

## Romans 4:18-25 Faith and Assurance

### 1. The transforming power of the Gospel

Kim, a gifted High School pupil in North Korea came home from school unable to speak. He was in a state of shock. His mother sat with him until finally he began to speak of the trauma he had endured that day. He told her he had been with one of his best friends presumably in the playground between lessons when two police officers came up to them and accused his friend of being a Christian. One of the officers punched him to the ground. The other took out a gun. His friend said nothing but appeared totally peaceful. With a gun pointed at his head he looked straight into my eyes and without speaking a word I sensed the accusation was true and that he wanted me to believe it as well. He uttered only two words before the officer pulled the trigger and shot him dead on the spot. 'Bless them'. Mum, what is a Christian? I don't understand any of this? With tears in her eyes his mother told Kim about Jesus from his miraculous birth to His death in our place and resurrection and how He wished us to put our faith and trust in Him. Returning to the present she told Kim that God had allowed him to witness the martyrdom of one of His brave children, an event that planted a seed in Kim's life. The conversation ended shortly afterwards on that unforgettable day in 2001. The next morning Kim told his mother that before going to sleep that night he had committed his life to Jesus and his face beamed with joy. The following day after school his three younger brothers came home and remarked that something had happened to their older brother; Kim then explained the Gospel and all three boys prayed a prayer of commitment. Then with a heart filled with joy but also pain at the possible consequences the mother told them that she was a Christian who had prayed for her children every day to become followers of Jesus, but had never dared mention it because of the constant pressure at school to betray people with inappropriate beliefs. She had no Bible or other Christian literature because the risks of searches had been deemed too great, but now that the whole family had professed faith and it was inevitable that one day they would be discovered she started to search – without success. Kim made a solo trip into China to find a Bible and although unsuccessful on his first visit challenged Chinese believers to obtain 5,000 copies of a Korean Bible within one month for him to smuggle into the country. On a series of trips over the border in 2001 and 2002 he took possession of the Scriptures. All four brothers were actively sharing their faith and passing on the Bibles until some time in 2002 they all went missing, presumably murdered by that evil regime [D.C. Talk, *Jesus Freaks*, Volume 2, 2002, pp. 20-22]. What kind of faith did these boys all aged under eighteen possess that enabled them to do what they did? It is the kind of faith that Paul talks about in these last verses at the end of Romans chapter four. *...being fully persuaded that God had power to do what He had promised.* <sup>22</sup> *This is why 'it was credited to him as righteousness.'* <sup>23</sup> *The words 'it was credited to him' were written not for him alone,* <sup>24</sup> *but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness – for us who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.* <sup>25</sup> *He was delivered over to death for **our sins** and was raised to life for **our justification*** (Romans 4:21-25). Resurrection faith, anchored in the resurrection of Jesus Christ for us, was that same faith grasped by Abraham, by believers in successive generations and by an increasing number of millions of Christian men and women at the present time.

Paul in these verses at the end of Romans chapter four brings his concluding remarks to this opening section of the book (Romans chapters one to four). After his initial greetings he spent a great deal of time to convince his hearers and readers, both Jews and Gentiles, of the problem of human sinfulness. He then in the later part of chapter three explained very precisely what the good news or Gospel of Jesus Christ is and followed that up with three questions and subsequent answers that demonstrated that believers are no better than other people we are fully dependent on God's grace for salvation; it is a Gospel equally for all people, which both upholds God's righteous standards and allows those who have failed to keep God's perfect standards to become part of His family in the present and have a guaranteed share in the eternal life He has promised beyond this life. Abraham is the role model figure for us as our father in the faith. He was an individual who both had outstanding moments when his trust in God was total and other occasions when he made significant mistakes. This reminds us that God uses imperfect people like you and me to accomplish His purposes. However, the apostle will add to the basis of Abraham's faith something the patriarch believed possible, but had never seen, the wonderful fact of both the death and resurrection of Jesus as the basis for our faith as Christians. Our assurance of the accuracy of the Gospel is grounded in the truth of His glorious resurrection.

