

“THE GOD WHO MAKES PROMISES.”

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Scripture Texts: Romans 4:17-25

Introduction.

So far in chapter four of Romans Paul has used the life and faith of Abraham to prove to the Jews Abraham was not justified by works but by faith (4:1-8), Abraham was not justified by circumcision but by faith (4:9-12), and Abraham was not justified by the law but by faith (4:13-17).

The Jews thought because they were chosen by God they were superior to all other races and nations. By their laws and rituals they had favor with God, they were saved by race not by faith.

This is why Abraham is such a big deal, the hero and founder of their faith believed God, he lived by faith and his faith was credited to him as righteousness by grace, before works, before circumcision, before the law. Paul turns now to focus on this faith and the nature of it.

Faith is trusting in God, vs. 17.

Faith is not vague or nebulous, it doesn't just hang out there in space somewhere. Faith is not just intellectual knowledge or even asset to that knowledge. Faith is not the power of positive thinking. The Word of Faith movement or as some call it “the name it and claim it” teaching like Joel Osteen abuse Romans 4:17. They say if you have enough faith you can treat God like a cosmic genie and call into being things that are not.

“True faith does not say, “I can accomplish whatever I want if only I will.” It says, “God can accomplish anything he wants because he said he would.” Faith doesn't say, “I think I can, I think I can.” Faith says, “I know God can. I know God can.” Faith is not belief in the impossible, simply because it is impossible. Faith is trust in the divine promise that God can overcome the impossible” (Sam Storms).

Faith is not focused on us, it is focused on God and His power and His faithfulness to His promises. Faith is not irrational, it is reasonable and rational because it has a solid object, it is grounded in a real, reliable person. Faith's power resides in its object, not in a subjective feeling.

God called Abraham father, even though he was not a father, and a father of many nations even when there was yet no nation.

In hope against hope Abraham believed he would become the father of many nations.

This is the substance of Abraham's faith. Without seeing any sign of the thing promised, he believed and trusted God. Having no good reason to hope, when reason was against him, he still believed and hoped in God. When hope was hopeless, he had hope, he still believed.

Abraham took the fact that God promised it to be enough, sufficient ground for hope, no matter how incredible or impossible the promise was.

One of our members posted on her Facebook a quote: "God doesn't say understand me, He says trust me. Trusting without understanding takes a brave faith. There will be times when we don't understand what God is doing. But God is faithful, and we know He is good, so we can trust him with all our heart."

Our faith should be even more fixed and sure this side of the resurrection, in which God has shown Himself reliable, dependable, true to His promises. We are in a better position than Abraham to believe all God's promises.

We love and follow and serve a God who raises the dead and makes universes out of nothing. Have you considered the staggering implications of that in your life? What should that do to all our stress, anxiety, fear, doubt, worry in the face of such a God? Those are all signs of unbelief, lack of faith. When God seems small and weak our problems seem big.

Faith is trusting God's promises, trusting God's Word, vs. 17-18.

As it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations."
As he had been told, "So shall your offspring be."

Genesis 15:5-6 God 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." 6 And he believed the Lord, and he counted it to him as righteousness.

Abraham believed that which was spoken. He was not ashamed of the Word of God. Abraham was not skeptical about God's Word. Abraham could very easily been tempted to not believe, to be dismissive. Abraham had plenty of reasons to doubt. Everything around Abraham said this is crazy, insane. Everything said the promise would fail.

Every week you hear me declare before reading the Scripture that what you are about to hear is different from everything else you hear all week long. This is the eternally true, trustworthy, inerrant Word of the Living God. I believe this is the divinely inspired Word of God.

I want to build up your confidence in the authority and trustworthiness of God's Word. I hate it when preachers and Bible scholars erode peoples trust in the Word of God, as happens all the time in the world and in the church and in seminaries today.

Don't let anyone make you skeptical about the Word of God, as it is written, thus says the Lord. Don't be ashamed over what is written, no shame over the creation account, or the children of Israel crossing through the Red Sea, or water coming out of a rock, or manna falling from the sky, or the sun standing still, or Jonah being swallowed by a big fish, or a man being raised from the dead.

Abraham believed the promises of God two thousand years before Jesus was raised from the dead. We have so much more reason to believe knowing what we know about the power of God to keep all His promises.

What a glorious thing it was yesterday to hear Shirley's family testify to Shirley's faith in God and her absolute trust in the Scriptures.

Faith is trusting God's promises in adversity, vss. 19-22.

Abraham considered his body, and what he saw was opposed to God's promise. The biggest reason not to believe was staring at him in the mirror. When he considered his own body, he saw he was as good as dead, he had one foot in the grave. He was almost a hundred years old. And then thinking about Sarah's body, if he was as good as dead, she was already dead.

If Abraham came to you and said he had a visitation from God and God told him he was going to conceive a child and Sarah was going to give birth to a son, you would lol, laugh out loud. "Abraham, are you out of your mind? Hello, you are old, as good as dead. And Sarah? What are you talking about? She has been barren her entire life, your entire marriage, and now her womb is past dead. If she couldn't have children back in the day, how in the world do you think she can now?"

The very idea of either of them having children was ludicrous. If they had walked into a hospital and asked for the maternity ward, the receptionist would have said, I'm sorry but I think you want gerontology. And if they insisted on maternity, the receptionist would have said, no I think you need psychiatry.

Abraham was staring at two painfully stubborn facts. He could not beget a child and Sarah could not conceive one. Humanly speaking this is impossible. The situation, the circumstances all pointed to failure.

