

## Romans 4:16-25

### *The Guaranteed Promise to All*

**Main idea:** God's promise is guaranteed because it doesn't depend on us, but on God Himself.

I'm going to make you a promise this morning. It's a pretty big promise, are you ready for it? I promise you that I'm never gonna give you up, I'm never gonna let you down, I'm never gonna run around and desert you. And I promise you that I'm never gonna make you cry, never gonna say goodbye, never gonna tell a lie and hurt you. And I promise you all these things IF you can make the same promise to me, and IF you can get Rick Astley to come and sing that song for us this morning.

### **[Video of Never Gonna Give You Up]**



So, can you get Rick Astley here this morning to sing that song to us? And can you promise me that you're never gonna give me up, let me down, run around and desert me? Can you promise me that you're never gonna make me cry, never gonna say goodbye, never gonna tell a lie and hurt me?

And if you can promise all these things, including having Rick Astley here this morning, I will keep my promise to you. Can you do it?

Well, since you can't fulfill your end of the bargain, then I'm not obligated to fulfill my promise to you either.

So, that really wasn't much of a promise, then, was it? I mean, there's nothing wrong with making that kind of promise, but it's really more of a contract than a blessing. Good promises that are blessings rather than contracts don't require the person you're promising something to act a certain way.<sup>1</sup> A good promise is one that we can simply believe and enjoy.<sup>2</sup>

That's the kind of promise that God makes to us.<sup>3</sup> A lot of people think that God's promise is conditional; they think that we have to do something in order to earn God's promise. And certainly there are contracts that God has made with various people throughout history.<sup>4</sup> The Old Covenant with the people of Israel was a contract based on their obedience.<sup>5</sup> In fact, we see the terms of the contract layed out in Deuteronomy 11. Moses told the people of Israel, speaking for God:

Look, today I set before you a blessing and a curse: there will be a blessing, if you obey the commands of the Lord your God I am giving you today, and a curse, if you do not obey the commands of the Lord your God and you turn aside from the

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<sup>1</sup> If you have to act a certain way, it's not a gift, but a wage. Romans 4:4

<sup>2</sup> God has made many such promises. Exodus 14:14, Jeremiah 29:11, Hebrews 10:23

<sup>3</sup> God promises us eternal life. John 14:2-3, Romans 6:23, Titus 1:2, 2 Peter 3:9, 2 Peter 3:13, 1 John 2:25

<sup>4</sup> Sometimes even with individuals who make vows to Him. Numbers 30:2, Ecclesiastes 5:4

<sup>5</sup> Notice the if...then structure of Exodus 19:5-6

path I command you today by following other gods you have not known. (Deuteronomy 11:26-28)

And, of course, if you've read the Old Testament, you know that the Israelites were not faithful to their part of the contract. They did not obey God fully, and instead, they followed after other gods. They broke the contract. Therefore, in Jeremiah 3, God said:

it was because unfaithful Israel had committed adultery that I had sent her away and had given her a certificate of divorce. (Jeremiah 3:8b)

Because Israel was unfaithful to God, God divorced His people. The Old Covenant in the Old Testament that God made with the people of Israel was a contract, and Israel had broken the contract, and therefore did not earn the blessing.

But the promise that God made to us is different. God's promise to us isn't based on our works; it's based on His work. It's based on what Jesus did for us, dying on a cross, and being raised from the tomb. And because Jesus accomplished our salvation for us, salvation is given to us as a gift, so that there's not a thing we can do to earn it, and there's not a thing we can do to break it. All we can do is believe it.<sup>6</sup> That's what it says in our passage today, in Romans 4.

Romans 4:16-18

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<sup>6</sup> The gospel must only be believed. After all, it's good NEWS! John 3:16

This is why the promise is by faith, so that it may be according to grace, to guarantee it to all the descendants—not only to the one who is of the law but also to the one who is of Abraham's faith. He is the father of us all. As it is written: I have made you the father of many nations—in the presence of the God in whom he believed, the one who gives life to the dead and calls things into existence that do not exist. He believed, hoping against hope, so that he became the father of many nations according to what had been spoken: So will your descendants be. (Romans 4:16-18)

*Father, help us to trust in Your grace. And help us to come alive in our faith so that we would not be people who break Your contract, but believe Your promise. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

About a century ago, an evangelist named Harry Ironside often preached to people passing by on the streets of California, and he welcomed questions from the crowd. One person stopped and asked him, "There are hundreds of religions in this country, and the followers of each think they're right. How can plain people like us find out what really is the truth?" Harry Ironside answered like this:

"Did I hear you say there are hundreds of religions? That's strange; I've heard of only two. True, I find many shades of difference in the opinions of those comprising the two great schools. But after all, there are but two. The one covers all who expect salvation by doing; the other, all who have been saved by something done." - Harry Ironside

Christianity is so incredibly different from every other religion on the planet, and yet I'm constantly in shock about how so many people are still so confused as to what Christianity is. Every other religion says that you need to do certain things in order to go to heaven or achieve nirvana, or get reincarnated as a cow, or whatever the goal of their religion is. But Christianity is completely different.

