's what we have in Abraham's situation in Genesis 17. God appeared to him. He gave him this promise when there was no reason to believe that he would have a son, that he would have an heir, other than the promise itself, other than the promise of God. That's all he had.

God spoke to Abraham. He repeated the promise He had made earlier. He even expanded upon it. He made it even grander. It was not just that he would be the father of a great nation; it is not just that he would be the father of a multitude. But it is that he would be the father of a multitude of nations. And at a time when he could not be the father of one child.

His circumstances challenged his faith, as they frequently do in our lives. And in the life of faith, everything that Abraham knew about himself, everything that Abraham knew about life, denied everything that God said. When a person is dead to something, he's dead. You reach 99 years of age and are incapable of reproducing children, that's it. It's over. You don't have examples of people who were revived or something like that and has abilities.

Well, all of Abraham's circumstances, from what he knew about himself, from what he knew about life as a whole, all of that denied the promise. But Paul writes, "In hope against hope, he believed, so that he might become a father of many nations. In spite of the circumstances. When the promise was no longer humanly possible, Abraham believed it with confident hope.

In fact, Paul adds in verse 19, "Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was

about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb."

There's a textual variation here. The King James version, which some of you are using, reads, "He considered not his own body," rather than "He contemplated his own body." So the difference is he didn't think about his body and the other says he contemplated; he thought about his body.

So the meaning of that King James translation is that his faith was so strong that even though his body was dead to producing children, he didn't give consideration to it, didn't think about it. And the meaning of the New American Standard Bible, which I have, and which follows my edition of the Greek text, which follows a reading of older texts, has it that he did consider the condition of his body. He understood his inability, understood it full well, but still believed. Either way, the meaning is essentially the same. The apparent hopelessness of the situation did not frustrate Abraham's faith. Either text comes to that point than that teaching.

He believed God in spite of the circumstances and he clearly understood the circumstances and the impediments to the promise that had been given. But still he believed. In fact, Moses writes in Genesis 17:17 that when Abraham heard the promise, he "fell on his face and laughed, and said in his heart, 'Will a child be born to a man one hundred years old? And Sarah, who is ninety years old, bear a child?'"

Now, that is not the laughter of disbelief. That's not incredulous laughter. That is the laughter of wonder and amazement that such a thing should happen. He believed the promise. His mind was filled with wonder over the promise. And in verses 20 and 21, Paul adds that "he did not waver in unbelief, but grew strong in faith" and was "fully assured" that God would perform His promise.

Now, that gives us another aspect of faith, that the second point in this explanation of the nature of faith, and that is that it does not waver. It is assured. True faith has conviction. It has assurance. It has confidence in the promises of God. It is based on God's promises. It is governed by God's promises. It is not something paradoxical. It is not

something contradictory. Faith is often thought of in those terms. One of the commentators put it, "This is not belief in the impossible simply because it is impossible." It's the way some people think of faith. It's just believing what is unbelievable.

Faith is not that at all. It's not a wish or a longing. It is trust in the objective word of God. It has an object. It has a concrete object. It is trust in the word of God and in that alone, and trust in that alone, because it is the word of God. Some have spoken of it as belief in the bare word of God. The promise is enough. It doesn't need proofs. It doesn't need some kind of support. Faith is confident in that word of God because it is the word of God.

That was Abraham's faith, and so Paul writes that Abraham did not waver in unbelief, meaning he was not divided within himself over the promise. It's the idea of this word "waver." It has the idea of being divided, and what Paul is saying is Abraham was not divided against himself over the promise that God had given. A divided mind is an unbelieving mind. Israel had that in the days of Elijah. It had that, really, throughout its history. But we see it very prominently in the days of Elijah and the days of Ahab and Jezebel. The nation worshipped Baal and the prophet abraded the people for their apostasy, and then he challenged the people. He said, "How long will you hesitate between two opinions?"

