

Fully Convinced

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Prepared from the spoken message and lightly edited for readability. Scripture quotations and spoken phrasing are preserved as delivered.

Hey, if you have a copy of God's Word, go ahead and join me in Romans chapter 4. Romans chapter 4, that's where we'll be today, verses 19, 20, and 21.

As we continue our Life Lessons series, when Pastor Jarrett asked me to speak for this week, it got me a little bit introspective, thinking about my life. It got me thinking about what kind of man, husband, father, and pastor I want to be and continue to be as I get older.

As I was reading through the book of Romans in my personal time with the Lord, I got to Romans chapter 4, and then I got to these three verses. If you're like me, sometimes something jumps off the page and into your heart. It articulated what I've been trying to put into words for quite some time.

This is the kind of person and believer I want to be. I want to be a man, a husband, a father, and a pastor who's convinced that God is always able.

I don't know about you, but in my abundant free time as the dad of two small children, one of the things I'll do once they're in bed is watch documentaries. Lately, I've been watching a documentary about NFL quarterbacks. It's kind of behind the scenes in their lives - what they do and what it looks like in the middle of the season.

I'm probably like you. I just watch on Sundays and think that's about it. They just show up and throw the ball. Good armchair quarterback over here, right?

Then I started watching this show, and I was blown away at how much of their lives revolves around playing this position. Their money goes into it. Their time goes into it. I would say they're borderline obsessed with what they do. Their lives revolve around the fact that they're convinced they were created to play quarterback in the NFL.

So, as we get started this morning, that's my question for you: What does your life reflect? What are you convinced of?

Abraham's Faith

As we go to Romans chapter 4, for some context, Paul is writing here to the early church in Rome, and he's commending Abraham for his faith.

God had promised Abraham that he was going to be the father of many nations about the time he was 75

years old. So, if you can imagine that, however old you are, think about being 75 years old and God appearing to you and saying, "Hey, you are going to be the father of many nations, and you don't have kids yet."

After this promise was made, nothing happened for a little while. Abraham tried to take matters into his own hands and kind of help God do what He said He was going to do. You know how that goes. That's where we get Ishmael from.

But a few years after that, God spoke with him again, and God gave him his son Isaac when Abraham was about 99, almost 100 years old.

When Paul and the early church looked back at Abraham, they weren't saying he was a perfect person, but they were commending him for the faith he had to listen to God once God got ahold of his life.

Let me read these three verses to you, and then we'll get into them together. Romans chapter 4, starting in verse 19:

"He, being Abraham, did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead, since he was about one hundred years old, or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what He had promised."

If you're taking notes this morning, the title of our sermon is "Fully Convinced." Fully convinced.

If you're looking for the sermon in a sentence, if you go to lunch with somebody in the afternoon and they ask you, "What did you learn at church today?" you can simply tell them this: You are either convinced of your Savior or of your circumstance. You're convinced of your Savior or your circumstance.

Really, the flow of our time together is the flow of these three verses. Abraham faced his circumstances, he glorified God, and he was convinced of God's ability. Those are the three things. We'll give you some different points just to make sure you're paying attention.

Circumstances Can Describe Us, but They Cannot Define Us

Look back at verse 19 with me, where it says that he "did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead, since he was about one hundred years old, or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb."

After God got ahold of Abraham, Abraham responded differently. But, as we mentioned, right out of the gate Abraham did not respond great to the promises of God. He had doubted in the past, but now he was focused on his God instead of his circumstances.

When we commend him for his faith, it means that he didn't doubt God when he looked at his own limited ability. Abraham believed and hoped when there were no grounds for hope from a human perspective.

Maybe you walked in here in a similar situation. From a human perspective, you feel like you don't have any reason to hope. But Abraham believed and hoped when there were no grounds for it.

One commentator I read this week said, "To be weak in faith is to allow doubt to cloud and partly undermine belief." Abraham did not weaken in his faith.

As believers, you can write this down this morning. You can take this home and think about it throughout the week: Our circumstances can describe us, but they cannot define us. Our circumstances can describe us, but they can't define us.

In the third century AD, there was a woman named Perpetua. Perpetua had a lot of things going for her at that time. She came from a wealthy, influential family. Her father was very impactful in the community and in the area. They had a lot going for them.

But at the age of 22, Perpetua had given her life to Jesus. She was a follower of Christ, and she was unashamed about it. About this time, she also gave birth to a child.

In that day and age, it was not advantageous to be a believer. I'll just put it that way. It was not good for you to be a public follower of Christ in this world because believers were being persecuted and killed for their faith.

