

Confidently Assured

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Date: 07 November 2010

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[0 : 00] Present series in Romans. We're going to pick it up again after Christmas from Romans 5. But we've basically gone through from chapter 1 and we're going to finish the end of chapter 4 this morning.

If you want to know what we have been doing, there is a sheet at the back by the door which has an outline of Romans 1 to 8. And it'll give you the big picture or the main pointers the whole way through.

So you can have a look there. Then next Sunday, as I said, Keith Wilson will be preaching. And then following that, we start a new series of four talks. And the title we are giving that is Pure. So we're going to be looking at issues like marriage, singleness, living in an age of purity. And the other one then is on homosexuality.

So the title is Pure. I'm looking at each of those subjects. And they will be followed up by evening discussions or question time. So we'll have the talk in the morning.

[1 : 02] And then on Sunday evening, you will be invited, if you wanted, to join in just further discussion and question based on those talks. As I'm sure there will be lots of questions.

Well, Romans 4 is where we are this morning. And we're going to read from verse 13 to 25. And it's on page 1131.

Romans chapter 4, verses 13 to 25. It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless, because law brings wrath. And where there is no law, there is no transgression.

Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham.

[2 : 16] He is the father of us all. As it is written, I have made you the father of many nations. He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed, the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.

Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed, and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, so shall your offspring be. Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead, since he was about a hundred years old, and that Sarah's womb, his wife, was also dead.

Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. That is why it was credited to him as righteousness. The words it was credited to him were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness, for us who believe in him, who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.

He was delivered over to death for our sins, and was raised to life for our justification. Well, let's pray as we look at that passage together.

[3 : 49] Our Father God, we thank you for all that we have. From what we have heard and seen this morning, we recognize there are so many people, so many children in this world, who do not have the basic necessities of life.

But we thank you, Father, that we have things available to us. We have food and water and homes. And not least, we also have your word in our language, that we can understand and read for ourselves.

But yet, you have also promised that you would pour out your Holy Spirit to those who will ask. And we ask that you would pour out your Spirit upon us, so that what we hear may change our lives.

That it would also help us to see how your word affects the world in which we live, and the attitude that we should have on the world.

And how we should look forward to your eternal kingdom. So, Lord, please help us. And be with us as we look at your word together.

[5 : 07] In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Would you describe yourself as a very confident person? Well, let's do a little test.

On a scale of 1 to 10, how confident are you that Liverpool are going to qualify for the Champions League? Not too long ago, they were the defending champions.

But now, in the space of a few months, things are very unsure for the club. On a more serious note, how confident are you that you are going to be living and working in Carigoline in the next 10 years? A few years ago, we may have been very confident. But with the recession, it makes things a little bit more uncertain. How confident are you that you are going to be in good health next year?

Perhaps on the basis of how you feel today, you may be feeling very confident. But we never know what a certain test is going to show up. We all live in hope.

[6 : 20] But life never guarantees any of these things. So let me ask another question. How confident are you that when you die, and we can be very confident we will die, how confident are you that when you die, you will receive a rich welcome by God into his eternal paradise?

How sure are you this morning that you are going to be part of heaven? That God is going to say, you can be part of my new creation?

Well, I think that answer will depend on how you feel the last week or the last month has gone. If you've had a good week, you've been reading your Bible, you've managed to pray, you've made a few people happy, you've done a good deed for someone, then you may feel very assured that, yeah, God is going to welcome me.

After all, I've sponsored a child for compassion. On the other hand, if you've had a bad week, and you can't even remember when the last time was you opened your Bible, maybe you've had a big bust-up with your spouse, you maybe even got a bit drunk at the weekend, then maybe you're feeling a little bit unsure, and you don't know if you're going to get to heaven.

Or perhaps, like me, you wonder, what happens if I die in the middle of some sin? Do you ever think that? What if I die before I even had the opportunity to ask God to forgive me?

[8 : 04] Would he let me in then? Well, we all live in hope, don't we? But can we be 100% confident that we are going to receive a welcome into God's paradise?

Well, the Bible's answer is a very, very confident yes. And it all starts with a promise that God has made.

In fact, chapter 4 is all about a promise. And we're told what the promise is in verse 13. It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise.

And what's the promise? Here it is. That he would be heir of the world. Now, if you are an heir, you are going to receive something.

You inherit what has been promised to you. And you really can't get anything better than this, can you? The promise is to inherit the world.