The Lord is God, follow Him; but if Baal, follow him. Hesitating between two opinions is being divided in one's mind. It's unbelief. Elijah wasn't a divided man. He was absolutely committed to the Lord and he was completely confident in Him. And his faith was demonstrated by the test that he proposed between Baal and Jehovah. And it was a test of fire from heaven. Baal was the storm God. Baal was the God who not only sent rain, but he sent lightning, he sent fire, and so Elijah says, "I'll give you the benefit of the doubt. I'll stack the cards in your favor. We'll make this a test of fire. Since Baal is the God of fire, that should be easy for him. The one who's the true God will bring fire down from heaven."

So they went up on Mount Carmel. They built altars and the prophets of Baal danced around the altar and cried out and became frenetic in their prayers and gashed themselves with knives, did everything they could to stir Baal to send down fire, but nothing happened of course.

And then Elijah prayed before God; prayed once, simply asked God to answer his prayer and God did that. God sent down fire from heaven. He sent down fire onto Mount Carmel. He devoured the altar that Elijah had made and proved Himself to be the true God and proved Baal to be a phantom God, a no-God at all - nothing at all.

That was Elijah's faith. He trusted in God. He trusted in the unseen. He knew God and believed His word, and Abraham had the same kind of faith. His mind was undivided. That's the essence of his faith, an unwavering belief in the promises of God.

Now, that does not mean that a believing person never has doubts. I think we can read something like this, perhaps, and get a little bit discouraged and wonder, "Well, I have doubts. My mind sometimes seems a bit divided." We do have that. We shouldn't think that it is unusual when doubts arise to challenge our understanding, to challenge our faith. The devil will make sure that we have doubts. And those are part of his arsenal of firey darts, throws them at us all the time.

And doubts come with living in a world that is constantly denying what the Bible declares to be truth. But faith, faith that Paul is speaking of here, the faith that Abraham had, the faith that Elijah had, overcomes doubts. It faces them squarely and it rises above them as Abraham did when he believed in hope against hope to become the father of many nations.

And that's not unique to Abraham. The faith that's being described here is saving faith. It's genuine faith. It's the faith that pleases God and it's the faith that all of his spiritual descendants have. That's why you and I who believe in Jesus Christ are children or sons

of Abraham. We're of that line. He's the father of those who believe, because our faith is like his.

It says the faith that a person as a believer in Jesus Christ has, and yet while our faith is common to his, it's the same faith, we cannot be help but be amazed at the faith of such a man and feel that we come short of him or we come up of Elijah or Paul, or a host of others. So the question arises, how does a person come to have that kind of faith? Abraham, we read, grew strong in faith. How does our faith grow strong? How does it become like this man's faith?

Well, Paul indicates how that happens and he does so in two ways. First, it is divine. And secondly, it is human. There's a divine way and there is a human way. The first is indicated in the statement that Abraham grew strong in faith. Very often, that is taken to mean that Abraham was strengthened by his faith, or that Abraham strengthened himself by means of his faith. And it is true that as a person acts in faith, as a person is obedient, that he or she is strengthened in his or her ability to do that, is strengthened in faith, develops in faith. Obedience in small things leads to obedience in large things. That's how faith grows. We act, and as we act, we grow stronger and stronger.

But that is not what Paul is teaching here, not in that statement. The grammar really doesn't favor it. The verb "strengthened" is not a middle voice, which would mean that Abraham did this for himself. He strengthened himself. That would be the meaning of that, if it was in that grammatical form, but this isn't that. The verb is passive, which means Abraham was acted upon. He was passive in his. He wasn't the subject of the action. He was the object of the action, which was the action that was done by God Himself. Abraham was unable to believe. Abraham was made to grow strong.