Perpetua came from a wealthy family, so you can imagine some of the tension. Her dad was not a believer. She was. She was arrested for her faith, and she was about to be killed for believing in Jesus as the Son of God, the risen Messiah.

Her dad came and visited her in her jail cell. All the while, she had a newborn child. Could you imagine some of this tension?

Her dad came to the jail cell and begged her, "Hey, it doesn't matter what you say. What you do behind closed doors is between you and the Lord. But deny Christ. Say to everybody that you just made a mistake, that you misspoke, that you don't follow Jesus, so that you can live the rest of your life, raise this child, and enjoy the abundance that we have."

Sitting in that jail cell, Perpetua looked around and noticed a vase over in the corner. I can imagine her holding her newborn in a jail cell, speaking to her dad, who's begging her to renounce her faith so that she could live. All these circumstances were mounting.

She pointed at the vase and said, "Just like this vase cannot be called anything other than what it is, so I cannot be called anything other than what I am: a Christian."

Perpetua was allowed to wean her child, and the child went and lived his life, but Perpetua went into the arena. She and another woman who were followers of Christ were attacked by wild animals. There's a picture kind of resembling what would have happened.

The animals did not kill them, so a gladiator was sent in to finish the job, and they died in the arena for their faith. Her circumstances were extreme, but she never let them define her faithfulness to the Lord.

So, this morning, I've got to ask: How much time have you spent fixated on your circumstances?

I can imagine you're going through some things right now. It probably wouldn't be like what Perpetua was facing, but we're all going through things. If you're struggling this morning, you're in good company. Abraham and Sarah did too.

Abraham did not always live in the way for which he was commended. After God spoke to him, there was a long time when nothing happened. Does that sound familiar? Maybe you know God has told you something, but you haven't heard Him speak. He hasn't shown up yet.

So Abraham tried to do God's job for Him. If you know the story in Genesis, that's where we get Ishmael from. If you don't know the story, you can read it this week.

But let me tell you: When our circumstances dictate our decisions, we get Ishmael. We get the son who represents Abraham trying to do God's will for Him. But when the promises of God dictate our decisions, He gives us Isaac. This is the son God gave Abraham who defied everything you and I thought could be possible.

Giving Glory to God

Abraham wasn't focused on his circumstance. What was he focused on?

Look with me at Romans 4:20. It says, "No unbelief made Abraham waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God."

I might need to reread that for somebody: "No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God."

It doesn't say there weren't reasons not to believe it. It just says that none of them made him waver in his trust for the Lord. In the process, he grew strong in his faith, giving glory to God.

Abraham trusted God because God is trustworthy. Abraham believed God because He's good and He always keeps His Word.

Giving glory to God is simply giving to Him what He is already due. He's a good God, so we praise Him. He keeps His promises, so we trust Him. He listens, so we speak to Him.

He is always in control, but sometimes you and I can do the opposite of what Romans 4:20 says. I would say that the opposite of Romans 4:20 is actually found in Romans 1:21. Some of you may have memorized this before. It says, "For although they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks to Him. But they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened."

What does this mean? It means that these people's unbelief did make them waver.

Has that ever been your story?

I think there's a danger you and I face in our culture today. We know God. We know about Him. We've heard the stories. We go to church. We do all the right things, and it's familiar to us, but we don't honor

Him or give thanks to Him with how we live our lives.

Pastor and theologian John MacArthur said, "Faith in God, because it affirms His trustworthy character, is the supreme way that men glorify Him. While without faith, any attempt to worship, praise, or honor Him is a worthless, self-righteous sham."

Pretty clear, huh? Faith in God is the supreme way we can glorify Him.

There's an idea in this verse that strength - do you want a strong faith? I do - is drawn from the promises of God, and a weak faith comes from doubting the promise of God.

You probably think as I do that oftentimes we only doubt the promises of God when things aren't going well for us, right? It's like, "Man, I didn't get that job, or the promotion, or the pay, or whatever I wanted. My family's not doing well."

All those things are legitimate factors that play into our lives, right? They can sometimes affect our faith. When we don't keep our eyes on Him, they can affect our faith.

When circumstances are bad, oftentimes we think God is not able. He didn't show up when I wanted Him to or how I wanted Him to. That's our propensity. We think, "Our circumstances aren't the way we want them to be, so God might not be able to do what He said He could do."

But the other side of that coin - and this is probably the other half of the room - is when circumstances are good. When things are great, when you haven't seen a red light or a rain cloud in months. You know what I'm talking about? You ever get on a roll like that? It's great.