## 2. The nature of Abraham's faith and ours

(a) Abraham believed God's promises *Abraham in hope believed* (Romans 4:18) The basis of His faith was the promises of God. He took at His Word what God had said and believed it. This is no different for us today. When Jesus honoured a Gentile, a Roman centurion for his faith in God through Jesus, He made the following declaration: <sup>11</sup> *I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven* (Matthew 8:11). Rarely does God give us details of the timescale for the fulfilment of His plans. What He does do is tell us something of the bigger picture so that we can be in no doubt that in His time it will come to pass. Peter, in II Peter 1:16-21, made reference to his being present on the Mount of Transfiguration when God the Father declared His approval and blessing on what Jesus had done on earth and was to accomplish in the near future in Jerusalem through the giving of His life on the cross. Peter wrote: <sup>16</sup> *For we did not follow cleverly devised myths when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but we were eyewitnesses of His majesty.* <sup>17</sup> *For when He received honour and glory from God the Father, and the voice was borne to Him by the Majestic Glory, "This is My beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased,"* <sup>18</sup> *we ourselves heard this very voice borne from heaven, for we were with Him on the holy mountain.* <sup>19</sup> *And we have the prophetic word **more fully confirmed, to which you will do well to pay attention** as to a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts,* <sup>20</sup> *knowing this first of all, that no prophecy of **Scripture** comes from someone's own interpretation.* <sup>21</sup> *For no prophecy was ever produced by the will of man, **but men spoke from God as they were carried along by the Holy Spirit*** (II Peter 1:16-21 English Standard Version). Peter has stated here that his readers could be confident in the events described because he was an eyewitness of them, but there was something in which they could place even greater confidence –the Scriptures. The promises and assurances of God recorded in the Bible were written by authors who were inspired to do so by the Holy Spirit. May we all trust His Word and the promises contained in its pages. Do you need to be encouraged to take hold of God's promises today? If we are going to claim the promises we need to know them and we can only know them by reading God's Word and studying it.

(b) **Abraham believed God on the sole basis of His promises** *Abram believed the Lord, and He credited it to him as righteousness* (Genesis 15:6). Hebrews 11:8 reminds us: *By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going.* Our natural human nature wants all the answers before we will commit to going in a new direction. God prove it to me beyond all reasonable doubt! His response time and again over the centuries is this: trust Me based on the promises of My Word. I will give you enough light to take the next step, but only when you have done that will the next revelation come. As a congregation looking to go forward with God into the future He has planned for us. We will have to get used to not having all the answers, probably not even all the questions! The Lord I believe has given us clear signals about the future, but there is still a fair bit that is unknown for the future, that He will reveal as we go forward in faith. What we also need to grasp is that God rarely gives His people a detailed timetable about when things will happen. He simply says what I have promised will happen, but in a timescale of His choosing – not ours. However, just as with the coming of Jesus ‘at the right time’ –Galatians 4:4-5: <sup>4</sup>*But when **the set time had fully come**, God sent His Son, born of a woman, born under the law,* <sup>5</sup>*to redeem those under the law, that we might receive adoption to sonship* God has a similar perspective on our lives as well. Are you / Am I willing to trust Him with the timetable of our lives personally and collectively?

(c) **Abraham believed God in spite of contrary physical evidence** (Romans 4:18-19) <sup>18</sup>*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.’* <sup>19</sup>*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.*** It was a miracle they required to have a child. It was extraordinary enough eighty six year-old Abraham having a child with the much younger woman Hagar (Genesis 16), but now a ninety nine year-old man with a wife of ninety hoping to conceive a child appeared to be totally ridiculous (Genesis 17:1, 17). Even allowing for the fact that people appeared to live longer lives at that time -in comparable terms they are still well past the age when the average couple hoped to conceive a child! Do you think there might have been individuals in Abraham’s circle of family and employees who thought Abraham must have been mistaken? Whenever God calls His people to take a big step of faith there are always some genuine Bible-believing Christians who assume the individual(s) concerned must be mistaken. George Verwer, when he founded Operation Mobilisation, as a means of employing Christians on short-term mission projects received a fair number of critical comments suggesting that it couldn’t be of God. Missionary service was always a long-term lifelong commitment for the rest of your days. Now looking back from our present perspective when many of us have given a week here or there to engage in some form of mission service at home or overseas, it seems obvious what he did. Yet it was very different at the time when he first raised this proposal. When God directs us to go forward as a Church not every member will grasp the vision at exactly the same time; we have to be patient with one another because with a range of Christian experiences it is inevitable that we look at things in the light of very different past experiences as believers. However, when the Lord opens doors for us we cannot delay for ever, but eventually have to go forward in faith, without seeing all the physical evidence that some people may still be seeking. This is the Hebrews 11 pattern of discipleship. There will be times –as for Abraham and Sarah at this advanced age- when it is a real struggle to accept what has been suggested as the Lord’s will for going forward. At such times, we have to simply say Lord please help me in Your time to grasp how You want us to go forward. I saw that in another church I know well, at a time of one of the biggest decisions of that era, when at a particularly blessed church meeting a number of individuals got up to say how they had opposed a major initiative that had now

started, but had now come to see that they had been in the wrong. In fact, they became some of the strongest supporters and hardest workers in that ministry in the years that followed.

