

BELIEVING GOD FOR A MIRACLE

Romans 4:17-25

Part # 9

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HOW TO BELIEVE GOD FOR A MIRACLE

Romans 4:17-25

Rick Edwards

We're going to talk about How to believe God for a miracle. We're going to look at the life of Abraham as we looked at last week. Paul was a master teacher. He made a point then gave an illustration. In 3:28 he says *"We maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from the law."* You're not saved by works but you're saved by faith.

Then in 4 he gives us an example of the greatest man of faith who ever lived, Abraham. He is a model for us of faith. Faith is so vital for the Christian life Paul spends this entire chapter of it, using Abraham as an example.

First, I want us to consider a couple of other verses on faith. The word "faith" or "believe" is used 485 times in the New Testament.

Romans 1:17 *"For in the Gospel a righteousness from God is revealed, a righteousness that is by faith from first to last. Just as it is written, the righteous will live by faith."* You want to be righteous? Live by faith! Paul sums it up in chapter 1 -- from first to last, the beginning, the middle, the end is faith.

1. DEFINITION OF A MIRACLE

Tonight we're going to talk about Abraham. Romans 4. First, I want us to look at the definition of a miracle. What is a miracle. v. 17 *"As it is written 'I have made you a father of many nations'. He is our father in the sight of God in whom he believed. **God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.**"*

God gives life to the dead and He calls things that are not as though they were. Those two phrases tell us two types of miracles that God does.

1. The first type of miracle God does is He gives new life to something that's dead. *"He gives life to the dead."*

God specializes in bringing life out of death.

- **He does that physically -- health is a restoration of life.**
- **He does that emotionally -- a dead relationship restored, a marriage**
- **He does that spiritually -- when God gives new life to a church or a group of people; that's called revival.**

God gives new life to something that's dead.

2. The second type of miracle is when God creates something out of nothing.

"He calls those things that are not as though they were." God creates something out of nothing. NAS: *"He calls into being that which does not exist."*

Genesis 1. There is one phrase that comes up over and over -- *"and God said"*.

Whatever God says, happens! This is the power of God's word. God speaks things into existence. That's what he's saying in Romans, *"God calls things that are not as though they*

were." And when He says it, it happens. The moment He says it, it happens. That is the power of God's word.

That's what Romans is talking about. God does two types of miracles:

- He resurrects something that's dead (He gives new life to it)
- and He creates something out of nothing. Those are both miracles.

Romans 4:18 *"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. Sarah's womb was also dead yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promises of God but he was strengthened in his faith and he gave glory to God being fully persuaded that God had power to do what He had promised. This is why it was credited to him as righteousness."*

These verses summarize what it takes 10 chapters to say in the book of Genesis -- Gen. 12-22.

II. HOW GOD PREPARES YOU FOR A MIRACLE

I want us to look at these in a little more detail because Abraham is not only the father of faith but he is the model for what is commonly known as the phases of faith.

When God does a miracle in our lives He often takes us through certain stages in preparation to do that miracle. Abraham is a key example of the six phases of faith.

We'll see how God moved in faith in Abraham's life. Genesis 12. *"The Lord said to Abram, 'Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to a land that I will show you. 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 those who curse you will be cursed. And all the peoples on the earth will be blessed through you.'"*

1. It starts off when God wants to do a miracle in our life is a DREAM.

God gives you a dream, a vision, a goal, an idea, something that captures your attention, a promise. God told Abram, "I'm going to give you a land for yourself. I'm going to make you a great nation."

He got a promise. At that time Abraham was 75 years old when he left Ur. He was already up in years when God gave him this promise.

This is the first promise, or the first covenant. In the New Testament we have the new covenant. We talk about our Bible being the Old Testament and the New Testament. The old covenant is the covenant to Abraham. The new covenant is the covenant to Christians and to the world through Jesus Christ.

Phase 1 is God gives you a dream. Every miracle that ever starts, starts with a vision, a dream, an idea, a goal, a beautiful thought, a promise from God.

At this time Abraham was 75 years old and he has one problem. He doesn't have any kids. And yet God says I'm going to make you a great nation. That's the first phase.