All of y'all who are in that boat are like, "Amen. That's where I'm at right now."

It's much more fun to be there, but the problem is that we can also doubt our God. When circumstances are good, we often think God is not needed.

When they're bad, we think He's not able. When they're good, we think He's not needed. We think we're the reason things have gone so well. Both make us weaken in our faith because we're doubting who God is.

Abraham sets the example for us. While he was surrounded by every reason not to believe - I mean, can we call a timeout real quick? He was 100 years old when he had Isaac. All I can think when I read this story is that it means he's 105 in the kindergarten pickup line. I'm like, "Dude, I don't know, man. I'm struggling as it is."

To be 105, he had every reason to struggle and not believe, but he kept his focus on the Lord.

Let me tell you this morning that when believers have unwavering faith, we can do some great things for the Kingdom because our eyes are on Him and nothing else. Because we believe what He's saying, and we don't listen to what the world whispers to us.

Abraham never took his eyes off the reality and truth that God is greater than everything else. So he

believed the Lord in the middle of struggle. That's why his faith is talked about even today.

It wasn't by his own grit. It wasn't by his own resolve that he mustered up faith.

I think oftentimes when we're convinced of our circumstances, what we're doing functionally is glorifying ourselves. We're so fixated on them that we're putting the spotlight on ourselves and taking it away from our God.

If we're not glorifying ourselves, oftentimes what we're doing is glorifying our worry. That's a whole other sermon, right? We get so fixated on the things we're worried about that we miss our God.

But when we're convinced of our God, we glorify Him, and in that process, we grow strong in our faith.

Let me tell you this morning that strong faith is from God and it's for God. Strong faith is from God and it's for God.

We can never grow in our faith on our own. The strength is provided to us by our God, but it's specifically for the purpose of honoring and glorifying Him, not to make much of our own name. He will give us the strength we need to do His will.

Think about Peter walking toward Jesus on the stormy sea, Daniel in the lions' den, and Abraham being told that he would be a father at 75 years old, with the child of that promise not coming until he was almost 100 years old.

You and I can have reasons to doubt all around us. That's why it's important that we keep our eyes on the Promise Keeper.

Some of the believers with the strongest faith that you and I know are those who kept their eyes on Jesus in the midst of complete and utter chaos.

Do you have a mom, a grandma, a dad, or somebody like that who has gone through it, but they're your hero in the faith? Not because they lived a life that was easy or perfect, but because in the middle of difficulty, they looked to God and set the example for us. Do you know somebody like that?

A while ago, when I was an undergraduate at Dallas Baptist University, I got to know Dr. Gary Cook. He was the president of DBU for 35 years, and now he's the chancellor there.

I was going through a season in my life that's probably understandable, where it feels like every major life decision comes all at once - career, family, school. Everything you're deciding is all at once.

So I asked if I could meet with him, and he said yes.

I said, "Dr. Cook, when you first got to DBU, the university was in a bad spot. It was in debt. Lots of people thought it wouldn't make it the next couple of years. Somehow, some way, it went from what it was to what it is now. How did you do it?"

I wanted the secret, right? I said, "What did you do?"

He said, "Emory, every morning, I would wake up, roll out of bed, and get on my knees. I would simply ask God, 'God, what would You have me do today?'"

I thought about it and said, "Okay, so what did you really do?"

It couldn't be that simple, right?

I walked through with him all the things I was processing, wondering about, and asking about. He said, "Emory, that's exactly what you need to do. Each day, each morning, walk with the Lord and ask Him, 'God, what am I to do today to glorify You? God, what can I do today that will honor You?' In the process, I don't have time to worry about my circumstances."

God is the One who gives us strength when we give glory to Him.

For us as believers in the room, it's important that we don't quit, that we don't lie down, and that we don't stop moving forward. In the process, we give glory to God every step of the way.

Your circumstance, I get it, very well may be tough. It probably is. But what I know about circumstances is that every one of them is temporary, and our God is eternal.

Fully Convinced That God Is Able

Now look with me at Romans 4:21. This is where I want to hang out for a while. This is where the title of the sermon comes from.

It says in verse 21 that Abraham "was fully convinced." I would encourage you to underline that. Highlight those two words: "fully convinced." We'll get to that in a second.

Abraham was "fully convinced that God was able to do what He had promised."

The NASB says, "And being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform."

Every part of Abraham was convinced that God was able to do what He said. He was able to perform what He promised.

