

Freedom of Fully Assured Faith

Romans 4:20-25

“...but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, ²¹fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.”

Introduction: As a pastor and father, I will get asked from time to time, “*what are the biggest challenges and concerns that you have for the current generation?*” This is a wise question that is easily encapsulated in a simple response. Is there concern with a lack in our overall culture of godly marriages, fathers who lead by example and Scripture, a scarcity of true Biblical knowledge, a constant barrage of temptation to sin and rebel, an inundation of false teaching that can be accessed at the palm of our hand without much oversight?! The answer to each of these is, of course, a real and ongoing concern. But there is another issue that intertwines with all of these and perhaps is more difficult to discern, but creates an insidious path into our heart and mind, and that is the issue of **apathy**.

Now, perhaps this is a word that we do not often use or is not part of our typical nomenclature, but apathy is an issue that has plagued mankind from the beginning of creation. It's also called **indifference, lethargy, disinterest and unconcern, which manifest in a passionless and emotionless existence**. It is feeling *blah* about the most important things in life. It is marked by a lowering of motivation, interest, and initiation, and is the cousin of depression, which overlaps in many ways. The Bible uses the Greek word *acedia* which can be translated “*sloth*” (Prov. 12:24; 27; 19:15; Matt. 25:26; Rom. 12:11), which describes why a person resists hard work, despises his station in life, and has laziness of mind. It is what we feel when we experience **laziness in prayer, struggle in self (and spiritual) discipline, cannot enjoy stillness of the soul, and muzzles meditation**. *Apathy distracts, numbs, and convinces that the path of least resistance is enough.*

Dorothy Sayers wrote that apathy or *acedia* “*is the sin which believes in nothing, cares for nothing, seeks to know nothing, interferes with nothing, enjoys nothing, loves nothing, hates nothing, finds purpose in nothing, lives for nothing, and only remains alive because there is nothing it would die for.*”¹

In observing our lives that are full of information, many forms of ‘truth’, listening to people who portray themselves as experts in a two minutes reel, one streamed after another, and polarizing statements from leaders, we have a hard time differentiating between what is worth living for and what is merely trying to numb us from ultimate reality. Passion, focus, purpose, and clarity go out the window, traded in for virtual novocaine, killing our joy and numbing God given desire.

In his short but impactful book “*Overcoming Apathy*”, Uche Anizor said this about apathy:

*“Some things evoke passion in us, while other things induce yawns. The **paradox of apathy** is that we are captivated by the things that we don't really care about and are lukewarm to the things that, in our heart of hearts, mean the most to us. We don't act on what we should act on, but we are awakened to things we should probably ignore...*

*It is not care-less; it is care-adrift, care-misplaced. Our culture is a breeding ground for chronic apathy due to the **proliferation of distractions available to us**. We are invited to care, just not too much or*

¹ Uche Anizor, “*Overcoming Apathy: Gospel Hope for those who struggle to care.*” P. 51

about too important a matter. In fact, our busyness may serve only to exacerbate our disengagement from meaning and to keep our spirits in a state of lethargy.”²

Does this resonate with anyone else? This helps explain why it is fashionable for our young people to care about community so much that they do not want to offend with the truth of God, Scripture and gospel. It is why we are so captivated by the **trivial** but bored with the profound. It is why it is easier to be “mid” about everything than have our lives marked by eternal truths. It is why built into our flesh we struggle with areas of **doubt, laziness, joy, and working to both enliven our passions AND discipline ourselves when they wane**. The point we are trying to make is NOT that this exists, but rather what do we do about it if we find it in ourselves and church. Do we have people here who fall into the national average where only half of our people engage meaningfully in the Bible daily, or who only pray for meals, or give only when convenient.

