

**HAPPINESS IS...  
ROMANS 4:1-25**

**By Pastor John Carlini, D. Mn**

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Whenever we study through a literary piece of work, one of the key elements is knowing how important a theme is to the author, and how much time he/she spends on developing that theme. The book of Romans is only 16 chapters long, and so far, the Apostle Paul has spent the first three chapters on developing the theme that we are born alienated from God because of sin and the only way we can be saved and reconciled with God is by placing our faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ.

In today's text, yet one more chapter will be devoted to this theme, and to be sure, Paul will not yet be finished. Much more of the book of Romans will deal with this salvation by faith issue, what it means, and how it applies to us. That means that already, over ¼ of the book of Romans has been dedicated to the theme that there is only one way to be reconciled with God and to be saved, that is to place our faith in Jesus Christ.

So Paul thinks this theme is pretty important. This morning we are going to see that he wants to demonstrate that faith was the only way to approach God from the very beginning, he is going to continue his thought from the last chapter that the Old Testament and the whole Hebrew experience testifies to this point.

This morning, the text focuses on God as a gift giver. He is the One who freely offers us salvation and reconciliation and all we can do is receive it through faith.

You know, the interesting thing about gift giving is that for the most part, we give gifts to others based on what we think is valuable or desirable. Let me give you an example; three sons grew up, left home, went out on their own and prospered. Getting back together, they discussed the gifts they were able to give their elderly mother.

The first said, "I built mom a huge house."

The second said, "I sent her a Mercedes with a driver."

The third smiled and said, "I got you both beat. You know how Mom enjoys the Bible, and you know she can't see very well. I sent her a parrot that can recite the entire Bible. It took 20 monks in a monastery 20 years to teach it to him. I had to pledge to contribute \$100,000 a year for 10 years, but it was worth it. Mom just has to name the chapter and verse, and the parrot will recite it."

Soon thereafter, Mom sent out her letters of thanks: She wrote to the first son, "Son, even though I appreciate the thought, the house you built is so large, that even though I live in only one room, I have to clean the whole house."

To the second son she wrote, "Thank you for the thoughtful gift, but I am too old to get out a lot, much less travel. I stay home all the time so I never use the Mercedes and the driver is rude."

To the third son she wrote, "Dearest Melvin, you were the only son to have the good sense to know what your mother likes... That chicken was delicious."

Well the nice thing about God is that since He created us, He knows exactly what we need to make us happy. As we will see, God provided us with a very generous offer He has offered us salvation through Jesus Christ. All we have to do is to receive Him in faith and that is the only true way to happiness.

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Here is Paul's theme this morning: **WE CAN ONLY BE TRULY HAPPY IN LIFE WHEN WE RECEIVE GOD'S GRACIOUS PROMISE OF SALVATION THROUGH FAITH ALONE.** In other words, Paul is reinforcing the lesson he has been teaching from the

beginning of the letter which is, because we are all children of Adam and Eve, we are all born sinners, guilty before God, alienated from God, with natural bents towards evil. Religion tells us that we need to be good and to do good that is the way we can be reconciled to God.

However, Christianity makes it abundantly clear that this task is impossible. We can never be good enough or do enough good to earn God's love. Christianity moves in the opposite direction from religion. Religion is the human movement upwards whereas Christianity is God's movement downwards. It is God Who moves to be reconciled with us it is God the Father Who sent His Son, it is God the Son who took on human flesh, suffered and died on our behalf and it is God the Holy Spirit who comes to live in each one of us. The only human movement in Christianity is to receive the gifts God gives us.