Faith is a supernatural work of God. Faith is a gift. The Bible is clear is about that. We can give a number of examples. Wednesday night, I was teaching on a similar subject and I gave a number of examples from the scripture, where we can read this, but one I think

will do. Philippians 1:29, Paul encourages the Philippians with the words "To you it has been granted for Christ's sake to believe in Him." It has been granted. It has been given. What has been given? To believe. Faith is a gift. God is the source of it. He's the source of every spiritual blessing. When we stand before the throne of God, we will not take credit for one good thing in our lives.

Do you think you're going to do that? Do you have the confidence that when you stand before God, you're going to take credit for something good that you've done? I don't think you will. We will not, because every good and perfect gift comes down from the Father of **Lights**. Everything we have, every spiritual blessing, faith and all else, is a gift of God.

Now that is a great assurance. Now that should not lead to indolence or indifference. That is a great assurance and stimulus in the Christian life, because this is stated in this verse in contrast to a divided mind. Abraham did not waver in unbelief. He was strengthened in faith. God doesn't leave us to the pressure of the circumstances of life, to the pressures of the world, and the firey darts of the devil. All of those things can bring us down. Satan could sift us like wheat if God were to just cast us aside and let him do that. We're not strong enough to stand up against that, or the world, or any of this. All of that produces doubts and those doubts could carry us down.

But we're not left on our own. God is with us. He's always with us to enable us. He does not leave us alone ever. Becoming a Christian is not like enlisting in the Navy and being sent out on a ship that is fully equipped, which the crew navigates through seas and storms. As a Christian we are fully equipped. We are complete. We lack nothing. But God doesn't send us out to make our own way through the world and through life. He is with us to guide us and enable us all along the way, at every moment. From the beginning God opens our blind eyes and we see and believe and give Him the glory. That's what Abraham did - giving glory to God, Paul says.

But God works through means to produce and strengthen faith. He uses what are sometimes called the means of grace, and there are various means of grace. But prominent among them, the main means of grace, is the word of God itself, His revelation. That's how Abraham was strengthened in his faith. That's the second way that Paul mentions.

When the amazing promise was given to Abraham, that this man who was as good as dead would have a child and a multitude of nations, his faith was encouraged - was strengthened, we could say - was encouraged by his knowledge of God. We saw that last week. Paul indicates that in verse 17 when he stated that Abraham believed in the one "who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist."

Behind all promises stand a character of the one who makes those promises. Abraham knew that and he knew the one that stood behind the promise that he would have a child. And as he thought about that promise and he thought about his own physical condition, about his age, about his inability, and about Sarah's barrenness, he didn't turn a blind eye to the problems. He didn't underestimate the situation in his life. What he did was remind himself of God's power and faithfulness. True faith doesn't ignore reality, isn't blind to what is. It always looks at problems, though, in light of the promise and in light of the one who made the promise.

That's what Abraham did. He considered God's attributes. He considered God's faithfulness. God's always true to His word. In Titus 1:2, Paul wrote of the "hope of eternal life, which God, who cannot lie, promised long ago." God made a great promise long ago and that promise is eternal life. Eternal life to the believer, and, Paul says, God cannot lie, cannot make a promise that won't come true. He cannot contradict Himself.

God is completely different from us, because we do that. We make promises and we break them. Now, maybe we don't intend to do that. In fact, we can make promises with the best intentions, but

forget, or circumstances can conspire against us so that we fail. We desire not to fail, but things just happen and we're not able to keep our word. But God never fails - never fails. He never forgets.

Circumstances cannot conspire to overthrow His best intentions, because He controls all of the circumstances. And He never breaks His word. He's always faithful.

And He is all-powerful. He is able to do what He has promised to do. He is the Creator. He calls into being that which does not exist. Before time and matter, when there was nothing, not even darkness, God spoke and everything came into existence.

Abraham knew that was the God who spoke to him. He is the God who gives life to the dead. No one and nothing can frustrate God or turn back His hand. Isaiah tells us that in Isaiah 14:27. Jeremiah said, "Lord God, behold, You have made the heavens and the earth. Nothing is too difficult for You." That is the God of the prophets and the patriarchs - an omnipotent, omnipresent, omniscient God with whom all things are possible.