(d) **Abraham believed in God with full assurance concerning the future** (Romans 4:20-22)<sup>20</sup> *Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God,* <sup>21</sup> **being fully persuaded** that God had power to do what He had promised. <sup>22</sup> *This is why ‘it was credited to him as righteousness.’* Abraham had his doubts and fears and struggles but came to a place of full assurance. It was not mustering enough psychological power to convince himself by positive thinking that God could do what He had promised. It was acting on the promises of God. Hebrews 11:1-2 & 11:6: *Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see.* <sup>2</sup> **This is what the ancients were commended for...** *And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to Him must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him.* What might this kind of faith look like in your life and mine today? In Matthew 14:22-33 there is an excellent illustration from the life of Peter. *Immediately Jesus made the disciples get into the boat and go on ahead of Him to the other side, while He dismissed the crowd.* <sup>23</sup> *After He had dismissed them, He went up on a mountainside by Himself to pray. Later that night, He was there alone,* <sup>24</sup> *and the boat was already a considerable distance from land, buffeted by the waves because the wind was against it.* <sup>25</sup> *Shortly before dawn Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake.* <sup>26</sup> *When the disciples saw Him walking on the lake, they were terrified. ‘It’s a ghost,’ they said, and cried out in fear.* <sup>27</sup> *But Jesus immediately said to them: ‘Take courage! It is I. Don’t be afraid.’* <sup>28</sup> **‘Lord, if it’s you,’ Peter replied, ‘tell me to come to You on the water.’** <sup>29</sup> **‘Come,’ He said.** *Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came towards Jesus.* <sup>30</sup> *But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, ‘Lord, save me!’* <sup>31</sup> *Immediately Jesus reached out His hand and caught him. ‘You of little faith,’ He said, ‘why did you doubt?’* <sup>32</sup> *And when they climbed into the boat, the wind died down.* <sup>33</sup> *Then those who were in the boat worshipped Him, saying, ‘Truly you are the Son of God.’* Are there any personal or collective situations in which the Lord is inviting us to ‘get out of the boat’? All of us at different times will have these moments in our personal lives. Equally as a congregation at particular times in our history we will have similar moments when action is required. I hope and pray we will be willing to step forward in faith trusting in God for our futures.

(e) **Abraham believed God enough to allow it to shape his life** (Genesis 17:1-8) *When Abram was ninety-nine years old, the Lord appeared to him and said, ‘I am God Almighty; walk before Me faithfully and be blameless.* <sup>2</sup> *Then I will make My covenant between Me and you and will greatly increase your numbers.’* <sup>3</sup> *Abram fell face down, and God said to him,* <sup>4</sup> *‘As for Me, this is My covenant with you: you will be the father of many nations.* <sup>5</sup> *No longer will you be called Abram, your name will be Abraham, for I have made you a father of many nations.* <sup>6</sup> *I will make you very fruitful; I will make nations of you, and kings will come from you.* <sup>7</sup> *I will establish My covenant as an everlasting covenant between Me and you and your descendants after you for the generations to come, to be your God and the God of your descendants after you.* <sup>8</sup> *The whole land of Canaan, where you now reside as a foreigner, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you; and I will be their God.’* Abram meant ‘Father of many’; Abraham meant ‘Father of a multitude or a nation; can you imagine the pressure on this ninety nine years-old man telling his family and employees –do you know what God told me recently... The name by which he had been called ‘Father of many’ seemed a poor fit when the only child he could call his own was conceived with a slave girl. A change of name seemed a good idea. If his employees managed to stifle laughter when this announcement was made then they did very well. It appears to be totally ridiculous that this could be right and God’s will –from a human perspective! God doesn’t ask us to be totally stupid and reckless in the choices we make, but this story informs us in a very powerful way that God can accomplish the most extraordinary things when He had called us to follow Him in a particular way. Abraham was prepared to act upon the promises of God –will you? Will I?

### (3) Our assurance of faith grounded in the Gospel (Romans 4:23-25)

<sup>23</sup> The words ‘it was credited to him’ were written not for him alone, <sup>24</sup> but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness – for us who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. <sup>25</sup> He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification (Romans 4:18-25).

