



### Romans 4:16-25

I am going to do something I have never done in a sermon. I am going to start with a magic trick. I am going to bend this spoon. All I am going to do is lightly rub the spoon between my finger and thumb. If I rub in just the right way, the molecules and atoms will begin to change. I will not bend the spoon with heat but rather with subtle change in its molecular structure. Do you see it getting softer? Can you start to see the change in the metal? There it goes—it's bending now. It's soft and pliable. And there you have it. A hard metal spoon bent in half.

Obviously, this is not magic or some strange power. All I did was bend the spoon with my hands. But some people believe that they can bend spoons with their mind. One person who believes this is Karen's college roommate. Karen was instrumental in leading her to the Lord. Listen as she described her experience with a spoon.

I know that I held that spoon, and connected with it, and showed it an image in my mind of what I'd like it to do, and asked it if it would bend for me. I asked it to bend into a corkscrew. I know it became warm in my hands, and just for a moment, it and I had no boundaries between us.

Then I shrieked with laughter and cried with awe and amazement, and came out of the wordless place where I'd been, and it stopped bending. The corkscrew wasn't complete, but the bend was



indisputable.

The God I've loved for so long has become so much bigger. He's become Goddess and Universe and energy and oneness and the divine Feminine and so much more.

It's really sad to see her lose her faith. But on the other hand, doesn't she have a type of faith? You could argue that her faith is quite 'large.' She believed that she could bend a spoon and she did bend a spoon. But do you see the object of her faith? After all, she did actually talk to the spoon. She asked the spoon to bend. I find it interesting that she even used the pronoun "he." "He's become Goddess and Universe and energy and oneness and the divine Feminine and so much more." I'd like to ask her how a "he" became a goddess. Her faith could best be described as a type of panentheism—God is in everything. God is in the spoon. The spoon is not God but God is in the spoon by its "energy" and "oneness."

People—this is faith. This is belief. So we must not think that people like this do not have any faith. She has lots of faith. I can't argue with the strength of her faith but rather the object of her faith. I think this important because we often describe faith in terms of amount. She has more faith. He has less faith. While this is true to some degree, the chief issue of faith is not the amount of faith but the object of faith. The amount of faith will come as you first anchor yourself to the correct object of faith.

A few weeks ago I had a good discussion with a young guy at the fitness center. In the course of the conversation I asked him if he had a faith that sustains and guides him in life. His answer surprised me. He simply said "No." He explained that at one time he had been an agnostic but he eventually realized that he did not have any faith in any kind of God. He was an atheist. He wasn't the radical kind of atheist like Annie Gaylor from Madison's Freedom from Religion Foundation. This guy was content to leave believers of all kinds alone. But he was wrong to say that he didn't have any faith. It may be true that he did not have a faith in God, he does have loads of faith. Since he was lifting weights we can assume that he had faith in the constancy of gravity. In other words, what if gravity quadrupled while he was lifting weights? The weight would fall on him and kill him. But I did not detect that he had anything but full faith in the constancy of gravity. In fact—his faith in gravity was as strong and sure as anyone's in the world. Do you want a faith in God that is as certain as your faith in gravity? Let's read the next section of Romans and see what we can learn about faith that will give you a certainty in your life.

*For the promise to Abraham and his offspring that he would be heir of the world did not come through the law but through the righteousness of faith. 14 For if it is the adherents of the law who are to be the heirs, faith is null and the promise is void. 15 For the law brings wrath, but where there is no law there is no transgression.*

*16 That is why it depends on faith, in order that the promise may rest on grace and be guaranteed to all his offspring—not only to the adherent of the law but also to the one who shares the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, 17 as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations"—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist. 18 In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, "So shall your offspring*

be.” **19** *He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah’s womb. 20 No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, 21 fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. 22 That is why his faith was “counted to him as righteousness.” 23 But the words “it was counted to him” were not written for his sake alone, 24 but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, 25 who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.*

New Testament writers routinely use the Old Testament as examples. In our Wednesday night study through James this past week we were reminded at how James used the example of Elijah to write about prayer. One of the most radical verse in the Bible is James 5:17. *Elijah was a man with a nature like ours, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth.* This of course summarizes a key event in the life of Elijah. He prayed and because he prayed it did not rain for 3 and a half years. This deadly drought then brought about the confrontation between Elijah and the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel. This is the ideal way for a NT writer to use an example from the OT to make a point.

But when Paul writes about Abraham, he is doing much more than just using him as an example. Abraham is the father of all who believe. Genesis 15:6 is the key to understanding the whole Bible. “Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness.” When you read that verse in Genesis, you ought to have the sense that fifty thousand nuclear bombs were exploded all at once. In that one verse there was a massive explosion of grace-based salvation. If you will see it, this atomic bomb of grace reverberates throughout the rest of the Bible. Do you see, Abraham is not merely an example of faith, he is the archetype of faith. He is the mold by which all saving faith is measured. If you can grasp the faith of Abraham, you not only get saving faith but you get a faith that will carry you through anything that the world can throw at you. But what did Abraham believe?