Christianity teaches that we don't have to do anything, because Jesus has already done everything.<sup>7</sup> We're saved not by works, but by grace through faith in Jesus.<sup>8</sup>

So whether you're a lawkeeper, or a lawbreaker, the gospel is for you.<sup>9</sup>

And I find that even a lot of confessing Christians often get this wrong, which is why the world is probably so confused about it.<sup>10</sup> I mean, if we can't even get this right about our own faith, how can we expect everyone else to get this right, and want to follow Jesus?<sup>11</sup>

For example, many Christians say that they believe in God's grace, but then when you talk to them about various political or social issues, they think they're better than the people they disagree with and therefore more favored by God.<sup>12</sup> But that flies in the face of everything the Bible teaches about grace.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> That's kind of the whole point. If we think we can do anything to earn salvation, Jesus didn't really need to die. 1 Peter 3:18

<sup>8</sup> And even faith is a gift from God. Ephesians 2:8-9

<sup>9</sup> By the way, we're all lawbreakers. James 2:10

<sup>10</sup> The gospel is so simple, yet that makes it hard to believe. 1 Corinthians 3:2

<sup>11</sup> Matthew 16:24

<sup>12</sup> Which is definitely not how we ought to think. Romans 12:16, Philippians 2:3

<sup>13</sup> Ephesians 2:4-7

So, search your heart. Do you ever consider yourself better than someone else? Do you think that certain sinners are bigger sinners than you are? Or do you have the attitude of Paul, who considered himself to be the chief of sinners,<sup>14</sup> saved only by grace through faith in Jesus?

I read a story about a man, a mouse, and a snake. The man purchased the mouse to use as food for his pet snake. He dropped the unsuspecting mouse into the snake's glass cage, where the snake was sleeping in a bed of sawdust. The tiny mouse had a serious problem on his hands. At any moment he could be swallowed alive when it woke up. So as fast as he could, the mouse frantically got to work covering the snake with sawdust until it was completely buried. And once he finished doing that, the mouse rested, thinking that the snake wouldn't be able to see him and eat him.

The solution, however, came from outside. The man watched all of this take place and took pity on the silly little mouse, and he then removed it from his snake's cage.

You see, God saves us not because of anything we've done or can do, but by His grace alone. No matter how hard we try to cover or deny the inevitable consequences of our sin, it doesn't work. Our enemy will eventually awake from sleep, shake off our foolish attempt to ignore it, and eat us alive.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> It's an interesting question. Should we all consider ourselves to be the worst of sinners, or should we accept that Paul himself was the worst of sinners? 1 Timothy 1:15

<sup>15</sup> 1 Peter 5:8

But God gives hope to the hopeless.<sup>16</sup> He gives life to the dead.<sup>17</sup> He even calls things into existence that do not exist. Only God can do that.<sup>18</sup>

And really, God did that for all of us. I mean, that's why we're here all. God made something from nothing. Science can answer all sorts of questions, but it can't answer this: why is there something rather than nothing? Listen, I think science is a great thing. I love learning about all the intricacies of how we function, and how the universe functions, and even how quantum physics ties everything together. Science is awesome! But science cannot possibly answer why anything exists at all.

But the opening verse of the Bible says it clearly. Say it with me. Genesis 1:1.

**In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.  
(Genesis 1:1)**

Only God can call into existence things that do not exist. And if He can do that, He can do anything. Jesus could heal the sick,<sup>19</sup> He could raise the dead,<sup>20</sup> and possibly most remarkable of all, He could even save sinners, since Jesus stated that His purpose was to seek and to save the lost, which includes you.<sup>21</sup>

Do you believe that? In light of all the promises that have been broken by people we know and love, it's easy for us to doubt God's

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<sup>16</sup> Because that's the most logical time to give hope. Psalm 34:17-20, Romans 15:13

<sup>17</sup> Because Jesus IS the life. John 11:25

<sup>18</sup> Luke 1:37

<sup>19</sup> Matthew 8:16

<sup>20</sup> John 11:43-44

<sup>21</sup> Luke 19:10

promise because it just seems so big. So impossible. But with God, all things are possible.<sup>22</sup>

Our Scripture passage this morning alludes to how Abraham was given this huge promise. Abraham was old, and didn't have any kids. And yet, God told him that he would have an Offspring, and that his Offspring would bless all the families of the world.<sup>23</sup> We often call Abraham the father of the Jews, but the Bible calls Abraham the father of many nations. Abraham would be the father of all who believe, I think in the sense that the promise given to Abraham is for all of us, that Abraham's Offspring, His descendant Jesus, would bless all the families of the world.

Verse 19.