I. CHOOSING FAITH OVER WORKS (Vs. 1-8)  
**WE CAN ONLY BE AT PEACE WHEN WE LET GO OF THE IDEA THAT WE CAN BE SAVED BY BEING OR DOING GOOD.**

In verses 1-8, Paul says that happiness is choosing faith over works. In other words, **WE CAN ONLY BE AT PEACE WHEN WE LET GO OF THE IDEA THAT WE CAN BE SAVED BY BEING, OR DOING GOOD.** Now I want to give you a side note to watch as we study through this chapter. Keep in mind that Paul is writing this letter to the Christian Church in Rome, the church is made up of both Jews and Gentiles, non-Jews. One of Paul's hopes throughout his ministry was that Christians from diverse backgrounds would come together as one in Christ so Paul is going to take the most famous hero from Judaism, Abraham, the founder of the Hebrew nation, and demonstrate how Jews and Gentiles are children of the same father.

Where we pick up the text this morning shows that Paul has said that rejecting God's laws can't bring us peace with God, being good can't bring us peace with God, and being

religious doesn't solve the problem either. No amount of being good and no amount of heroic acts can win us favor with God.

**A. A PRIME EXAMPLE (Vs. 1-3)**

In verses 1-3, Paul makes Abraham the prime example. He picks the greatest person in Hebrew history. Jews and Gentiles alike would be familiar with the life and times of Abraham. The Jews held him up as a man of righteousness. After all, when God tested him by asking him to offer up Isaac, the son he waited for so long and received at 100 years old, ... Abraham obeyed. Just as he was about to sacrifice Isaac, God stopped him and commended him for his great faith and love, if anyone had a chance to be saved by good works and heroic deeds, certainly it would be Abraham.

Paul asks the question, "So what then shall we say that Abraham learned concerning this whole salvation by faith issue?" Let me point out that the NIV omits a key phrase here. That phrase is, "according to the flesh." The NASB reads, "What then shall we say that Abraham, our forefather according to the flesh, has found?" There is debate as to what this "according to the flesh" refers to, does it refer to forefather? Is Abraham is the father of everybody that is a Jew, because all Jews could trace their ancestry to a particular tribe who was originally one of Jacob's sons, who was Isaac's son, who was Abraham's son? So physically, every Jew was a child of Abraham. But it could also refer to the learning. In other words, "What did Abraham learn about this salvation process in the real world, in a practical way?"

Now even though I think both apply to a certain degree, I think Paul is addressing Abraham as the Physical forefather of all Jews, because later he will talk about the spiritual children of Abraham. The first century Jews held Abraham up as the example of perfect obedience. And that will work nicely for Paul, since he too is a Jew.

Look at verse 2 where Paul says, “If indeed the case were that Abraham or any of us were justified by works, then of all people, Abraham would have something to boast about.” How much more could anyone love God than to offer Him his one and only son? No, Abraham clearly stood head and shoulders above any human in the righteousness category, so if we compare Abraham to other human beings, he looks pretty good. But look what Paul quickly adds, “But not before God.” You see, Abraham did do a lot of good things. When God called him, you remember our study through Genesis, “Lek Lekah, get up and go,” Abraham left his family behind to travel to the land of Canaan, modern day Israel he interceded for his nephew Lot and did many great things.

But let’s not forget some of the other things Abraham did, he gave his wife Sarah to Pharaoh to have sex with because he was afraid for his life and he wanted to get rich. Abraham pulled the same stunt with King Abimelech, only this time God stopped the king from having sex with Sarah. He went along with his wife’s plan to have sex with her servant girl Hagar, and later was forced to send his son Ishmael away.

Now please keep in mind that the word justified means not guilty. Righteousness, the same root word means without fault, perfect, so would we say that Abraham is not guilty? Would we say he was perfect? If not, then by God’s standards of righteousness, holiness, and justification, Abraham, like the rest of us, misses the mark. Even though he may fall closer to the target than the rest of us, he nevertheless still falls short and misses the mark.