In verse 17 Paul quoted from Genesis 17:5. *No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham, for I have made you the father of a multitude of nations.* And in verse 18 Paul quoted from Genesis 15:5. *And he brought him outside and said, “Look toward heaven, and number the stars, if you are able to number them.” Then he said to him, “So shall your offspring be.”* These verses represent one of three main promises that God gave to Abraham.

1. Many descendants—multitude of nations
2. Possess the land<sup>i</sup>
3. Be a blessing to all nations<sup>ii</sup>

All three promises go hand in hand, don't they? Abraham could not be a blessing to all nations unless he first became many nations. And of course the promised land is where they would eventually dwell and multiply. But Abraham had a problem which Paul described in verse 19. *He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah’s womb.* Paul said that Abraham's body was “as good as dead.” We don't know how old Abraham was during

the events of Genesis 15 but he was probably in his late seventies or early eighties. But we do know that Abraham was 99 years old in Genesis 17.

Now, is it possible for a 99 year old man to father a child? It is not very common but it is entirely possible. In 2012 there was a news report of a 96 year old man from India who just became a new father of a bouncing baby boy. However, he did say that he didn't plan to have any more children.<sup>iii</sup> He's not very likely to see his son finish kindergarten, is he? So what does this have to say about Abraham's chances of becoming a dad? Was it possible for him to become a father without the miraculous intervention of God? Obviously it was impossible because Sarah was well past the age of childbearing. A man might be fertile at age 96 but a woman is never fertile at age 89.

However, we should not too quickly skip over Abraham's situation. Paul said that Abraham's body was "as good as dead" and he also noted the "barrenness of Sarah's womb." Both the word dead and barren are from the same root word—necrosis, which means dead. Paul did not use the normal word for a woman who was barren—who was unable to conceive but instead he uses a much stronger word—dead. Sarah's natural ability to bear children was dead and Abraham's natural ability to father children was dead. They were equally infertile. It would have been impossible for both of them.

Let's do a little math here. What do you get when you add impossible to impossible? Well if you multiply them by God's perfect promise, you get a certainty!

IMPOSSIBLE + IMPOSSIBLE x GOD'S PROMISE = CERTAINTY

In fact, it doesn't matter how many "impossible" you add to the left side of the column, as long as you multiply it by God's promise, you always get certainty. Tell me—does this describe your faith? Maybe you are in a period of life where you have impossible plus impossible plus impossible plus impossible and on and on it goes. If you add all of your impossibilities together do you get certainty? Is your faith in God as certain as gravity? If not, why not?

Verse 20 makes this certainty even more clear. *No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God.* Verse 20 sounds a lot like James 1:6-8—*But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that he will receive anything from the Lord; he is a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.* After reading verses like this, do ever start to feel a little guilty? Maybe you don't exactly feel like Abraham. Your unbelief makes you waver at times. Maybe you don't feel like James. Sometimes you are a double-minded man or a double-minded woman. You feel like the waves of the sea have blown you about like a hurricane and you don't know where your faith is going to land. Why is that? The standard God lays out in Scripture is that our faith can be certain—as I said before, as certain as gravity. But our reality is often a wavering faith. It looks like this.

God's Standard = CERTAIN FAITH

# STEEL BARRIER

Our Reality = WAVERING FAITH

There seems to be a steel barrier between the certain faith in Scripture and the reality of our wavering faith. We can see the other side. We see the certain faith that could be ours but we don't know how to get from here to there. Let's explore some way to get around this barrier and grab a hold of this certain faith.

I want to use two missionary stories to illustrate this barrier. Most of us know Aaron and Whitney Juetten and some of you will remember Aaron's brother, Dan. Dan and his wife Amanda shared their ministry vision with our church many years ago. Dan is an airplane mechanic and they both felt a clear call to serve in Haiti with Mission Aviation Fellowship. They were accepted by MAF and were hard at work raising support to go. But the support that they needed never came in and so their dream of serving in Haiti went unfulfilled.

A similar thing recently happened to Lincoln Brunner. Lincoln is one of the missionaries that our church supports and he has preached and shared with us on two occasions. Lincoln has a fascinating calling. He is a talented journalist and he wants to share missions stories from around the world as a way to inspire and educate the next generation of missionaries and give support to current ones. He felt a strong call to move to Costa Rica for a few years so that he could expand this missions and journalism vision. But like the Juetten family, the Brunner family was not able to raise enough support. Their dream of moving to Costa Rica was dashed.

So what happened to the Juetten and Brunner families? Did they lose their faith? Did they walk away from God in utter disappointment? I will tell you the conclusion to their stories after I lay out a few principles and they all relate to the object of our faith.

## **God's power**

Verse 21 tells us why Abraham did not waver in his faith: *fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised*. How does anyone fulfill a promise? If I promise my wife that I will be home at 5:30 for dinner, can I keep that promise? First, I must want to keep the promise but assuming that I do, I must be able to control every possible outcome. I must be able to control the weather and not allow icy roads to send me careening into the ditch. I must be able to control all of the mechanical functions of my 14 year old car so it will be able to take me home. I must be able to control all of the other drivers on the road so that they don't run into me. I must be able to control the fact that someone won't call me at 5 PM with an emergency that I need to attend to. Even if I have every possible intention of fulfilling my promise to be home at 5:30, to guarantee that promise, I must be able to control every possible contingency. In other words, in order to fulfill even one small promise, I must have sovereign power over all things. Even though I like to control things at times, I willingly admit that I don't have sovereign power over the universe.