He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body to be already dead (since he was about a hundred years old) and also the deadness of Sarah's womb. He did not waver in unbelief at God's promise but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, because he was fully convinced that what God had promised, he was also able to do. (Romans 4:19-21)

So Abraham was about 100 years old when God continued to promise him that he would have a son. His wife Sarah was 90 years old. So not only was she past the age women normally have children, she had most likely gone through menopause, so we would say today that it was physically impossible for her to get pregnant.<sup>24</sup> Her womb was dead.

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<sup>22</sup> Matthew 19:26

<sup>23</sup> Genesis 12:1-3, Genesis 17:7

<sup>24</sup> Genesis 18:11

And yet, God gave them this promise. They would have a son.

And Paul writes that Abraham did not waver in belief at God's promise. Now, if you're familiar with the story in Genesis, you probably have some red flags about that statement. Because Abraham did seem to waver in unbelief. He kept on giving his wife away to save his own skin.<sup>25</sup> He complained to God that he didn't yet have a son, and that all of his inheritance would go to one of his servants.<sup>26</sup> And at his wife's suggestion, he even took matters into his own hands at one point, having a child with his wife's servant.<sup>27</sup> But even through all these things, it wasn't so much that he doubted God's promise, but more just had no idea how God was going to bring about His promise.

Are you convinced that God can do anything? Maybe you've heard the promise that God can deliver you from sin and give you strength throughout life,<sup>28</sup> but you have no idea how God's going to bring that about. Maybe you look at yourself like Abraham and Sarah did and think that God's promise is just impossible. That's ok! Continue to believe! Because God can do the impossible in you. What God has promised, He's able to do.

You see, before God fulfilled His promise to Abraham, I think God wanted Abraham to get to the point that he realized that God's promise didn't depend on his own actions. He wanted Abraham and

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<sup>25</sup> While technically not a lie, Abraham wasn't being the most truthful. Genesis 12:11-13, Genesis 20:2, Genesis 20:11-12

<sup>26</sup> Genesis 15:3

<sup>27</sup> Genesis 16:1-4

<sup>28</sup> Psalm 103:12, Philippians 4:13

Sarah to stop trying to fulfill the promise themselves, trying to make themselves righteous. God wanted them simply to believe.

Verse 22.

Therefore, it was credited to him for righteousness. Now it was credited to him was not written for Abraham alone, but also for us. It will be credited to us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification. (Romans 4:22-25)

We talked about this a bit last week, but it bears repeating. Basically, notice that Abraham's faith didn't make Abraham righteous, but rather God made Abraham righteous when he had faith, and even this faith was a gift from God. So God credited both faith and righteousness to Abraham, and God did it like this so that Abraham couldn't boast in his superior faith, and could only be thankful to God.

And the same is true for us. Sometimes, it's hard to believe. In our modern age, when science has an answer for everything, it's tempting to believe everything scientists tell us. And scientists often interpret science in a way that presupposes that there is no God. But in doing so, they actually have left science, and have become preachers of their own religion.

G.K. Chesterton put it like this:

**"Without education, we are in a horrible and deadly danger of taking educated people seriously." -G.K. Chesterton**

Like Abraham and Sarah, sometimes we want to take things into our own hands. So when you find yourself doubting God's promises, pray, "Lord, I believe, help my unbelief."<sup>29</sup> I think that's why Abraham was commended for his faith. As it says at the end of verse 21, he was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God.

When you admit your weakness to God, asking for His strength, He'll give it to you. You see, He raised Jesus from the dead, and He can certainly raise you out of spiritual deadness.

Maybe you feel like you have faith, but no works. That's ok. I mean, we shouldn't be content to stay in that situation, and our faith ought to lead us to do things for God as we read in the book of James,<sup>30</sup> but God's promise itself isn't based on our works. G.K. Chesterton also said this:

**"The true soldier fights not because he hates what is in front of him, but because he loves what is behind him." - G.K. Chesterton**

So we don't serve God in order to earn salvation or anything from God, we serve God because He gives us salvation as a gift.<sup>31</sup> We love because He first loved us.<sup>32</sup>

Look at verse 16 one more time.

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<sup>29</sup> Mark 9:24

<sup>30</sup> James 2:14-26

<sup>31</sup> Ephesians 2:10 (which is comes after Ephesians 2:8-9)

<sup>32</sup> 1 John 4:19

This is why the promise is by faith, so that it may be according to grace, to guarantee it to all the descendants—not only to the one who is of the law but also to the one who is of Abraham's faith. He is the father of us all. (Romans 4:16)

You see, God's promise doesn't rest in our ability to accomplish it. It rests in believing in God's ability to accomplish it. Salvation isn't through works, but through faith. So we know God's promise is guaranteed because it doesn't depend on us, but on God Himself. And here's how He did that. Verse 25.

He was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification. (Romans 4:25)

In short, salvation is all about Jesus. When he was crucified on the cross, He paid the price for all our trespasses and sins. And when He rose from the grave, He proved that we are justified, made righteous, by God. So God completely fulfilled His promise to all through Jesus.

So, do you believe God's promise? God won't force you to believe it. And like any gift, you must simply open your hand, and open your heart, to receive it.