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St. Paul's Lutheran Church

2100 16th Street SW

Austin, MN 55912-1749

Pastor Ted Barthels

Sermon preached on

March 19 2017

3rd Sunday in Lent

(previously preached on February 12, 08)

Scripture Lessons: Genesis 12:1-8 Passion reading: The Betrayal

Hymns: 376; 380; 311:1-4 173

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Romans 4:1-5, 13-17

What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? ²For if Abraham was justified by works, he has *something* to boast about, but not before God. ³For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” ⁴Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt.

⁵But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness,

¹³For the promise that he would be the heir of the world *was* not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith. ¹⁴For if those who are of the law *are* heirs, faith is made void and the promise made of no effect, ¹⁵because the law brings about wrath; for where there is no law *there is* no transgression.

¹⁶Therefore *it is* of faith that *it might be* according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all ¹⁷(as it is written, “I have made you a father of many nations”) in the presence of Him whom he believed—God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did;” (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, who gave Himself for us, Dear Fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: It's a sure thing!

All too often that is the catch phrase for a speculative investment. It is supposed bring confidence to the new investor. I think for most people it is almost surely the opposite. There is no such thing as a sure thing. Or is there?

Abraham's salvation was a sure thing. We have all known that. God identifies Himself for us with Abraham's name, saying "**I Am the God of Abraham.**" But it is not only a sure thing as we look back upon the facts. It was a sure thing for Abraham during his life on earth. We should want to know what made it so sure, and how we during our earthly life can --

THEME: Possess Abraham's Certainty of Salvation.

I. This Certainty is NOT found in Personal Obedience.

For many who have reviewed Abraham's life, that is the focus of attention. That was the focus of the Jews in the days that Paul wrote the words of our text in this epistle to the Romans. Even today, as we put together Bible History lessons for Sunday school, we will select accounts from Abraham's life that demonstrate how Abraham did the things God asked of him, as difficult as they were. So that is where Paul begins his examination of the certainty of Abraham's salvation. What exactly does the inspired record say about Abraham's salvation?

Romans 4:1-2 What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? 2 For if Abraham was justified by works, he has *something* to boast about, but not before God.

When Paul asks, "What did Abraham find 'according to the flesh?'" Paul is referencing those things that Abraham did. Did Abraham find his security of salvation in his obedience? Did Abraham receive the credit of righteousness that is required to gain heaven

from his obedience? If he had, Abraham would have had something to boast about. He would have been in the position to tell others how he had gained this wonderful security of salvation by doing what he was told. Even then Abraham would not ever had the right to boast before God, because God expects nothing less than perfect obedience. When we stand before the Lord on that Day we will confess right along with Abraham, **“We are unprofitable servants, we have done what was our duty to do”** (Luke 17:10). This lesson taken directly from Jesus’ teaching goes against the grain of our flesh, but it speaks to an obvious truth that Paul expresses in our text:

Romans 4:4 Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt.

But that puts forward the impossible proposition which Jesus excludes with His words. Too many people fall into the trap of thinking, “God owes me! I did everything He asked of me” (which no one can possibly do in the first place) “and now God owes me.” For what you have accomplished in life God could never owe you. If we were perfect in every way we would still be “unprofitable servants” for God hasn’t gained anything at our expense. In His providential care, God has always given us more, much more than we have deserved.

And then, when we do look at the law, and honestly look at ourselves in light of that law, we CANNOT find certainty of salvation. We find certainty of sin, as Paul reminds us in verse 15 of our text:

Romans 4:15 “Because the law brings about wrath, for where there is no law there is no transgression.”

And if people make claims to even just **increasing** the certainty of salvation by their good lives, the promises of God are made of no effect. God’s promises of salvation become irrelevant.

Sometimes we have difficulty separating the ideas of different churches or religions and their philosophy. That is really what was happening with the Roman Christians. They were having a little difficulty keeping two very different ideas regarding salvation in

their proper place. Of course the commandments are important, and we are to obey them. **They are the Word of God!** They show us our sin, because we fail to obey them as we ought. They bring to light for us the **uncertainty** of the flesh, indeed the utter failing of the natural man to please God. So if we come to church thinking, “Pastor, just tell me what I am supposed to do to be a better Christian,” we are feeding into the **uncertainty** that comes with our human frailty. We do need evangelical admonition, and encouragements to serve our Lord in love, but that must never become the certainty of one’s salvation. It feeds the wrong spirit within you.