2. The second phase is DECISION.

v. 4 *"So Abram left as the Lord had told him, and Lot went with him. And Abram was 75 years old when he set out from Haran".*

First there was a dream and then there was the decision: Am I going to obey God or not? Am I going to leave the country or am I not.

Anytime you have a goal, there has to come a point that you lay it on the line, you make the decision, break your chains and take the plunge, put your money where your mouth is. Faith is a verb, Faith is not passive, it is active.

Faith is taking the initiative. First God gives Abram the dream, then Abram makes the decision to go for it! I'm going to leave all my family, all my heritage, all my people behind and go for what God wants me to do. So far, so good.

3. Stage three gets a little tight. DELAY. Genesis 15. The problem we have in living by faith is we get impatient. There is always a delay in God's timetable of when He preforms a miracle. *"After this the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision. 'Don't be afraid Abram. I am your shield, your very great reward.' But Abram said, 'O sovereign Lord, can You give me one? What can You give me since I remain childless? The one who will inherit my estate is Eleazer of Damascus.' And Abram said, 'You have given me no children so a servant in my household will be my heir.' Then the word of the Lord came to him, 'This man will not be your heir. But a son coming from your own body will be your heir.' He took him outside and said, 'Look at the heavens and count the stars. Indeed, if you can count them. So shall your offspring be.' Abram believed the Lord and it was credited to him as righteousness."*

Why do I call this delay? In this instance God comes back to Abram and gives him the same promise again, "I'm going to make you a great nation." But this is eleven years later and Abram is not 86.

God repeats the promise, "I'm still going to do it, Abram. I've just been waiting." I'm sure **Abram was saying, "God, what's the problem here? What's the delay? What's taking so long?"**

God, in order to increase Abram's faith, gives him a little object lesson. He says, "Go outside. Look up at the stars.

Count them. That's how many kids you're going to have in your descendants." Why did God do that?

An important step in the faith process is God wants you to visualize what's going to happen. You've got to see it in your mind in order for it to become a reality. What you can conceive and believe you can achieve. That's a human statement. But the fact is what you can conceive and believe, God can achieve. Every night as Abram went to bed, he'd lay back and

look at the stars, he'd see his future. Looking straight up. Every night he got a daily reminder that God is going to make my life the founder of a great nation, the nation of Israel.

But there is a delay. He's getting older.

We need to ask ourselves, How do we handle the waiting rooms in life? Do you like to wait? What do we do when we wait? We have two or three typical reactions:

1) Doubt. When there is a delay we can doubt. In v. 8 "*O sovereign Lord, how can I know that I will gain possession of it?*" He had doubts. That's a typical reaction when there's a delay in a promise.

2) Despair. That's when you want to give up. No situation is hopeless. Remember the children of Israel when they were led out of Egypt to go into the promised land and it took them 40 years; they didn't get there overnight. They said, "This is lousy. Let's go back to Egypt."

3) Detour.

A detour is what happened to Abraham. He got impatient. He thought "I'm not making it. I don't have any kids and I'm not getting any younger. I'm going to take matters into my own hands." In chapter 16 we have the detour. Sarah, Abraham's wife, said, "I'm no spring chicken. I haven't been able to bear you any child. So why don't you take my hand maiden and have a pregnancy through her."

Hagar bore him a son, Ishmael -- the father of the Arabs. The Middle East is still paying today for Abraham's impatience. He just got ahead of God. How many times do we do that? We believe God but we try to help Him out a little bit. We begin to do our own thing. The most difficult step in the phases of faith is waiting. The fact is you cannot hurry God.

4. DIFFICULTIES. Genesis 17. Abraham had a son by Hagar but God said, "That's not the one, Abram." v 1 "*When Abram was 99...*" Now it's getting desperate!

But at 99 we're talking about a difficulty becoming an impossibility.

Why did God wait so long. Then to make matters worse, v. 3 "*Abraham fell face down and God said to him, 'As for Me, this is My covenant with you, you will be the father of many nations.'*"

I'm sure Abram is thinking, "God, this is the third time you told me. You told me when I was 75, 86, 99 but nothing's happening!" God keeps reassuring him but he doesn't see any evidence that it's really going to happen.