Abraham knew that God could keep His promises, because of His power. And he knew that God would keep His promises, because God is faithful. Verse 21, "Being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able to perform." So Abraham **pressed** within the word of God.

Calvin had some good thoughts on this. Not going to read them, because I've got some quotes that I'm going to read in a moment, but he brings up the point we face doubts in our life. There are things in the world that cause us to doubt. We are declared righteous by God through faith alone, yet we look at our lives and we see sin and we wonder are we really justified? Has it really happened? Or we face various problems and we wonder can God overcome this? Isn't this too great? Isn't this too much of an obstacle? And we begin to waver in our faith. What do we do?

And Calvin says, "When those kinds of things happen, what we do is we close our eyes to them. We disregard ourselves and our

circumstances and we believe firmly in the word of God." When we see all of these things around us, when various doubts arise, what do we do? We say no to them and we say yes to the word of God. We trust in Him. We believe. But we should know this, that our faith is not unreasonable. It's not irrational. Because to believe in the promise is to believe in the one who promised, and the one who promised is great.

And that's what strengthened Abraham's faith. His vision of God was big. And as we get a vision of Him like that, as we see Him as He really is, as we come to understand Him increasingly - and I say increasingly, because we'll never come to the end of that, because God's infinite. We'll never come to end of what He is. We'll never gather Him up and contain Him in one idea that will be sufficient. He is beyond everything. He's not only omnipresent, He is immense, which means He not only fills the universe, He's beyond the universe. Cannot comprehend that, but as we increase in our understanding, as we get a clearer and better vision of God, then like Abraham we will become fully assured.

And we get that kind of vision, that understanding, by looking at Him, by studying Him. It's what the author of Hebrews tells us, in Hebrews chapter 11. He gives this gallery of spiritual portraits, of men and women of faith, and then in 12:2, he gives us the exhortation, "Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith." That's how faith grows. We fix our eyes on Him. We think about Him. That is the means that God uses to strengthen us.

Peter, you'll remember, is in the boat on the Sea of Galilee and he sees Jesus walking across the water and he says, "Bid me to come, Lord," and the Lord does. "Comes out to me." And Peter steps out on the water, begins to walk on the water. It's an amazing thing. He walked on the water as long as his eyes were on Christ, but when he took them off, he sunk. The lesson there is keep your eyes on Christ. As we look to Him, our faith is strong. Faith is only as strong as its object. When the object becomes the things around us, when it

becomes anything other than the Lord God, faith is worthless. But as it's focused on Him it grows and it becomes strong. So we need to study Him. We need to know Him.

Let me give some quotations that I think reinforce this from - two men, one American and the other English. But first, A.W. Tozer commented nearly 50 years ago on the loss of the concept of the majesty of God in the modern church. "In its place," he writes, the church has substituted something that he described as "so low, so ignoble, as to be utterly unworthy of thinking, worshipping men." "This happens," he writes, "just when the forces of religion are making dramatic gains and the churches are more prosperous than at any time within the past several hundred years."

But the alarming thing is that our gains are mostly external and our losses wholly internal. And since the quality of our religion that is affected by internal conditions, it may be that our supposed gains are but losses spread over a wider field.

He went on to state that no people has ever risen above its idea of God. "For this reason," he writes, "the gravest question before the Church is always God Himself, and the most portentous fact about any man is not what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like." In other words, what you think about God is of first importance. The way you think about God determines much about your life - everything about your life.

Charles Spurgeon said much the said thing a century earlier. In the first year of his long and significant London ministry, he began his Sunday sermon on January 7, 1855. "It has been said by someone that the proper study of mankind is man. I will not oppose the idea, but I believe it is equally true that the proper study of God's elect is God; the proper study of a Christian is the Godhead. The highest science, the loftiest speculation, the mightiest philosophy, which can ever engage the attention of a child of God, is the name, the nature, the person, the work, the doings, and the existence of the great God whom he calls his Father. There is something exceedingly improving to the

mind in a contemplation of the Divinity. It is a subject so vast, that all our thoughts are lost in its immensity; so deep, that our pride is drowned in its infinity.