One thing I love about this verse in particular is that there's a visual that comes with it. Think about your life, your faith, and who you are spiritually, and think about the gas gauge on your car.

If you're like my wife, it's always on empty, okay? Spiritually, I hope it's full, but husbands, that's for free. Pay attention to that.

Think about your life like it's a gas gauge. In the context of this verse, when it says "fully convinced" or "fully assured," one commentator said that Abraham was filled to the brim with no room for doubt.

I think many of us in this room are 95 percent convinced that God is able, but we've got that one thing that keeps us from believing 100 percent.

It's like, "God, You don't understand this one thing I'm going through. God, I haven't seen You show up

yet in this one area of my life, so I've got this much room for doubt to creep in."

Abraham is commended because he was full to the brim, fully convinced that God was able to do what He had promised. He didn't just believe in God's promise. He believed in God and His character - that He always keeps His Word.

Could you imagine that in your own life? That gas gauge being so full that there's no room for doubt in your life? Would your life look a little different? Would your time and your thoughts look a little different if the doubt that kept creeping in was flooded out with faith?

Abraham had seen that God performs what He promises. This is exactly how we should respond to what Jesus has done for you and me.

If we believe that Jesus is the living Son of God, that He came to this earth, lived a perfect life, died on Calvary, and three days later was resurrected so that we could follow Him in life if we repent of our sin and follow Him - if we believe that, then we believe He is the God He says He is.

We believe that He promised to make a way for us, to never leave us or forsake us. We believe that He can cast our sin as far as the east is from the west. We believe that He supports those whose hearts are blameless, His grace is sufficient, His power is made perfect in weakness, He lifts us up, He cares for us, He hears our requests, and He who began a good work in us will carry it on to completion.

That's the God we believe in.

Here's where it lands on our end: If we believe He is that God, there is no room for doubt in our lives with a God like that.

The Christian faith addresses every part of who we are. You and I were totally sinful. Every part of who we were before Christ was totally sinful, and Christ died to make us totally free. Our faith should be one that defines all of who we are.

Our reasoning here is so clear. If you're still taking notes, write this down: We should be fully convinced because God is fully able.

That's the why. Our response of being fully convinced comes from the fact that our God is always able.

We're not fully convinced because Grandma told us to be, because we grew up in church, or because we're more moral than our other coworkers around us who do a little bit more on the weekend. We can only be fully convinced because our God is fully able. Our hope, our faith, and our trust are in Him.

For us simply to acknowledge the person, the power, or the presence of the Lord is no full measure of worship.

If somebody were to ask you today if you're fully convinced, does your life reflect that there's not an inch of room for doubt? Does your life reflect that you're convinced God can do what He said He can do, that you believe that? Or do you acknowledge God but make all your decisions based on your

circumstances?

That was a huge part of my life.

My Testimony

I figured today, in a sermon series called Life Lessons, I could share a little bit of my testimony. If you've heard the story before, I'm sorry. God's only given me the one testimony, okay?

I remember like it was yesterday. It was the end of my junior year of high school, and we were playing spring ball in Beaumont, Texas. I remember that practice field was like this. It was like concrete. It was like playing on gravel. Every time you'd fall down, you'd get scraped up, or there would be stickers in the grass.

I don't know, I walked barefoot in my grass last week to get something out of the car, and I got a sticker. I just wanted to quit and go home, okay?

It was not a great time.

I remember it was so hot that spring that when you'd breathe in through your nose, it would burn your nostrils. I remember it like it was yesterday.

That spring, I started to make a plan for my life that was different from what I knew God had called me to do. Have you ever said, "I know what God said, but..."?

That was me.

I grew up in a home that pointed me to Jesus. I gave my life to Christ when I was young. I told the world that I was called to ministry at an early age, and that was my plan until the end of my junior year of high school because my circumstances changed.

It was for the better, or so I thought. I started getting good at football. Scholarships started to become a potential thing. With two small children at home now, the thought of scholarships is a great concept.

My girlfriend's older brother was playing at Air Force, and they were scouting me. So I began to create a plan for my life. I was going to go play there for four or five years. I was going to serve my country, and maybe one day I would get back to this whole ministry thing that I knew God had called me to do.

But I had a better plan for now.

At the very end of practice, at the very end of spring training, at the very end of my junior year, getting ready for the summer before your senior year, when it's supposed to be all about you and what you want to do, I remember we lined up for a play.

I was playing offensive line. Let me see if I can still get in my stance, right?

I jumped up, and we were going against the JV B team, so I held on to my guy. I did what you're never

supposed to do as an offensive lineman: I stopped moving my feet.