God says, "*No longer will you be called Abram. Your name will be Abraham, for I have made you the father of many nations.*" Abraham means "the father of many nations". Imagine how embarrassing this was to Abraham. "*I have made you [circle "made"] a father of many nations.*" Notice that is past tense.

This is the example that Paul refers to in Romans when he says, *"God calls those things which are not as though they were."* He's bringing what's going to happen into the present and acting as if it's past tense.

We'll explain this a little more in a minute. It's important you understand how God works in the phases of faith. Phase 1 He gives you a dream. Phase 2 you make the decision to go for it. Phase 3 there's a delay. **Phase 4 all of a sudden comes difficulties.**

In this situation, God waited until it was completely out of Abraham's hands, out of his control. Finally he comes to the limits of his own ability and saying, "We've tried everything!" Now all he could do was trust God's power.

Have you ever been in a situation like that? You did everything in your power to make a situation go and you're at the end of your rope, out of gas.

There's nothing left to do. You're fed up, tired, can't resolve it on your own resources, you're out of energy and there's no way to figure the situation out. You give up! God says, "Great! Now you're ready for a miracle!" That leads us to Phase 5.

5. DEAD END. This is what's called the death of a vision. It's a principle seen all through scripture. Abraham eventually had a son, chapter 21:1 *"Now the Lord was gracious to Sarah as He had said and the Lord did for Sarah what He had promised. Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age. [She was 90, Abraham was 99.*

The baby was born when he was 100. *Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son Sarah bore."* They have the baby but that's not the end of the story.

Chapter 22 *"Sometime later God tested Abraham and He said, `Abraham, take your son, the only son whom you love [circle "the only"] and go to the region of Moriah and sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I will tell you about."* If that isn't a dead end, I don't know what is!

Finally, at age 99 Abraham fathers a child who was born at age 100. He's got his boy, his answer, his miracle child. Then God comes and says, Sacrifice him, give him up. I'm sure Abraham had no idea what was going on. "Why God?"

v. 3 *"Early the next morning Abraham got up and saddled his donkey. He took with him two servants and his son Isaac. When he had cut enough wood for the burnt offering he set out for the place He had told him about. On the third day Abraham looked up and saw the place in the distance and he said to his servants, `Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy will go over there to worship and then we'll come back to you."* Underline this phrase. That's a statement of faith. We will worship and then we will come back. Hadn't God said he's going to sacrifice his son there. Hadn't He said you're going to give your son to die there? Yet Abraham, the man of faith says, We will return.

What happened? Abraham figured even if he sacrificed him God can resurrect him. Because God does two things: **He creates something out of nothing and He calls things that are not as though they were.**

"... burnt offering and placed it on his son Isaac and he himself carried the fire and the knife. As the two of them went together Isaac spoke up and said to his father Abraham, 'Father?' 'Yes, my son,' 'The fire and wood are here,' Isaac said, 'But where is the lamb for the burnt offering?' Abraham answered, another statement of faith: 'God Himself will provide the lamb for the burnt offering.'"

Abraham is believing all the way. He's being obedient to God. But all the long, he's hanging on. God will provide. *"And when they reached the place He'd told them about, Abraham built an altar there and arranged wood on it. He bound his son Isaac and laid him on the altar on top of the wood. And when he reached out his hand and took the knife to slay his son..."*

This is the final seconds. He's got to the top of the mountain. He's got the fire ready. He's laid his son out to literally offer a human sacrifice. He raises the knife and he's ready to take his own son's life, the son who represents all he's ever dreamed up, everything he's ever wanted, everything God has ever promised and he doesn't understand it one bit. But he believes that God has told him to do it.

He's ready to sacrifice and just as he's ready it says the angel stopped him. v. 12 *"Abram, Abram' 'Here am I' he replied. 'Do not lay hand on the boy. Do not do anything to him. Now I know you fear God and you have not withheld from Me your son, your only son.'"*

This was a test. God said, Abraham I'm going to bless you. The blessing is going to be so great I'm going to test you to see what's more important to you, Me or the blessing.