[9 : 11] That's astounding, isn't it? That the world could be promised to one person. But what does it mean to inherit the world? Well, we need to go back in time to the beginning of the Bible story.

You see, very often we talk about the gospel and salvation in narrow terms. We talk about Jesus dealing with our sins on the cross and restoring our relationship back to God.

Now, as primary and as important as that is, it's only the beginning of the story. The gospel and salvation is much broader. It's about not just restoring our relationship to God, but it's about restoring and renewing the world.

So, go back to the beginning of the Bible story. Go back to paradise in Genesis 1 and 2. And that paints a picture for us of what paradise would look like.

In Genesis 1 and 2, we see that the world is perfect. It's in order. Everything works the way that it should do. People are living under God's loving and caring rule.

[10 : 21] They have everything that they need. All is provided for them. Adam and Eve are living in relationship with God. And they're living in relationship with each other. They know their roles and everything is good.

And not only that, they're in harmony with the world. There's no death. There's no disease. There's no suffering. There's no violence. There's no need of any sponsorship program because everybody

is provided with all that they need.

The world is the way that it's meant to be. But then as we move on in Genesis, we come and we encounter a problem. Man and woman, Adam and Eve, they rebel against God.

They reject his loving rule. And they replace God's authority with their own authority. And they say, we want to rule the world the way we want to. And what follows is what we might call a cosmic curse.

People are cursed. And as a result, their relationship with God breaks. They have to leave paradise. They're shut out from God. And their relationships with each other begin to break.

[11:30] They begin to fight. In fact, the first two brothers that existed in the world, one of them killed the other. But it's not just people who are cursed. The world was also cursed.

It became disjointed and twisted. The cogs that make everything go round the way it should be begin to jam up. And the brokenness and the pain that we see all around us today, whether it's earthquakes, famines, flooding, wars, violence, all of these are the results of the curse that came upon the world and the people.

But then, and we need to turn to this, in Genesis 12, God intervenes. He had intervened once with Noah, but things went from bad to worse.

And in Genesis 12, God speaks and he makes a promise. It's a promise to undo the curse and to bring blessing.

So in Genesis chapter 12, verses 1 to 3, he comes to, well, he's called Abram here, later to be called Abraham. Genesis 12, verses 1 to 3, the Lord said to Abram, leave your country, your people, and your father's household, and go to the land I will show you.

[12:53] I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you. I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you, I will curse.

And all peoples, all peoples on the earth will be blessed through you. Now, the rest of the Bible's story, all the way from Genesis chapters 12, right the way through to the end of Revelation, is a working out of that promise.

It's a promise to restore man's relationship to God, and the promise to renew the world. It's a promise, as we've been reading, to replace the curse with blessing.

This promise that God made points forward to a new people. He said he would be the father of a great nation. This great nation, these people of God, who will live in God's paradise forever.

You see, it's all about reversing everything that had gone wrong, and re-establishing the way the world should be. And that's what it means in Romans chapter 4, verse 13, where God had made the promise to Abraham to inherit the world.

[14:17] He is saying to Abraham, you can be part of God's new world order. Be part of my paradise where people will live once again under his loving rule and care, just like they did at the very beginning of creation.

No suffering, no pain, no wars and no violence. Everything will be the way that it was meant to be. Now tell me, could you get a better promise than that?

I don't think we could. Well, you see, that all sounds great. A wonderful promise. A promise to inherit the world and to live in God's paradise.

But who is this promise for? Well, look at verse 13 again. It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise.

So, the promise was made to Abraham and his children. Well, you say, that's no good to me or to you because I doubt if there's anybody here who can trace their family line back to Abraham, is there?

[15:28] Don't think so. You see, it's not about having a physical connection. It's actually about having a spiritual connection with Abraham.

And we'll see how that works out. Let's see how Abraham received the promise. Verse 13. At the beginning, it says it was not through law or not through performance that Abraham received the promise.

End of verse 13. But through the righteousness that comes by faith. So, the promise wasn't received because of something Abraham did because he was one of the best people in the world. No, it was simply received by faith. Trusting that God would do what God said he would do. Verse 14. For if those who live by performance are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless.

You see, we've heard the promise this morning and I'm sure we all want the promise. But we think the only way to get the promise is to earn it. So our life becomes a big religious performance, a system of rules that we impose on ourselves and we impose on other people.

