

*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope through the power of the Holy Spirit!*

**Understand the Promise that Comes by Faith!**

- I. It's not about works**
- II. It's all about trust**

**INTRODUCTION**

I promise that... How would you complete that statement? Does it bring to mind intentions as a child to clean up your room and keep it clean? Does it bring to mind wedding vows and the promise of life-long faithfulness to your spouse? Intentions as a team member to work harder together with your teammates? Intentions as a coworker or employee to increase production or sales?

The list could go on and on couldn't it? Promises we have made in our lives and sadly, many of those promises that went unfulfilled.

But look at each and every one of those promises we have made in our lives – whether we kept them or not – they were dependent on something that we were going to do or least intended to do. In other words, every promise like that which we make is dependent on our own works or doing. Is that maybe the reason that when we talk about the promise that is on our text for today – the promise of salvation by faith alone – that we have trouble understanding it?

In God's Word for our consideration today, the Apostle Paul wants to help us **Understand the Promise that Comes by Faith!** We will find out that if we want to do that, 1) It's not about works, but 2) It's all about trust. Our sermon text is Romans 4:1-5, 13-17.

**I. It's not about works**

If you put together the words of Paul which we just read with the words of our Old Testament lesson (Genesis 12:1-8), you could understand how in the eyes of men at his time, Abraham could have been viewed as a man who was justified by works. Abraham was a man whom people would have said "He's a really good guy and if anyone deserves to be in heaven, it's him." One of, if not THE richest men of his time. Respected and well-known. It wouldn't be hard to say that Abraham should have been justified by his works.

But Paul tells us in v. 13 – that even with all that, it was not by his works that Abraham was justified.

We see how Abraham was viewed as a man who could justify himself by his works. Is it any wonder that such an idea is rampant in our world today?

- churches say you must do something to make sure you are saved
- in the workplace as well as the athletic or musical fields, your performance goes a long way in determining who you are
- in social circles, those who do much to impress others are highly viewed and respected

In spite of all that, what Paul wrote to the Romans at the end of v.2 remains true today - "*not before God*". When it comes to "the Promise that Comes by Faith", our works count for absolutely nothing before God. That his hard for us to understand, because whether you are the one making a promise or the one to whom a promise is made, be it as a parent, boss, teacher etc., you would not stand idly by and let someone fail at their promise. You would work on your part to help them keep it. Paul goes on to help us understand that when it comes to the promise of salvation, it's all about trust.

## II. It's all about trust

In spite of all that is known about how the people of his day spoke of him, Paul tells us "*Abraham believed*". Even Abraham did not count on his works to save him. He believed and trusted in God, even though he never saw God or would see the fulfillment of the promise.

The challenge is that when we trust, we have to put all our confidence in someone else. We have to lay aside who we are, what we've done etc. and put ourselves totally in the hands of someone else and have the confidence that they will come through.

Paul shows us how this plays out in our salvation in v. 5 "*However, to the man who does not work but trusts God who justifies the wicked, his faith is credited as righteousness.*" And again v. 16 "*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*".

Did you hear the two crucial words which Paul uses there? Trust and then to those who trust, Paul says that this promise is guaranteed. Not some flimsy guarantee only on paper or only as good as the ink as it is written with. A 100% guarantee that when we come to the Lord's Table as we do in a few minutes, our forgiveness is guaranteed. A 100% guarantee that the next time we stand at the graveside of a loved one who died as a believer, we know that we will be reunited with them in heaven. A 100% guarantee that as we go through life, we always have the grace, mercy and power of our God with us where ever we go.

Isn't that why we do what we do every Lenten season? Even though we know exactly what we are going to hear, know the places we are going to visit and what the end result will be and could probably tell the story from memory, we need to walk that Lenten journey every year to remind ourselves and reinforce our trust in the "the Promise that Comes by Faith".

## CONCLUSION

Recently a news report told of a two - story house in the Bahamas that was on fire. The parents and their 2 small children were getting out of the house when suddenly the smallest boy became terrified and ran back inside and upstairs. His father outside shouted to him, "Jump, son, I'll catch you!". "I know," his son replied, "But I can't see you". That may not be a perfect picture, but doesn't it illustrate our unwillingness to let go and live totally by faith?

May God give us his grace so that while we may not be able to understand, we continue to live by trust and faith. Amen.