Abraham didn’t possess certainty of salvation because of the things which he did.

II. This Certainty is Found in Faith.

That is as true today as it was for Abraham. And what does the Spirit teach us:

Romans 4:3,5 For what does the Scripture say? *“Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” ... 5* But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness.

God made some spectacular promises to Abraham, and Abraham believed all those promises, not because he thought he deserved all that God could send his way, but because **Abraham believed in God as the One “who justifies the ungodly.”** He looked to God for his own justification. Abraham knew his own sin, and Abraham had been called out of sin and unbelief and idolatry to serve the only true God. God justified Abraham through faith in God’s Son who was come as the Seed through whom all the nations of the earth would be blessed. (Genesis 22:18)

God justifies the ungodly yet today just as He did with Abraham. He sent His Son into the world to bear the cross, to endure the shame and the curse of our sin for us. He has called us to faith, in the same way that God called Abraham to faith, through the power of His Spirit working in the Word of the gospel. Our certainty of salvation lies at the foot of the cross. In Jesus’ blood our debt has

been paid. In view of Jesus' blood God has pronounced the ungodly yes, "THE UNGODLY," to be innocent of all sin, to be righteous in His sight forevermore. We are not first godly people, and then justified. We are first part of the ungodly of this world whom God has justified through the sufferings and death of His Son. Then, by the continuing grace of God, we are called to faith, and that faith is counted as righteousness! And so our inheritance of salvation is sure!

Romans 4:13 *For the promise that he would be the heir of the world was not to Abraham or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.*

We live with certainty of our final place in heaven, knowing that the inheritance comes to us because of the righteousness of faith. We know and believe that what Jesus did for us in His perfect life and in His innocent sufferings and death secured our salvation. And so God counts this faith as righteousness, He counts us among the righteous of whom Jesus was speaking in the beatitudes in the Sermon on the Mount. Our text speaks of the promised inheritance as if **all** shall come to the righteous, to those who are of a right heart before God. Jesus said:

Matthew 5:5-8 Blessed *are* the meek, For they shall inherit the earth. 6 Blessed *are* those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled. 7 Blessed *are* the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy. 8 Blessed *are* the pure in heart, For they shall see God."

Did you hear all that the Lord has in store for those who believe! Our text says that Abraham believed that his descendants would inherit the **WORLD!** And Jesus confirmed it in the beatitudes. But there were greater blessings than that! The **righteousness** which comes to us from God, the **mercy** of our God, and finally that **we shall see God!** We have it promised to us through faith. But isn't this sermon about **certainty** and not just promises? That is why it is "of faith" and not "of the law!"

Remember the words in verse 16 of our text:

Romans 4:16 Therefore *it is* of faith that *it might be* according to grace, so that **the promise might be sure** to all the seed, not only

to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all.

That this inheritance comes to us of faith makes it a matter of grace, and the grace of God is absolutely dependable. That it is of faith makes it so that it is “**a sure thing**” to ALL THE SEED. That means it is sure to those believers who are of the Jewish race as well as to those believers who are of the nations of the world. And that expression “**that the promise might be sure**” should not be taken lightly. It is rightly understood “that it might be **Guaranteed!**”

The grace and promise of God makes it sure because Abraham put his faith in a God that did the things no one else could do, that couldn't happen without God's Word of power! The God whose word Abraham believed is –

Romans 4:17 “God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did.”

He is the God of all life. **He gives life to the dead!** He is the God who created the heavens and earth with His word. His Word can be trusted, because it is not an empty word. It is a powerful Word that has brought life to my dead soul, and shall bring life to my mortal body, all by the power of His Word. So then His promises are not empty promises. His Word is sure and it saves. **OF THAT YOU CAN BE SURE!**

CONCL.: Are you sure Abraham was saved? Absolutely. But more to the point; was Abraham certain of his salvation during his life? **Absolutely!** Should we share that certainty of salvation? Again the answer is, **absolutely!** Why? Because that salvation which Abraham possessed with such certainty was **by grace through faith!** While we may or may not live as godly a life as Abraham, **our God is the same.** He is the God who justifies the ungodly, and so has justified also me, by the death of His Son. And **He** says I'm redeemed and justified by Jesus' death. And **He** has called me to faith in that sacrifice. And **He** has guaranteed with His promise that the inheritance of Abraham's seed is mine, by grace, through faith, for Jesus' sake.

AMEN.

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Amen. (Romans15:13)