[16:47] And we say, well, if I'm a good person, if I read my Bible, if I go to church, if I do all kinds of good deeds, if I live a good moral life, if I do sponsor a child, then I deserve the promise.

But performance will never give you the promise. Performance will just destroy you and break you. As verse 15 says, because law or performance brings wrath.

We can never live up to its standard. We can never be good enough. It will only condemn us. So the point is simple. It's saying, we have to have faith like Abraham.

And if we have faith like Abraham, we too can receive the promise. If we trust that God will do what he said he will do, we will also share in the inheritance. Verse 16.

Therefore, the promise comes by faith. So if we want to have this promise, we have to be people of faith, but we also have to be people of grace.

[17:51] Look at the rest of verse 16. Therefore, the promise comes by faith so that it may be by grace. Now we often bandy that word around, don't we, grace?

It's God's overwhelming generosity towards us. It's something that is unearned and undeserved. It's God's loving and faithful intervention in our lives.

So the promise that comes from God is something that originates or is initiated by God from him to us. The promise is something that God does for us.

It's something that he achieves for us. Therefore, we are people who are to rest in that grace. We don't try to earn it or to achieve it.

It comes by grace so that it may be, verse 16, do you see, may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring.

[18:54] And who are his children? Who are those offspring? Not only to those who are of the law, in other words, those who are just Jews, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham.

He is the father of us all, as it is written, I have made you a father of many nations. So grace guarantees the promise to us because it's not dependent on us.

It's dependent on God who makes the promise but who also keeps the promise and it can be our promise too if we have the faith and if we are resting in the grace that came to Abraham.

Now let's think this through a little bit more. What if the promise depended on me or you? If it was all up to us? Well, it would fail, wouldn't it?

We would never receive the promised inheritance. But amazingly, God not only makes the promise to us, but he is also the one who is going to keep the promise for us.

[20:09] Look at verse 17. Just one sentence in. It says, He is our father in the sight of God in whom he believed.

The God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were. Have you ever tried to give life to the dead?

Have you ever told a corpse to stand up, instructed that corpse, stand up and go home? Well, you'd be probably locked up if you tried to do that.

Jesus did it though, didn't he? He did it to a little girl. He did it to Lazarus. And it worked. They did stand up and they did go home.

Have you ever tried to make something out of nothing? Things that are not as though they were. Commanded something into existence. Have you ever done that?

[21:08] Well, Jesus did when he created the world. He just spoke and the world came into existence. So it's telling us that Jesus can do what we could never do.

He gives life to the dead and he creates out of nothing. And this same God will also do the same with the promise. He will achieve for us what we can never do and that is that he will keep the promise for us because we can't.

And Abraham is our example here. Look at verse 18. Remember what God had promised to Abraham? He said he would be the father of a great nation. Verse 18.

Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations just as it had been said to him so shall your offspring be.

Without weakening in his faith he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old and that Sarah's womb was also dead.

[22 : 22] Now Abraham and Sarah were well on in years. They were making plans for their retirement. Perhaps they were even checking out their local nursing homes.

But whatever their future, children were not on their agenda. But God had come to them and he had made a promise to them.

He said you would be a father of a great nation. Now when God made that promise to Abraham he didn't say to him right Abraham be the father of a great nation and good luck to you.

See how you get on. And if you've got troubles well, you know just see what you can do. Check out the local fertility clinic.

No, he didn't say any of those things. What God promised God would fulfill. He made the promise that you would be a father of a nation and he will also keep the promise.

[23 : 24] He does what we could never do. He literally gave life to a dead womb. And he literally created a nation out of nothing.

God does the impossible. He makes the promise and he keeps the promise. And that's exactly what God will do for us. He will achieve for us what we can never do. And how are we to respond to it? Well exactly in the same way as Abraham did. Verse 20. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God being fully persuaded that God had the power to do what he had promised.

So it's all about faith isn't it? It's trusting that God will do what he said he will do. It's not about trusting in what we can do. Abraham's faith was in God's faithfulness.

And our faith is also to be in God's faithfulness to keep the promise. Suppose you receive a letter from a distant relative and in the letter you discover that the detail is all about a will and you stand to inherit their estate.

[24 : 50] it's quite a unique will because what you're going to inherit is an old 16th century castle. A marvelous building except for there's a problem it's been left to ruin.

