

"Faith!"

Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be." Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. This is why "it was credited to him as righteousness." The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

Faith means trust. If I gave you a nice, cold bottle of water, you would twist off the cap, put it to your lips and swig down several refreshing gulps. You wouldn't think for a moment if it is safe to drink. You wouldn't take it to the lab and test it to make sure it is good water. You wouldn't stay up all night worried that it may have been contaminated. It was produced by a company that knows what it is doing. You have the government regulations guaranteeing that the manufacturer has to meet certain quality standards and didn't fill it with green covered creek water. You drink it without any hesitation or worry. That is faith.

Today we continue with our study of Romans and today's key word is, "faith." From the example of Abraham we will see how faith gives us hope and how faith receives salvation.

I. Faith holds onto hope.

"Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, "So shall your offspring be." Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead—since he was about a hundred years old—and that Sarah's womb was also dead. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised."

Hope gives us purpose. Hope keeps us going. When a cave in or explosion occurs in a mine, the families of the miners hope their loved one is alive, trapped in some tunnel and the rescuers will get there in time. But if they hear their loved one had died, then there is no hope.

Abraham should never have hoped that he and his wife, Sarah, would have a son. When God made that promise to him, he was 75 years old and Sarah was 65. Physically Abraham was too old and Sarah had some sort of condition preventing pregnancy. Normally it would be cruel to promise such people they will have a son.

But Abraham believed he would have a child, not because the doctor said he could. He believed because God said so. Even if everything in his life and experience and science said God was wrong, he believed God. Their faith gave them hope. And they needed their faith to keep that hope alive. What happens when a couple finds out they are having a baby? They have the nursery to get ready. They work feverishly painting the room, maybe a little wallpaper. They buy a crib and changing table and a nice rocker. They buy toys and diapers. Women host a shower. There is a lot to do and they have only nine months to do it.

Abraham and Sarah believed God. But how long did they wait? 25 years. Imagine getting a nursery ready, and for twenty five years it sat empty. Picture Sarah going in to dust every week accompanied by a sigh that said, "When?" Imagine the women in town. "We had a shower for her ten years ago. Was she lying?" Imagine Abraham. His name means "Father," and every time someone called out his name, he couldn't help but notice the irony, "My name is "Father. But where is his child?"

"Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised." Now they had their moments. When Sarah was 89 and the Lord said the baby will be born in a year, she laughed. And Abraham had his moments. When they relocated to Egypt because of famine, he lied and pretended his wife was his sister. He was afraid someone would kill him to get her. Even though God said he and this woman, Sarah, would have the child, he wavered as though someone can thwart God. When Sarah lost patience and suggested fathering a child through Hagar, Abraham listened, thinking God needs help. Yes, Abraham is no different than you or me. He had his weak moments.

Then how can our text say he never wavered? There is something special about faith. Faith trusts. As humans, though, we always have our doubts, but doubts don't mean faith is dead. It is like watching TV and your neighbor is blasting his AC/DC collection while washing his car. You can still watch TV, but there is the danger is we don't listen to God anymore. It would like turning off your TV and you listen to AC/DC instead.

That is why God strengthened Abraham's faith. How does he do that? If faith comes from hearing God's Word, then faith can be strengthened only through that Word. Each time Abraham wavered, God didn't shoot some faith vitamins into him. He repeated his promises. Read Genesis 12 through 17. After the incident in Egypt, after he let Lot take the best land, after his war to save Lot, after he sinned with Hagar, each time God came to Abraham and repeated his promise. It is like your neighbor

and his AC/DC collection. You just have to turn up the volume on your TV. When doubt comes, turn up God's Word.

Look at the hope you have because of God's promises. Someone once asked Luther how a handful of water at Baptism can save him. Luther responded, "My dear sir, where do the words come from, from God or from reason?" We should be living against hope. How can a little water save you? How can this book be the only one in all the world that is right? How can sinners be saved? All signs indicate there is no life after death. But who is speaking? Science? Experience? History? Humans? But what does God say? God promises that water saves you. His Son died for your sins. Yes, you will not perish but have eternal life. Science, psychology, logic, reason will never agree with God. But who is speaking here, God or reason?

Look at us. Against all hope, we have hope because we have God's promises. But we have more than hope.

II. Faith is credited as righteousness.

"This is why "it was credited to him as righteousness." The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness—for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification."

You have to be happy for Abraham and Sarah. They received the joy of parenthood. I try to imagine them taking young Isaac to the park. A parent asks, "Is that your grandson?" No, Abraham says. "He's my son." But this is more than a happy story of parenthood.

There is something special about Isaac, their son. Jesus said of Abraham in John 8, ***"Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad."*** Abraham would have been dead by more than 2,000 years before Jesus was born, but he saw him. He saw him because God said Jesus is coming. He saw him through the eyes of faith. Why does this matter? Remember the story of the rich man and poor Lazarus? Both men died. The rich man spends eternity in hell, while Lazarus spends eternity in heaven. When the rich man looked up toward heaven, whom did he see? Lazarus, yes, but also Abraham. Abraham is in heaven now, so is Moses and Elijah and all believers. They are because of this one descendant, Jesus Christ. This is what makes this promise of a child so special.

There is an old comedy about a buck toothed, geeky guy who asked an attractive model what were his chances she would go out on a date with him. She said one in a million, and that geeky guy was happy. It may have been one in a million, but he had a chance. What are the chances people like you and me can convince God to let us into heaven? It would be zero in a million. We studied that last week in Romans 3 how we can't muster any kind of righteousness before God. Without Christ, we will live forever, but with the rich man in hell.

But God gave Abraham and Sarah a son, Isaac, who had children and after generations one descendant would be born of the virgin Mary, Jesus Christ. He came to pay for our sins by dying for them on the cross. How do we know this worked? As it says in our text that God raised Jesus from the dead. This was his acceptance of his sacrifice for our sins. So what are our chances of getting to heaven through Christ? A million in a million. It will happen. Just ask Abraham.

And this gift comes to us through faith. You loosen the cap on the bottled water and drink trusting it is good water, Abraham put his trust squarely on the shoulders of Christ for his salvation. One of the most important phrases you will find in the Bible explains this: Abraham believed and God credited his faith as righteousness.

Remember a month or two ago when the government offered most Americans some stimulus money? We knew it was coming, but we didn't know when. Then one day, there it was. Some received it as a check; others like me got it electronically because we filed our taxes electronically. One day it wasn't there. Then one day it was. It was credited to our accounts.

Abraham believed in the Christ to come and God credited his faith as righteousness. The same with us: ***"The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness."*** Now you know how the world is be blessed through him Abraham. This is why we can call him our father, not because any of his DNA is found in us, but because we, too, believe and God credits Christ to us through faith.

They say there are only two things you can be sure of: death and taxes. That may be true. But our text offers us one more thing: what God promises. Abraham believed God and look at the hope it gave him. Abraham also believed in the coming Christ and look at what that meant to him and to us. You can trust anything God says. That is faith. Amen.