Now, what in the world does this have to do with **Romans 4??!!** Fair question. Here is what struck me about the re-telling of the life of Abraham through the lens of faith that justifies: *he was a model of a life that lived out the kind of faith that pleases God* (Heb. 11:6), that which **“believes that He exists and that He rewards those who seek Him”**. Abraham lived out his faith in the midst of most people who did NOT believe the same thing, had to wait a lifetime for promises he would STILL not receive, and did all of it by grace in hope that the God He believed would deliver. In this, he lived an **exemplary, full, passionate, forward looking, hope-filled, obedient, and joyful life**. This is truly the **antithesis** of the apathy that many are experiencing around us and that we ourselves face, and it is the same faith **available to us today**.

A Quick Review of Abraham’s Faith (20-22)

20 No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, 21 fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. 22 That is why his faith was “counted to him as righteousness.

Abraham’s faith was defined as one that came out of the **grace God provided** (3:24; 4:16), manifested itself in obedience (Gen. 22:18), and looked forward in **hope** that God would keep His promises (4:18). His faith was based on the person and character of God Himself, banking his present and future on God’s ability to deliver (Heb. 11:17-19), so that even if he was called to kill his only son of promise, that God would somehow **raise that son from the dead**, even though he had never seen a resurrection or experienced it himself. This is the faith that **justifies**, or that God gives us in order to *declare us righteous*, both forgiving our sin and restoring our relationship with Him.

This played out practically in Abraham’s life for 100 years, as he was called at 75 (Gen. 12:4) and died at 175 (Gen. 25:7). He was far from perfect, but he lived consistently in the reality of the promises of God. He left family, believed when his body was *dead* and his wife’s womb was *dead*, that somehow God would deliver. Though he struggled at times with **doubt**, an experience every believer will grapple with for a time, his overall course of life was **unwavering commitment to trusting God’s promise**. When verse 22 says that this faith was ‘counted to him as righteousness’, it gives a description of what **saving faith truly looks like**.

An Application for Abraham’s Offspring (23-25)

² Ibid, p. 23-24

23 But the words “it was counted to him” were not written for his sake alone, 24 **but for ours also**. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, 25 who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification

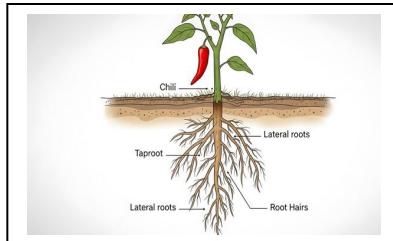
Here is where Paul pivots from an Old Testament story and character to his current readers and by extension, each person in this room. What Abraham went through and experienced was **for our sake**, that we would have a living and viable picture of what salvation by grace and faith alone looks like. Notice a few similarities between what Abraham believed and what we are called to believe also:

- 1) **Justification has ALWAYS been by faith** – There has NEVER been two paths of salvation, one being by works or obedience or law, and the other by faith. No, Abraham was declared righteous by faith alone, as were the people in Rome whom Paul was writing to, as are we who can hear this today. God accepts us back to Himself in full restoration through us having faith that is a gift He Himself gives.
- 2) **Justifying faith is in a DIVINE OBJECT** – Where Abraham believed the promise given by a perfect and immutable God, we put our full assurance in the same God who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead (Acts 2:24, 32). Abraham had to put his faith in a future reality, trusting that God could “give life to the dead and call into existence the things that do not exist” (Rom. 4:17), where we look back and believe that God raised Jesus up to life, conquering sin and death (1 Cor. 15:54-57). We also look forward in hope that what God has secured in the future through Christ will be ours in full (1 Pet. 1:3-5).
- 3) **Justifying faith saves both FROM & TO** – Notice that Jesus was “delivered up” on the cross to pay the *propitiation* (satisfaction) price in blood for our sins, offering us forgiveness. But He was also *raised up to life*, securing our future, where one day we will see Him and be like Him (1 John 3:2). We are saved FROM SIN by forgiveness and saved TO a RESTORED relationship with God.
- 4) **Justifying faith WORKS & ACTS** – Abraham was declared righteous based on faith, NOT works. It was his trust in the promise of God that was accepted, NOT his adherence to a moral law or ceremonial observance. Yet, every true, God given, grace infused faith will manifest itself in whole hearted, desiring-to-be-pleasing-to-God obedience and relationship (1 John 5:3), since His commands are not burdensome. Just like a loving relationship with an earthly father or spouse, our love overflows in a desire to please, not earn. There is no such thing as Biblical love and gracious faith that does not change a person, which then calls him to live out that change in daily trust.