But alongside this promise comes a list of conditions that you are obliged to fulfill. if you want that 16th century castle you must first restore it to its original beauty and design.

It's all yours. But first you're obliged to restore it to its original beauty. Now we know that's all impossible isn't it?

Because we haven't got the financial resources to do anything to such a great big building nor the skills nor expertise. So in some ways the promise of the inheritance is absolutely useless because we could never fulfill the conditions.

Well God has made a promise to us to inherit the world to live with him to reign with him to rule over the entire universe one day in God's eternal paradise.

[26 : 03] But we can't keep the conditions of perfect obedience and perfect loyalty. we break it every single day. And that's why God makes the promise and he says I'm also going to keep the promise for you because you can't.

He keeps the promise for all those who will have faith that God will do what he said he will do. Now for those of you who know the story of Abraham you'll think in these verses here that he's painted in a very good light that he wavered he was unwavering in his belief.

Now we know the story that he actually didn't believe fully completely that he would have a child he went off with somebody else and produced another child so was he keeping the promise?

you see it's all dependent on God even when our faith isn't what it ought to be and maybe like me your faith fails perhaps you have times of doubt and you wonder I really don't think I'm a Christian or maybe because of some particular behaviour or habit or some sin you just think my faith is completely gone there's no way he's going to accept me into heaven well let's remember that our response of faith is not in the strength of our own faith it's not in our ability to keep our faith or in our determination or a perseverance to hold on to faith no our faith is in the perfect performance of Christ who keeps the conditions for us our faith is in the promise keeper if it relied on us and our good will and our good intention it would fail every time we can't keep it we can't do it but God says I will keep it for you verse 21 being fully persuaded that God has the power to do what he had promised you see we cannot keep it it's only he can keep it but you say how could you be so sure can you really be so confident that God is going to keep us and make sure that we are part of his eternal kingdom if only you were able to see what I was up to this week if you saw my life what it was really like I'm claiming to be a Christian but the things I've said the things I've done boy you wouldn't want to see that how can we be so sure well we have been given proof look at the end of

verse 25 it tells us there that Jesus was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification remember

[29 : 27] God had made the promise to Abraham and to his offspring that they would inherit the world the problem was Abraham and Sarah had no children they had no offspring so God had to prove to them that he would do what he said he would do so he gave old Abraham and barren Sarah a son and their newborn their first born son Isaac was the proof that God was going to keep his promise now we have an even greater proof God has sent his son his only son Jesus Christ who is the ultimate proof that he is going to keep the promise for us do you see what it says at the end of in verse 25 it says he was delivered over to death for our sins if you think that your sin is so great and so big that it keeps you out of heaven look back to the cross and remember that he was delivered over to death for our sin he took the death he took the penalty he took the blame for us so that it can never ever be held against us again it won't break the promise because

Christ has died for our sin but not only did he die it says he was also raised to life for our justification to put us right so through the resurrection of Christ God has proved to us that he would do what he said he would do the resurrection is God's proof that Jesus death on the cross was sufficient and complete God raised Christ from the dead to say what he did was good enough it's all over it's complete it's finished he's raised him to life and if your faith is in him you too will be raised to life so let me say this to us all this morning if you're a Christian here and you're struggling and you're thinking my sin is too big my behavior over the last year or two years or last month whatever it might be it there's no way

I'm going to get to heaven well if you're depending on yourself you've got it wrong it's all dependent on God and if we want proof that we can be in heaven look back to what Jesus has done he died for you he took the ultimate curse for you and for me that we might receive his blessings through his resurrection so by faith in Christ we can be absolutely confident that paradise is 100% guaranteed for all those who have faith in Christ that means there will be no more death no more sadness no more sickness no more suffering there will be no more need for compassion because God has made everything new and everything right and he promises that to you and to me today if we have faith in

Christ let's pray together our Father God we thank you so much for your amazing promise the promise to inherit the world to be part of your eternal kingdom and we thank you that that is dependent not on us but on Christ his perfect life for us his death and resurrection for us thank you that you not only make the promise but that you keep it for us and you will assure and guarantee our journey through this life and into your eternal paradise thank you that all that is ours and I pray that you would stir each one of us that we would want to see others have that same faith that they too would also trust in you and become your children and gain eternal life that they would become heirs of the world we pray this in

Jesus name Amen welcome our name going we're going to sing together I like to sing together and sing together I like to sing into our name