Look at verse 3, because this will be Paul’s theme throughout the chapter and he will continue to play off this verse he quotes from Genesis 15:6. The word Paul will use as his theme is a banking term the word is “credited or reckoned”, and it will be used throughout the whole passage. Look how it’s used here; Paul quotes Genesis here as saying, “Abraham believed God,

and it was credited to him as righteousness”, we need to look at this as a bank account. God approached Abraham before he did anything good or performed any heroic acts God said, “Get up and go, I have great plans for you.” In the Hebrew, Abraham said, “Amen,” which means, “O.K. I agree.” God then credited Abraham’s bank account with righteousness. Before Abraham did anything, God declared him to be “not guilty, perfect, upright, and acceptable” Abraham was now reconciled and right with God.

Please don’t miss this, faith and God’s gift of righteousness all preceded Abraham’s great heroic acts. His heroic acts and great demonstrations of love for God all come after he had already been declared as not guilty, and as acceptable by God. Therefore, Abraham has no leg to stand on if he wants to boast about his righteousness or holiness since it was a gift from God. I’m hoping that we all understand this because salvation is a great deal.

#### B. A PRIME RATE (Vs. 4-5)

In verses 4-5, we see the prime rate here Paul wants to drive home the point using that word credited again. If someone were to work for his or her salvation, then it would not be a gift. I would not be right to say that God credited their account salvation would be owed to them, like religion, if I work hard enough then God owes me salvation. He cannot credit it to me.

Paul will summarize this again later but let me state it here he has proved that we have all sinned, Abraham sinned and the rest of us all fall short. Paul sums it up like this, if we want what we deserve, what we worked for, then our wages will be death because that’s what the wages of sin are. What’s our payment for sin? Eternal separation from God, torment in hell for eternity, that’s our payment for sin.

So if we are judged on our behavior, or on our works ... no, let's make it even more graphic, if Abraham, the great hero of faith were to be judged on his works, guess what, his payment would be to spend an eternity in hell. Let's make this example more contemporary; if Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King Jr., or Gandhi were to be judged on the basis of their works, then all would spend eternity in hell. That is what would be due them if they were judged on their works. Now if that's what they deserve, what do you figure that we deserve? Please don't miss Paul's message here if you want to think you are a pretty good person who does a lot of good things, and want to be judged on that, ... you are doomed to spend an eternity in hell.

On the other hand, if we are willing to approach God with confession, which in the Greek means to say the same thing as God, that we are hopelessly lost based on our thoughts, behaviors, speech, and works, ... If we then place our faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ on our behalf, ... then and only then can we be saved. When we ask God to save us through Jesus Christ, then God will credit our spiritual bank accounts with righteousness. Works lead to damnation, but Faith leads to salvation.

#### C. A PRIME RETURN (Vs. 6-8)

And that is how the prime return is described in verses 6-8. Paul now selects arguably Israel's greatest hero, King David to quote from. Do you remember the most famous line regarding David? David is a man after God's own heart, to be sure, David did a ton of heroic deeds. He conquered many nations and expanded Israel's borders to the largest they had ever been in all of history and peace reigned throughout Israel. As a young boy, David killed the giant Goliath. Truly David was a man after God's own heart surely he could qualify for righteousness based on his works.

But David knew it would only be by the grace of God that he could be saved. We may be tempted to forget that He disobeyed God by taking a census of his army. David also committed adultery with Bathsheba and had her husband killed to cover up the affair. In Hebrew law, it was forbidden to let a murderer go free, in fact, that person had to be put to death, or God would punish the whole nation. Yet, God forgave David and let him continue to rule that's why David knew full well that the way to blessedness, to happiness was through faith. Look what he says here; blessed are those whose sins are forgiven and covered by God. Now here comes that word credited again. Happy are those whose sin the Lord will not credit/debit against him. David knew that if we were truly judged on the basis of what we think, say, and do, then he was doomed to eternal damnation. But David loved God and had faith in His promises, that's why David wanted to be judged on faith rather than works. You know that's what the word Blessed means in Greek it means to be happy, to be joyful, and to be at peace.