So if all of this is true, how does this explain how we overcome our fleshly bent toward apathy or indifference, or our struggle with the true **core issue of it all, which is UNBELIEF**. That is what we want to look at for the rest of our time together, walking back through verses 20-21.

The Besetting Sin of UNBELIEF (20)
No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God...

John Piper said that unbelief is a deep down and which all other chili plant in the ground. Notice a with scraggly offshoots sprouting condition of our heart that **refuses preferring lesser pleasures, and power of joy and rest in Him**. How



"taproot sin", one that goes sins sprout out of. Think of a misshapen root that goes down all the way down. Unbelief is a **to trust God's promises, unable to experience the** does this play out?

Why were many in Israel excluded from entering the Promised Land? Disobedience? Rebellion? Anger? Playing the harlot? YES! But what was the core of each of these? **"So we see that they were unable to enter because of unbelief"** (Heb. 3:19). What is the heart issue behind worry and anxiety in our circumstances in this world? Jesus said it was because the disciples were those of "little faith" (Matt. 6:30). What keeps us from a willingness to forgive the repentant? The disciples understood they needed a boost in their faith since they had a hard time believing (Luke 17:4). In fact, if we spent time diagnosing the roots of our sinful choices and desires, they would invariably draw a line back to unbelief, an inability to hold onto a clear promise of God, from lust to laziness, contentment or materialism, lying to gluttony.

John Piper went on to say, *"Nothing dishonors God more than not to believe what He says."* If God does all things to the praise of His glory (Eph. 1:6, 12, 14), then the expected response of all people would be to trust what He says and to believe in His promises. Think about how you feel as a parent when you know the best for your children and they disobey! Not only is it bad for them, they actually declare that they do not inherently trust you. Unbelief never stays in its lane, but leads to growing impurity (Titus 1:15), a hardening of the heart (Heb. 3:13), and inability to please God (Heb. 11:6). This is why the caution and warning is given to believers in **Hebrews 3:12-13**:

*"Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, **unbelieving heart**, leading you to **fall away** from the living God. 13 **But exhort one another every day**, as long as it is called "today," that none of you may be hardened by the **deceitfulness of sin.**"*

We need each other. We need to be proactive with each other. We need to do it daily. We must battle unbelief since it is a matter of life and death. We must remember there is no middle ground in that fight. We acknowledge our own propensity toward it. But how did **Abraham battle it? How did he model unwavering (yet imperfect) faith?**

The Satisfying Goal of God's Glory (20b)

"...but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God,"

Now we are getting into those foundational, grandiose truths that Scripture lays out that we can often become numb to, where the glory of God no longer exhilarates us or captivates us. This happens when we stop seeing Him clearly, through the lens of Scripture, and create an artificial god made in our image. **What does it mean to give glory to God?**

First, it acknowledges the greatness of God and our frailty before Him. Giving glory to God is the REVERSE of the drift of mankind in Romans 1. Faith recognizes that we were created in His image, not the other way around. We are made to seek, honor, thank, and obey HIM, not that somehow He is there to serve us. When we treat God as a cosmic credit card or Amazon Prime Plus, we diminish the greatness of His glory.

Second, we acknowledge that we are saved “*in love, He predestined us for adoption to Himself as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of His will, to the praise of His glorious grace, with which He has blessed us in the Beloved*” (Eph. 1:5-6), so that as His chosen people, we may “*proclaim the excellencies of Him who called us out of darkness into His marvelous light.*” (1 Pet. 2:9). This means that in the grandiose or ordinary activity of the day, we do it because of, on behalf of, with the knowledge of, and FOR the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31).