My best friend through middle school and high school made a routine play and tackled our running back. I had planted my feet, and I was blocking this guy. They rolled into my left leg and snapped it.

If you can imagine what it sounds like to take a two-by-four and somehow bend it in half, that was the pop everyone heard when I broke my leg.

I found myself lying on the ground, screaming on what felt like this concrete practice field, full of stickers in the heat. I started screaming.

I would tell you that, yes, of course, some of it was from the pain. But most of it was because, before I hit the ground, I knew every plan I had made for myself had just vanished into thin air.

That summer, the scouts stopped calling. The offers went away. My girlfriend moved out of state. I don't know if that's related, but maybe that's just insult to injury.

The Lord began to speak to me that summer in ways I could understand.

I got a new student pastor that summer. He came in, took me under his wing, disciplined me, and showed me what it looked like to know God's Word and to know my Savior.

As I started to learn to physically walk again, I began to learn to walk spiritually. I began to learn that my ways were not better than God's ways, that the promises of the world were not better than His promises, that my circumstances were not greater than His power, and that nothing can ever stop what God has promised.

Now I stand before you convinced that God's way is better.

I've tried the other route. Many of you have tried it. Maybe you're still trying it.

I'm convinced today because I've seen that He will make a way where there is no way. I'm convinced that my God loved me enough, in His grace, to break me of myself and of my desires.

Without that moment in His love, I wouldn't have gone to the school I went to. I wouldn't have met my wife. I might not be standing here before you today.

I'm convinced that my Savior is always greater than whatever circumstance I may face. So my life belongs to Him.

Let me tell you this morning that what you're convinced of forms your convictions. What you're convinced of will form your convictions.

Righteousness Through Faith

Verse 21 is not where Romans 4 ends.

You hear all this talk this morning of being fully convinced, and it won't make any sense if you're just

trying to muster up faith and resolve on your own.

The truth is that you and I can never be faithful on our own. We cannot be righteous on our own. But the last few verses of chapter 4 tell us where our righteousness comes from.

Abraham was not considered righteous because he did everything perfectly. Again, I would encourage you to read the story of Abraham in the book of Genesis. He was far from perfect, but he was commended for his faith.

Look at verse 22 with me:

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

You and I can be counted as righteous this morning, not because of what you can do, not because of how much good you've done, how you grew up, or who you know, but because of our faith in the God who did all the work.

Our God raised Jesus from the dead, and we have been forgiven of our trespasses. We have been justified.

What a privilege that is. Do you understand that?

Our God did not owe us this, but in His love, He gave us the opportunity to know Him and to have faith in a God who always keeps His promises.

So let me ask you this morning, Champion Forest: What holds you back from being fully convinced that God is able? Fully convinced that He keeps His promises? Fully convinced that He has not forgotten about you?

What holds you back from a faith like that?

Application

Let's end this morning with two points of application quickly, and then we'll close.

The first one is for the struggling believer in the room. You could say, "Emory, I could take you to the place and tell you the time when I gave my life to Jesus, but, man, I'm struggling right now. If I'm being honest, admittedly, there is a circumstance, or a few, that has caused me to take my eyes off God. Recently, I'd confess that I have a little bit of trouble believing that He keeps His promises."

The first thing I would tell you to do is identify the circumstance that's causing you to doubt God's ability.

Have you identified it? Could you tell me, "This is the thing"?

Call it what it is. This is just a thing.

It might be a lot right now. You might be going through something I couldn't even begin to wrap my mind around. But what I know is that my God can. My God loves you. Our God is here for you in the middle of it, not when you get through it on your own to the other side.

Secondly, and this is for everyone, we need to experience God and His promises.

For so many people in the room, your story might be that you've gone to church, done the right thing, said the right thing, and played the right game. You know about God, but you've never experienced the God Abraham had faith in.

He's the God who has changed so many lives in this room, the God who has given us a testimony of redemption and hope and faith. Where there is no earthly way, He makes a way.

I would encourage you, in just a few moments, when our team comes up here, if God's working in your life and you've realized that you've never truly experienced Him, I would invite you to come to the front, grab one of our teammates by the hand, and say, "I need to experience God today."

I don't think we've ever been convinced of something we've never experienced, and maybe that's the problem. You know about Him. You acknowledge Him. But day to day, you're convinced that your circumstance has the final word.

When I say amen, this is your opportunity.

Think about it this week. Think about it now. Don't leave this place to run off to lunch if you can't answer this question: Are you believing in your Savior or your circumstance?

Let's pray together.