Hebrew 11 is the commentary that explains the story we just looked at. I don't know that I could do something like this. I don't know that I've got that kind of faith. Now do you see why Abraham is such a model? Unbelievable faith.

There was no precedent for this. He didn't have any Bible.

The Bible had not even been written! The first book of the Bible, Genesis, written by Moses probably 400 years later.

Hebrews 11:17 *"By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice. He who had received the promise was about to sacrifice his one and only son. Even though God had said to him, 'It is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.'" How could he have the faith to do that? v. 19 "Abraham reasoned that God could raise the dead." And figuratively speaking he did receive Isaac back from the dead.*

Now do you see why the verse in Romans says God brings life out of death? and he's talking about Abraham? This is the example here. This is the dead end, the impasse.

6. Step 6 DELIVERANCE.

God delivers you. He makes good on His word. He does a miracle. He provides a solution. He makes good on His promise. Genesis 22:13 *"Abraham looked up and there in a thicket he saw a ram caught by its horns. He went over and took the ram and sacrificed it as a burnt offering instead of his son. So Abraham called the place 'The Lord will provide'"* That's faith. God, at the last minute, at the last second, comes in and He delivers.

We see this over and over again, that God gives a dream. But there's a delay and difficulties and you come to a dead end and think, Maybe I was wrong. Then God, in His timing, bails you out, performs the miracle, specializes in the resurrection, provides the answer.

Those are the phases of faith.

Romans 4. I want you to see how to have faith like Abraham did. How does God prepare us for a miracle? Through these phases. Probably every one of us are on one of these phases. Some of you have a great idea but haven't launched out on it yet. Some of you have launched out -- maybe a new business you felt God leading you into and there is delay; the customers don't come in. Difficulty -- not paying your bills. Dead End -- the house is up for recall.

What's going to happen? How do you believe God? How do you have faith like Abraham? How did Abraham keep his faith in spite of the delays? How did he overcome the temptation to give up?

III. THE KIND OF FAITH GOD REWARDS

v. 20 *"Yet he did not waiver through unbelief regarding the promises."* He didn't waiver, he didn't doubt. Was he some kind of superman? or some kind of neurotic who didn't know any better than not doubt? No.

Abraham did four things: These are the four things we need to do if we want a miracle in our lives:

1) v. 17 ***Believing in God*** *"As it is written I have made you the father of many nations [Abraham is our father in the sight of God] in whom he believes."* Circle "in whom". Abraham didn't believe in a principle, he believed in a person. He didn't believe in himself, **he believed in God. The first principle for a miracle is "in whom". He put his trust in God not himself.**

Faith is not positive mental attitude. Faith is not psycho- cybernetics. Faith is not psyching yourself up with wishful thinking.

Remember the story of the little train going up the hill -- "I think I can, I think I can... I thought I could! I thought I could!"

If you think it, you can achieve anything. I'm not putting down positive attitudes. I believe in a positive mental attitude. I think there is a legitimate place for expectation, belief and positivism.

It's a much greater alternative than negativism.

Faith is faith in God, not in ourselves. It says Abraham put his trust in God. That's why he believed God could do a miracle, because he had his faith in God. Faith never just depends on yourself.

Hebrews 6:13 *"When God made His promise to Abraham since there was no one greater for Him to swear by He swore by Himself saying I will surely bless you and give you many descendants. And so, after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised."* That is an understatement! Men swear by some greater than themselves. But God doesn't have anybody to swear to. Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of His purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised He confirmed it with an oath. God said, "I want you to know that I'm promising you, Abraham, that you're going to have descendants and I'm basing it on My character." God's character is the foundation of His promises. Hebrews 6: V 18 ***"God did this so by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled take hold of the hope offered to us and may be greatly encouraged."***

He said God cannot lie. God said it, I believe it, that settles it. God said it, that settles it, whether I believe it or not! God said it. It will happen.

A promise is only as good as the person who gives it. If a father tells a kid, "Son, I'll take you fishing next Saturday."

What does that kid have to hold on to? Nothing except the character of his dad. Hebrews says, "God always makes good on His promises."