If all these great heroes of the faith would fall short of salvation and being acceptable to God based on their works, then where do you figure that leaves us? I haven't done anything good or heroic that compares to them but what I do share with them is my faith and love for God. How about you? Are you ready to let go of the notion that there is anything good in you? You see, happiness does come in choosing a life of faith over works. **WE CAN ONLY BE AT PEACE WHEN WE LET GO OF THE IDEA THAT WE CAN BE SAVED BY BEING OR DOING GOOD.**

**II. CHOOSING INCLUSIVENESS OVER EXCLUSIVENESS (Vs. 9-16)  
GOD'S GRACIOUS OFFER OF SALVATION IS GIVEN TO ALL WHO WILL BELIEVE.**

Sometimes I think we get the notion that Church is only for good people. I hear people say to me all the time, "Pastor, I'd come to church, but I'm afraid the building might fall down."

My reply is always, “I go everyday, and the church hasn’t collapsed yet.” You see, I think that oftentimes we church people give unbelievers the idea that we are exclusive, rather than inclusive. But as verses 9-16 demonstrate, happiness is choosing inclusiveness over exclusiveness. **GOD’S GRACIOUS OFFER OF SALVATION IS GIVEN TO ALL WHO WILL BELIEVE.** Did we hear that? Jesus said He came to the sick He said the healthy don’t need a doctor, the sick need a doctor. Church should be a place where sinners can find salvation. Church is not a place for Christians to come and gather and make each other feel better it is a place for those who are alienated from God to find and be reconciled with God.

A. THE SEAL OF FAITH (Vs. 9-11)

Verses 9-11 describe the seal of faith. Let me deal with the text first. Keep in mind that Christianity is birthed directly from Judaism. So it would be natural to think that it would be necessary to become a Jew before becoming a Christian. In fact that debate occupied much of the early church administration. And also keep in mind that Paul has held up Abraham as the Physical ancestor of the Jews.

So Paul now asks, “If that’s the case, then is this happiness of salvation by faith only available to the physical descendants of Abraham?” That’s who he is referring to by the circumcised. Circumcision was the ceremony given to Abraham as a sign of God’s promises to him. Throughout the ages, circumcision became the rite that Jews came to identify themselves by. They would reason, if you’re circumcised, then you’re a Jew. If you’re a Jew, you have the religious law. If you have the religious law, you’re a good person. If you’re a good person, you’re saved.

Paul has just refuted that reasoning in regards to the law. But he’s not through with Abraham yet. Watch his reasoning and ultimately his definition of circumcision. He says, God

gave Abraham this incredible promise of becoming a great nation before he was circumcised. God told Abraham that he would be blessed and that the whole world would be blessed through him. And God justified Abraham, God credited righteousness to Abraham's account at least 29 years before Abraham was circumcised. The rite of circumcision is not given to Abraham until chapter 17:11 of Genesis. Paul's point is this circumcision is merely the outward sign of what God had already done for him. God had made Abraham holy. God had set him apart because of his faith. Circumcision did not save anyone nor did it ever save anyone in all of Hebrew history. It is only faith that brings salvation. Just like today, baptism and communion do not save anyone. They are merely signs of what has happened already in faith. The signs for us are baptism and communion. But we are sealed in righteousness by God the Holy Spirit. When we place our faith in Jesus, we are saved. God the Holy Spirit enters our lives, lives in our lives, and guides us through life. He is the One Who brings righteousness into our lives.

Here is Paul's point. Since Abraham became the father of faith and of the Jews, even before he was circumcised, and since he was given the promise of becoming a blessing to every nation of the world before he was circumcised, he is the spiritual father of all who believe, whether they be Jew or Gentile. That means for the church in Rome that they all had the same spiritual father Abraham, and they all had the same Lord, Jesus Christ.

#### B. THE STEPS OF FAITH (Vs. 12-15)

Paul makes that exact point in verses 12-15 by describing steps of faith. Through faith, Abraham becomes the father of all nations, of every person who places their faith in Jesus Christ.