(a) **The plan of God the Father** believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead.

(Romans 4:24) Who was responsible for putting Jesus on the cross? There are many answers that are equally true here. The Jewish religious leaders for plotting to ensure that Jesus was killed; what about Judas who betrayed Jesus for money? What about Pontius Pilate the Roman Governor who presided over his official trial? What about the crowd that demanded Jesus be executed instead of the criminal for whom the cross had been prepared that day? What about God? Peter in Acts 2:23-24 states: <sup>23</sup> *This man was handed over to you by God’s deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put Him to death by nailing Him to the cross.* <sup>24</sup> *But God raised Him from the dead, freeing Him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on Him.* Revelation 13:8 states something even more astonishing: *...the Lamb who was slain from the creation of the world.* The sacrifice of Jesus was no accident. It was planned by God in order that we might be set free from our sins through His sacrifice. At the human level, at some particular moments in time, it can look far from any notion of God being in control of this world. We see part of the picture at best for our own and other people’s lives. The growth of the Christian Church two millennia ago was as a result of Christian men and women being assured and inspired by a God who could raise the dead. They loved a heavenly Father who was willing to give His best in our place on the cross and who proved this accomplishment to humankind by raising Him from the dead on the third day, according to the Scriptures. Paul urges us: *believe in Him..(v24)*; Have you taken that step of faith and put your trust in Jesus?

(b) **The sacrifice of God the Son** *He was delivered over to death for our sins* Have you ever realised that Jesus died in your place? That He paid the penalty for your sins and mine? The person that must have realised most clearly that Jesus died in his place was Barabbas. Matthew 27:21-26 states: *‘Which of the two do you want me to release to you?’ asked the governor. ‘Barabbas,’ they answered.*<sup>22</sup> *‘What shall I do, then, with Jesus who is called the Messiah?’ Pilate asked. They all answered, ‘Crucify Him!’*<sup>23</sup> *‘Why? What crime has He committed?’ asked Pilate. But they shouted all the louder, ‘Crucify him!’*<sup>24</sup> *When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. ‘I am innocent of this man’s blood,’ he said. ‘It is your responsibility!’*<sup>25</sup> *All the people answered, ‘His blood is on us and on our children!’*<sup>26</sup> *Then he released Barabbas to them. But he had Jesus flogged, and handed Him over to be crucified.* If this is not substitution I think the word needs to be redefined! Have you grasped the significance of what Jesus has done here for you? It captivated Paul to the extent that he gave the last thirty or so years of his life to spreading the good news of the Gospel across the Roman world, eventually being martyred for his faith. What currently motivates you most in the choices you are making in day-to-day living?

(c) **The significance of Jesus’ sacrifice** *and was raised to life for our justification* The resurrection of Jesus is the proof God has given us that Jesus’ sacrifice in our place was sufficient to accomplish everything necessary to reconcile guilty sinners with a holy God. It proves:

- There is a God, the God of the Bible who can raise the dead.
- Jesus came from God and was vindicated by Him, in what He said, how He lived, died and came to life again.
- Jesus is who He claimed to be –the Son of God
- There is a day of judgement coming for us all –this life is not the end of life.
- Those who are united by faith to Jesus can be certain that their sins are forgiven
- Those who follow Jesus have eternal life now and beyond the grave.

- The power of God that raised Jesus is the same Holy Spirit power that can enable you and me to win the victory over temptations to sin.

Reuben Torrey wrote: ‘When Jesus died, he died as my representative, and I died in him; when he arose, he rose as my representative, and I arose in him...I look at the cross of Christ and I know that atonement has been made for my sins; I look at the open sepulchre and the risen and ascended Lord and I know that the atonement has been accepted. There no longer remains a single sin on me, no matter how many or how great my sins may have been. My sins may have been as high as the mountains, but in the light of the resurrection the atonement that covers them is as high as heaven. My sins have been as deep as the ocean, but in the light of the resurrection the atonement that swallows them is as deep as eternity [R.A. Torrey, *The Bible and Its Christ*, pp. 101-111].

Hallelujah what a Saviour! Praise God for such a great salvation. If in the light of the little evidence he had received that Abraham was able to have such faith and assurance in God that he accomplished so much for Him, as Paul notes here in Romans 4:20-21: <sup>20</sup>*Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God,* <sup>21</sup>***being fully persuaded*** that God had power to do what He had promised how much more ought we to be assured in the light of Christ’s resurrection from the dead, Amen!