Romans 4:17 *"He put his trust in God. Against all hope, Abraham, in hope believed."* Grammarians call this an oxymoron -- taking two contradictory statements and putting them together for heightened impact.

Abraham had no reason to believe, yet Abraham, in hope, believed. *"and so became the father of many nations just as it had been said to him."*

2. The second thing about Abraham was that his hope was based on God's word. V 18 It was based on a promise. Not hope based on wishful thinking, a great idea. His hope was based on a promise. "Against all hope" -- it was humanly impossible, even in a hopeless situation, Abraham believed. He didn't listen to the cynics saying it can't be done. He said, I base my life on God's word.

Do you want to have more faith? Look at Romans 10:17. This tells you how to have more faith. *"Consequently faith comes from hearing the message and the message is heard through the word of Christ."*

The Bible says faith comes from hearing God's word. If you want to increase your faith, the more you hear God's word, the more faith you'll have. The more you come to Bible studies the greater your faith will become. We feed on the word of God, God's word is the food that strengthens our faith. Someone says, "I want to have more faith!" I ask, "Are you reading your Bible? You going to church? A Bible study? Are you having a quiet time?" No. How do you expect your faith to grow! Faith comes from the word of God. It's based on the Word of God. His hope was based on a promise.

3. He looked beyond the circumstances. V 19

Romans 4:19 *"Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead since he was about 100 years old and Sarah's womb was also dead."*

He looked beyond the circumstances. Some of you are in situations right now where you need a miracle. You're looking at the problem not at the solution. You're looking at the circumstances, not at the one who can overcome the circumstances.

Notice it says, "Abraham, without weakening in his faith, faced the facts."

Do not misunderstand me! Faith is not pretending. Faith is not saying "There's no problem!" Faith is not a fantasy world. Abraham did not fantasize. It says he faced the facts. "I'm impotent and my wife's barren."

There's no way that we can have a kid." He faced the fact but he didn't weaken his faith. A lot of people think to have faith you have to ignore reality.

Faith is facing the facts and still not being discouraged.

That's the most profound thing I could share with you tonight. **Faith is not pretending and kidding yourself and saying it's not an impossible situation. It is!**

Abraham faced the facts. God had promised him a son. Yet at 99 years old he looks at himself and says "No way!" Living Bible *"Abraham believed God even though such a promise couldn't come to pass. Because his faith was strong he didn't worry about the fact that he was too old to become a father at the age of 100."*

The issue is what do you have your eyes on? Remember Peter, when he walked on water? When he kept his eyes on the Lord he was fine. But the moment he started looking at what was beneath him he started sinking. When you start looking at your problems you're going to sink! So you've got to look at the Lord.

Faith is facing the facts but you're still not discouraged by them.

4. He did not waiver V 19

He didn't waiver -- the Greek means to have two minds or opinions. He didn't stagger. The word was used when a man would argue with himself. When you're walking you walk straight. When you stagger, you kind of move back and forth, you're double minded. James says a double minded man is unstable in all of his ways. Abraham was not unstable because he glorified God. He thanked God in advance.

5.) **He gave glory to God v. 20** *"Yet he did not waiver through unbelief regarding the promise of God but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God fully persuaded that God had the power to do what He had promised."*

All the time while Abraham was waiting for the promise to be fulfilled he was thanking God, praising God, glorifying God. The highest form of faith is thanking God in advance. There is tremendous power in praise. Faith brings glory to God. The people who glorify God the most are those who believe God for the most.

Is there a lesson for us?

6. His faith is an example to all of us V 22-25

v. 23 *"The words 'It was credited to him' were written not for his sake alone but also for us..."*
This is for us. That's why we're spending so much time on it. *"...to whom God will credit righteousness."*

For us who believe in him who raises Jesus our Lord from the dead."

Abraham believed God would raise Isaac from the dead. We believe Jesus was raised from the dead. *"He was delivered over from the dead for our sins and raised to life for our justification."*
Faith is for all who believe.

We have the same God that Abraham did. What holds true for Abraham, holds true for us today. We're saved by faith just like Abraham was saved by faith. There's no other way. That's how you have a miracle.