So what did Abraham do? He had to stop looking at the situation, he had to stop looking at the circumstances, he had to stop looking at what was seen, and forget about himself and what he could do, what he was capable of. He had to stop trusting in his resources, his ability. He had to stop listening to the voice in his head.

He had to look up to God alone and trust in God alone. He had to lay aside the obvious facts and turn completely to faith. Seeing that he and Sarah were dead, he believed in the God who raises the dead. Seeing that they had nothing to contribute to the situation, he believed in the God who creates something out of nothing.

He was fully persuaded God was able to do what He promised, fully convinced, no distrusting, no wavering. He did not weaken in faith, no doubt.

We are all finite and flesh. However much faith we have, we all battle with our minds and hearts, we all battle with fear and doubt. We are all weak, and we have to fight and struggle and exercise our faith, strengthen our faith, work our faith muscles.

What are you trusting by sight? What are you trusting by faith? Who is living by faith? Who is living depended on God to provide? Who is in a situation where if God's doesn't come through there is no other means, no other hope?

Who has an Abraham situation going on, something humanly impossible, so that if it happens it is clearly God, and He alone gets the glory? What are you seeking by faith and not by sight that only God can do? Where is God testing your faith?

Are we anxious about money? Are we trusting in our bank accounts to the point of lacking the faith God will provide? Are we afraid of being generous, because we don't have faith in God's generosity? Are we afraid to tithe the first ten percent because we don't have faith in God's promise to provide?

Are we afraid of having more children because we aren't sure God will provide? How many believe God's promise that if God sends mouths, God will send meat?

Are we afraid to speak up or share our faith with someone, lacking faith God will use our humble words? Is God asking us to step out on faith, to trust Him, before we can see how He will do it?

How many of us have so many safety nets build in, we don't need God, don't need God's help? How many of our decisions are based on sight and not on faith?

Can God raise the dead? Can God raise a dead soul, an unbelieving soul? Can God raise a dead, dying nation? Can God overturn abortion, can God turn back sexual immorality and porn addiction? Can God bring peace where there is war? Can God bring good out of evil?

Faith always looks at the problems in the light of the promises.

Don't doubt in the dark what God has shown you in the light.

Faith is a growing faith that glorifies God.

Notice, faith can be weak or strong, it is increasing or decreasing. It is a muscle that must be exercised, put into use again and again. It is a thinking, reasoning trust, an action of the mind and will. It is a fighting against and resisting of everything that seeks to push it away.

Notice Abraham's faith increased, as he exercised his faith it grew stronger.

Abraham looked at his body and then he looked at God and the more he considered the promise of God the more the problem shrank. The more fully persuaded he became the less he doubted and wavered.

Abraham glorified God by letting God be God and trusting Him to be true to His promises.

How is God glorified when we trust Him? Think about a dad in a swimming pool and his three-year-old standing on the edge. Dad says jump and I promise I will catch you, so she jumps. Her faith glorifies her dad, it makes him look good, that his promises are true, he is faithful. If she runs away from the edge, that makes the dad look bad, he won't catch me, or I don't want to do what he tells me to do.

Faith glorifies God, faith gives God glory, faith makes God look as good as He really is.

“We give glory to God when we trust him to do what he has promised to do, especially when all human possibilities are exhausted. Faith glorifies God. That is why God planned for faith to be the way we are justified” (John Piper).

Faith calls for a response, a commitment.

This was not just written for Abraham, but for us as well. Abraham is our spiritual father, our spiritual example, he shows us how to gain the righteousness of God, by grace through faith.

Abraham believed the same promise we believe, he believed in the God who raises the dead and we believe the God who raises the dead. He believed in the God who creates out of nothing and we believe the God who creates out of nothing.

The same God who credited faith to Abraham as righteousness, will credit our faith to us as righteousness, Abraham believed and was justified and we believe and are justified.

We become children of the promise the same way Isaac did, by God raising us from the dead when we were as good as dead. By God creating in us life, out of death, out of nothing.

“Isaac was born by a miracle of the Spirit; you are born by a miracle of the Spirit. He was brought forth from deadness; you are brought forth from deadness. His faith was called into being out of nothing; your faith is called into being out of nothing” (John Piper).

That is why it is called grace.

Ephesian 2:4-5 God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, 5 even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the singularly most important event in the world for building our faith, hope, trust. Christ is risen is the greatest truth against all hopelessness and fear.

God's revelation of Himself is always an invitation to trust and obey God's promises and plan. It always calls for an act of commitment.

Romans 8:31-32 If God is for us, who can be against us? 32 He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

We are all like Abraham. We are all surrounded by situations and circumstances that are in opposition to the promises of God.

We must close our eyes to the world, close our ears to the headlines, shut out all those things that would cause us to not believe and trust God, to cave in and not believe God's Word is true.

As you consider your body, your life, the the many obstacles, challenges, and seemingly impossible barriers that lie ahead, do you believe God is able to give life to what is dead? Do you believe he is able to call into existence the things that do not exist? Are you fully convinced God is able to do what he has promised? Glorify Him with your faith in Him.

Prayer: Holy Father, again and again, you shake us and our world to show us there is nothing permanent in this world, that the things we so often put our trust in are untrustworthy. Lift us up from trusting in earthly things, to lift our hearts and minds and thoughts to you, to fix the anchor of our hope in heaven, to fix our eyes on the author and finisher of our faith, who is Jesus. Amen.