"No subject of contemplation will tend more to humble the mind, than thoughts of God. But while the subject humbles the mind it also expands it.

"The most excellent study for expanding the soul, is the science of Christ, and him crucified, and the knowledge of the Godhead in the glorious Trinity.

"I know nothing which can so comfort the soul; so calm the swelling billows of sorrow and grief; so speak peace to the winds of trial, as a devout musing upon the subject of the Godhead."

Spurgeon was just 20 years old when he spoke those words. Tozer wrote toward the end of his life, but both men had mature faith and profound lives because they believed what they said. They had a big God. They made Him the object of their thoughts and studies, just as Abraham did. And that had a profound effect on what he did, how he responded to the promise. When he heard the promise of God, he believed the promise, because he knew that God was good for His promises, because He is almighty and always faithful. He believed and, Paul writes, that he glorified God. That too is the essence of Abraham's faith, the nature of true faith. It glorifies God. It recognizes that God is who He is, and it relies completely on Him. It relies completely on His power and His faithfulness. It relies on the bare word of God. And that brings glory to God.

Nothing brings greater dishonor to God than disbelieving His word. Nothing brings greater glory to God than believing His word. That is the faith that pleases God, faith that glorifies Him. It has the right objects, it has conviction, it has assurance, and it responds. It wholly leans on the promise of God. And so verse 22, Paul repeats Genesis 15:6, "Therefore it was also credited to him as righteousness." It was by faith and by faith alone that Abraham was justified.

And his faith was great. Wasn't it great? In hope against hope he believed. But the greatness of Abraham's faith is not in Abraham himself. It's not in his greatness. Abraham was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God. He took no credit for himself. He took no bit of glory for himself. It all goes to God. There's nothing in Abraham that's praiseworthy. It's all the work of God. Greatness of faith consists in the fact that it gives all the glory to whom it belongs. It gives all the glory to God and it rests in His power and His faithfulness. That is why faith is effective. That is why God counted Abraham's faith for righteousness.

But notice this. Paul wrote, "It was credited to him as righteousness." Faith was credited to him - not great faith; simply faith. There are degrees of faith. There are levels of maturity. The greater our faith, the more productive and useful will be our lives, so faith must grow and that must be our aim - to develop, to grow, to mature.

But God does not say, "I'll only accept your faith as long as it's mature, as long as it's strong, as long as it's great." He accepts faith. He accepts small faith. That's how faith begins. Just as every strong adult begins as an embryo, so faith begins small, like a mustard seed. But still, it is faith and Christ receives faith. He receives all who believe, even when the faith is weak and barely there, because it's not faith that saves. Christ saves. And all who believe in Him are received by Him.

So if you're here and you've not believed in Jesus Christ, if you've not believed the promise of God, the good news that there is forgiveness and eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ, faith alone in Christ alone, then believe. Believe in the weakness of your faith. With the mustard seed of faith, believe. That's enough. God reckons that faith for righteousness. He justifies the believer, the child in faith, and then causes that child to grow into maturity and strength of faith. May God help you to do that and help all of us to walk day by day with our eyes fixed on Christ. Let's pray.

[Prayer] Father, we do thank You for Your goodness, Your promises, Your faithfulness to give us faith and strengthen our faith. And yet, Father, we recognize that You work through means. You use Your word and we must confess we are not nearly as skilled in the word of God as we should be. Our eyes are not as focused upon our Savior as they should be. Help us to be men and women who redeem the time and apply ourselves to Your word, to learn it, to know You better. In so doing, to have stronger faith and live lives that are increasingly effective in this world. May we do that. May we be those kind of people, Father. We pray that in Christ name. Amen.