Now you can't use this as an excuse! If your wife calls you and asks you to be home by 5:30, you can't say, "Woman, I am not God. I don't have sovereign power over the universe so I can't possibly make such a promise." All other things being equal, chances are you probably will be home by 5:30, if you truly commit to doing so, but you cannot guarantee it. But God can. Abraham was fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. The word for able is *dunamis* from where we get our word dynamite. It simply means power. Abraham was fully convinced that God has the power to do what he had promised. Do you believe this? As long as you doubt God's absolute power over all things and all people, your faith will waver and be tossed about by the waves of the sea. Do you see how little this has to do with you? Like the guy at the fitness center, do you ever worry about gravity? Have you ever lost sleep concerned about gravity? But we do lose sleep over whether or not God is in control of our life. In verse 17 God was described as one *who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist*. Does that sound like someone who lacks control?

### **God's salvation**

The end of the passage gives the ultimate application.

*22 That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness." 23 But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone, 24 but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, 25 who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.*

Abraham was counted as righteous for believing in an impossible birth but we will never be asked to believe such a thing. But we are asked to place our faith in Christ alone. We are asked to believe that without Christ, the wrath of the Father remains on us. We are asked to believe that God took on human flesh, that our sins were credited to him and that his righteousness was credited to us. We are asked to believe that his sacrificial death and resurrection proves that he is God, that he has power over sin and death. These are the things that are certain. God's grace is offered freely if we simply believe. This is not belief in our ability to believe but belief in God's promise to save.

### **God's promise**

Having faith in God is all about believing the right promises. If you believe the wrong promise, you will most certainly be disappointed. And you should be! If you are convinced that God promised you a certain outcome in your life, whether it be health, good relationships, plenty of money, amazing ministry opportunities—whatever it is. If you believe that he has promised you these things and he has not delivered on his promise, then you *should* be disappointed. God has the power to fulfill all of his promises. That is not just as certain as gravity but even more certain than gravity. Gravity is merely something that God created and creation, even as something as statistically reliable as gravity, can change. God has the power to fulfill all of his promises but he is not under any obligation to fulfill what you think he has promised you.

This is part of what happened to Karen's college roommate. Twice in her life she was absolutely convinced that God had promised her that she would marry a certain guy. You would have thought that she learned her lesson the first time but she actually did this twice. She claimed promises that were never hers to claim. And she was devastated.

So let's get back to the Brunner and Juetten families. What happened to them after their dreams went unfulfilled? It's true that the Brunner family was disappointed about not going to Costa Rica but they did not doubt God's greater plan. Listen to this update from their December newsletter.

Since the door to Costa Rica closed on us, we have prayed and sought a lot of advice on what to do now. Time and again, friends and family and spiritual mentors have said to us, "God has something else planned for you, something big—just wait on Him. He will show you." We believe He has done just that.

The first week of this month, Lincoln and close friend Jim Killam got the go-ahead from ReachGlobal leadership to start a brand-new international news service for the entire missions world. This is very big news for several reasons:

1. It is the answer to years of prayer. We had plans to use Latin America as a model base for international missions reporting, but it appears that God wants us to remain in Stevens Point and do this from here.
2. It confirms the encouragement we've received from Christians living in Jordan, Egypt, Central America and the United States the past few weeks that this is exactly what the missions world needs right now--a better way to communicate what God is doing all over the world, regardless of denominational ties.
3. It fits. Our two key directives -- to use great stories to engage people in Great Commission work, and to train others to be missionary journalists -- fits hand-in-hand with our book, "Go Tell It," which we wrote to be a field guide to reporting God's stories worldwide. The book will publish May 1. Thank God for this!

Lincoln's entire purpose for going to Costa Rica in the first place was to start an international news service for the entire missions world. God accomplished this goal without him needing to go to Costa Rica and many years sooner than he had hoped. Now if they had claimed a promise that God would take them to Costa Rica, then they would have been disappointed. This would have given them a reason not only to doubt God's provision in this instance but also doubt him for everything else in their lives.

The Juetten family never got to Haiti but for an entirely different reason. Amanda was diagnosed with a degenerative eye disease that is making her go blind. Of course God knew this all along and so he prevented them from going to Haiti and returning just as quickly. The Juetten family did not claim Haiti as a promise. You know what else they did not claim as a certain promise from God? Seeing. Sight is not guaranteed in Scripture. Health and wealth are not guaranteed. Far too many things that we think God ought to do for us, he has never promised to do.

Now here's a promise to claim from Romans 10: *if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.* If you forsake all but Christ, if you confess him as Lord, believe that he is God incarnate, that he dies and was raised to life to cover your sins, you will be saved. That is a promise more certain than gravity.

Rich Maurer  
January 12, 2014



<http://www.livescience.com/24196-male-fertility-limit.html>