We need to learn to walk by faith. Look at his argument in verses 13-15. He says if the promise of a Savior and salvation was dependent on Israel's obedience to the law, we would all be doomed. If we were to think about Israel's relationship to the law, we can easily see why the

promise rested on faith rather than works. Think about the beginning of the Law of Moses. While Moses was up on the mountain getting the Law from God, the Israelites were down in the camp, worshipping a golden calf, getting drunk, partying and having sex. God kicked Hebrews out of Israel because they had violated the law so badly. However, it was God's faithfulness that kept the promise alive.

If my salvation or the success of this church depended on any of our goodness, then we would all be lost and the church doomed. However, the promise that Jesus will return and take us to heaven is based on His faithfulness and His righteousness. We need simply to walk in faith.

#### C. THE SEEDS OF FAITH (Vs. 16-17)

Verse 16 describes the seeds of faith. I think this is worth repeating yet one more time. God's blessing and promise to Abraham was that he would be the father of descendants more numerous than the stars in the sky or grains of sand on the ocean. He would bless Abraham and his descendants with land, prosperity, and most of all, a right relationship with God. But further, the ultimate goal was that all nations, peoples and tribes throughout the world would inherit this salvation promise through Abraham. The Jews are children of Abraham by birth. Christians are children of Abraham by rebirth, through faith in Jesus Christ. Israel never attempted to become a blessing to the world. We as Christians must remember that as children of Abraham, we are to bring the salvation promise of God to all those who will believe. Christianity is meant to be inclusive, rather than exclusive. **GOD'S GRACIOUS OFFER OF SALVATION IS GIVEN TO ALL WHO WILL BELIEVE,... ALL WHO WILL BELIEVE.**

#### D. GOD PROMISED (V. 17)

There are times when I feel people approach Christianity as an observer. It's like we read and study history. We read the material, analyze it, memorize the dates and facts, take a test on the material and forget it. The Bible is God speaking to each one of us personally. Reading and studying the bible is meant to impact the way we think, believe, and act. Happiness is choosing the personal over the impersonal. In other words, **EACH INDIVIDUAL MUST RECEIVE GOD'S OFFER OF SALVATION PERSONALLY.** Receiving God's promise of salvation is more than hearing it or reading it and saying, "I believe it's true." It's receiving Christ into our lives. Verse 17 makes it clear that God has promised salvation and an abundant life to all who will believe. We in the church in the United States forget about the power of the God we worship. We are so caught up in technology, that we rarely think about God. I want to draw your attention to the statement God made to Abraham in verse 17. God said, "I have made you a father of many nations." Now the interesting thing about this statement is that it was made to Abraham who was 100-years-old and his wife Sarah who was 90. They had no children yet God words this in the past tense, "I have made you a father of many nations." So God is talking about an event in the future as if it had already happened. God makes us many promises. He promises to forgive us of all our sin. He promises to give us eternal life. He promises to give us abundant lives. He promises to never leave us nor forsake us. He promises to empower us to do ministry. And just like in the case of Abraham, He promises the future in past tense. If you are a believer, then it is already done. The God we worship is the One Who created all that is out of nothing. He spoke creation into existence. And as we have seen he calls things that are not yet as if they were. He calls us perfect, righteous, justified. It is already done in the mind of God. That is why Paul in Ephesians can say that we are already seated in the heavenlies with Christ. God sees

the finished product. That is why we are addressed as saints, not because we are good, but because God justifies us and calls us so.

### III. CHOOSING THE PERSONAL OVER THE IMPERSONAL (Vs. 18-25) **EACH INDIVIDUAL MUST RECEIVE GOD'S OFFER OF SALVATION PERSONALLY.**

Verses 18-22 describe us waiting for the promises of God. God approached Abraham at 100-years-old. I'm not sure, but I'm imagining that Abraham hadn't had much sex lately and Sarah was post-menopausal.