Third, we grow our ability to glorify God by deepening our trust and dependency ON HIM. That means that when life goes well, we acknowledge that it is by His grace and an opportunity to reflect back praise to Him. But it also and maybe more importantly means that when things DON’T go according to plan, at least our plan, like pain, loss, suffering, persecution, hurt, or when emotions leave and doubts creep in, we still acknowledge Him that nothing is greater or more satisfying than who God is in Christ. In this part, we realize that our greatest joy comes when we are most satisfied in Him, and when our joy is complete in Christ, God is seen and experienced as glorious.

But you’ll notice that this sentence in Romans 4 gives us the greatest way to give glory to God, and that is by being **fully assured, fully convinced, persuaded, satisfied, and resolved to TRUST HIS PROMISES COMPLETELY:**

“*....fully convinced that God was able to do what He had promised.*”

Do you want to grow in your faith? Do you want to glorify God? Do you want to be more satisfied in the superior pleasures He offers versus the mudpies of this world? Then the pathway is clear: ***trust Him and believe completely in His promises!*** But herein lies the issue. Often we are lax in knowing these, or if we know them, we do not remember them. Or if we remember them, we do not exercise them. Last week my good friend Alan Vince asked me a wise and profound question: *what are the top five promises that you cling to in your life?* This pervaded my thinking for the week, and lead to my own reflection of foundational promises, but also walking it through with our shepherding group and elder meeting. So I wanted to share just a few promises that are precious in my own life, knowing that listing out “favorite” promises from God is like being asked who your favorite child is. But here is why it is so important, because we want to have these stored up ***before*** the trial hits, the pain starts, the decision is needed, or the unexpected hits. When we have these at our disposal, it creates a new lens to see through, a new grid to think through, so that our response is by faith to the glory of God by trusting Him in the MIDST OF the hard:

- **Jesus will be with us & will never forsake us:**

Hebrews 13:5-6 (Matt. 28:20; Deut. 31:8) “*Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you.”*”⁶ So we can confidently say, “*The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?*”

- **We are secure in the hands of God the Father & Son:**

John 10:28-30 (Romans 8:39) *I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.* 29 *My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father’s hand.* 30 *I and the Father are one.*”

- God will finish the work He started in our salvation:

Philippians 1:6 “And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ”

- Waiting on the LORD is a place of strength:

Isaiah 40:30-31 – “Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; **but they who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength**; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint.

- Fear does NOT need to control since God will help:

Isaiah 41:10 “fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand

- His GRACE is always sufficient

2 Corinthians 12:9 “But he said to me, “**My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.**” Therefore, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me.”

- We are NOT destined for wrath, but to see Christ, be like Him, and live with Him:

1 Thessalonians 5:9-10 “For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, 10 who died for us so that whether we are awake or asleep **we might live with him.**

1 John 3:2-3 “Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he **appears we shall be like him**, because **we shall see him as he is.** 3 And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.”

That's my list to start. What is yours? What are the promises you cling to when there is doubt, apathy, loss, a struggle with a lack of emotion, temptation, impatience, and unbelief? Do you have greater promises at your disposal to fight the inevitable drift of our flesh? My challenge for you is to take time and begin to list out promises you can hold onto NOW, knowing what is promised to come in the future.

John Sammis, a Presbyterian pastor overheard a young man leave a revival meeting under the teaching of D.L Moody and utter the words, ‘I am not quite sure—but I am going to trust, and I am going to obey.’, which prompted Sammis to write the hymn “*Trust and Obey, for there's no other way, to be happy in Jesus, then to trust and obey.*” This was true in 1887, and true today. We **trust** first in Christ, in His person and work, and believe that He died and was raised again by the Father. Then, we obey out of faith, knowing that obedience does NOT EARN, but honors, glorifies, and please, because it believes that God keeps His promises and leads us into greater joy. Is this true of you?