#### A. WAITING FOR THE PROMISE (Vs. 18-22)

Look at verse 18. Abraham hoped against all hope, and let me add, against all reason. Abraham hoped that what God said was true.

Maybe his faith wasn't weakened, but his reason was surely challenged. The text said that he actually laughed to think that he and Sarah at their age could have a baby. Two dried up old prunes, ... it challenges the imagination. So how is it that Paul can say that Abraham's faith wasn't weakened? Well think about it for a moment, ... duhh. Abraham went home to Sarah and said, "Woman, we've got work to do. God told me to come home and make a baby. Get ready." I've never tried that one at home before, but I'm sure it couldn't hurt, ... wouldn't work, ... but couldn't hurt to try. Well we know that Sarah also laughed, ... but she went through with it and wouldn't you know it, she got pregnant.

I don't want you to miss Paul's point. Abraham and Sarah weren't all that good. After all they already tried plan B and plan C. Abraham offered to adopt his servant to be his heir and Sarah gave her maid to have sex with Abraham to have a baby. They are not applauded for this behavior. They are applauded for the faith acted out sexually at 100 years old and 90 years old.

God doesn't expect us to act perfectly. He knows we won't. What He does expect is that we believe and trust in Him. How broken down are you this morning? Broken down by sin, by circumstances, by people, or by life in general? Dare to dream the impossible dream. That is get up and walk in faith that God will accomplish all that he has to do in your life. I have a friend who recently shared with me, "John, you don't really believe that Jesus is all you need, ... until Jesus is all you have." I know many people don't share the gospel with friends or family because they are afraid or are not confident in doing ministry of different kinds. The point is that God calls us to minister. God calls us to share the gospel. It is faith that will actually empower us to step out and do these things. As we step out and God empowers us, we gain strength and confidence to overcome impossible situations. So whatever we are not doing because we think we can't, is merely a lack of faith.

#### B. RECEIVING THE PROMISE (Vs. 23-25)

We are also called to receive the promise in verses 23-25. The fact is that God doesn't only work miracles through heroes like Abraham and David. They are given to us as examples of what God can do in our lives. In life, the road to happiness starts with a humble assessment of who we are and what we deserve. Once we come to the place where we confess that we are utterly and totally hopeless without Christ, then we can start to be in a position to receive His wonderful gift of salvation. Here is what it takes for us to receive salvation. It is personal. It is acknowledging that God handed Jesus over to death to pay for my sins. I am bad and evil. It is my sins that nailed Jesus on the cross. Each week we should come to church, look up at the cross and be offended that God had to die for an evil person like me.

And each week should end with a celebration that God raised Jesus from the dead for my justification. Here is the way to remember what justification means. God now looks at me through Jesus, just-as-if-I-had-never sinned (justification).

Jesus promises us eternal life, but we must accept it in faith. I can't do that for you. Your friends and your relatives can't do it for you. **EACH PERSON MUST RECEIVE GOD'S OFFER OF SALVATION PERSONALLY. WE CAN ONLY BE TRULY HAPPY IN LIFE WHEN WE RECEIVE GOD'S GRACIOUS PROMISE OF SALVATION THROUGH FAITH ALONE.**

God promises us many things. We must learn to stand on the promises of God, and walk in faith.

Listen to this poem by George H. Tabert concerning the promises of God.

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**My Savior's grace is promised me,  
His tender love and care,  
His deep concern in every grief  
Each burden He will share.**

**My Father's care is promised me,  
His faithful, guiding hand  
To lead me on and bear me up  
To Heaven's golden strand.**

**My Fater  
S wealth is promised me,  
Supplying all my need;  
He is a King, and I, His own,  
Am rich, yes, rich indeed.**

**The Holy Ghost is promised me,  
To in m,y heart abide,  
To hold me steady, pray for me,  
And keep me sanctified.**

**GEORGE H. TALBERT**