

Text: Romans 4:18-25 [Abraham] who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations, according to what was spoken, "So shall your descendants be." And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body, already dead (since he was about a hundred years old), and the deadness of Sarah's womb. He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform. And therefore, "it was accounted to him for righteousness." Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised again because of our justification.

Theme: THE FAITH OF OUR FATHER

- I. Faith in spite of sight
- II. Faith in God's faithfulness
- III. Faith accounted as righteousness

Dear fellow sons of Abraham by faith, heirs of the kingdom, fellow redeemed in Christ Jesus, "Back in the day, things used to be different." No doubt many of you have heard those words in talking to individuals from generations ahead of you. Maybe you've used those words when talking to someone of a younger generation. Those "back in the day" stories can deal with anything from child rearing, to gas prices, to dating, to farming. When it comes to gas prices and farming such stories are really not that helpful outside from an historic perspective. Farming has drastically changed in the last 100 years and gas prices will probably never be ninety-nine cents per gallon again. But what about child rearing? Can getting "back in the day" advice on raising and disciplining children be helpful? Absolutely. Kids are just as much kids as they were 100 years ago. They need structure and discipline today just as they did for George and Martha Washington. So depending on the topic, that "back in the day" advice can be relevant or irrelevant to our lives today.

In our continuing study of Paul's letter to the Romans we kind of have a "back in the day" account in chapter four. In our text Paul addresses the faith of Abraham. While Abraham lived 4,000 years ago and was the father of all Jews, neither of which apply to us today, the faith of Abraham is very applicable to us today. In our New Testament lesson we heard Paul say that Abraham is the father of not merely the Jews, but also to those who are of faith. Abraham is the father of us all. And now Paul writes in verse 23 of our text that the faith of Abraham was written "*for us.*" Let us examine the Spirit-worked faith of our father Abraham and apply it to our lives and the promises God has made to us! May that same Holy Spirit work mightily in us and increase our faith. Amen.

FAITH IN SPITE OF SIGHT

Some promises are just bigger than others. A promise to take out the trash at the commercial is not a very big promise - it's pretty easy to keep. A promise to take your child to the park is a little bigger of a promise because it is dependant on some things out of your control. Maybe it will rain and you won't be able to go. Maybe you'll be stuck at work later than you anticipated. So the bigger the promise the harder it is to keep.

What about the promise that God made Abraham? God made a covenant with Abraham that He would bless Abraham and make his descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and the sand on the seashore. What would have made this promise so difficult to believe is the age of Abraham and his wife Sarah. Abraham was 100 years old and his wife Sarah was the age of Grandma Mable. Even in Abraham's day it was unheard of having your first child at this age. Humanly speaking, Paul refers to Abraham and Sarah's reproductive opportunities as being dead.

According to what Abraham saw in himself and in his wife, this promise was laughable. Indeed at one point we're told in Genesis that both Abraham and Sarah laughed at this promise. Which in turn led to the naming of their son, "Isaac," which literally means "he laughs." But through it all, Abraham had faith in spite of sight. "***Contrary to hope,***" Paul writes, "***in hope [he] believed.***" "***And not being weak in faith he did not consider his own body.***" "***He did not waver at the promise of God.***" Contrary to what he saw in himself and what nature told him, Abraham had faith in the promises of God.

FAITH IN GOD'S FAITHFULNESS

Abraham did not have faith in God because of miraculous signs and wonders. Remember, at this point Isaac had not yet been born. Yet Abraham had faith in the promise which God had made. That faith was grounded in God's faithfulness. Abraham believed that God was God. Even though Abraham and Sarah were well past child-bearing years, he believed that the God of all creation could accomplish this unheard of thing. The same God who was so powerful that He put the stars in the sky could likewise cause two people old enough to be great-grandparents, to be parents for the first time. It was God who had promised Abraham, "***So shall your descendants be.***" Though old and without children, Abraham was convinced that this same God would be faithful to His Word.

Paul writes in verse 20 and 21 of our text of Abraham, ***He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was also able to perform.*** Abraham knew he and his wife were helpless to conceive children on their own - they were much too old for that. But Abraham was convinced that God was more than capable of performing what He had promised.

Was Abraham's faith misplaced? Would anyone call Abraham gullible for believing such an outlandish thing? Certainly not! While this promise went against all that nature showed, God did perform this seemingly impossible thing. God kept His promise and at the age of one hundred Abraham and his ninety year old wife became first-time parents. In hope Abraham believed, and this hope was not disappointed.

FAITH ACCOUNTED AS RIGHTEOUSNESS

This matter of Abraham's faith gets at the very heart of what Paul is presenting in this letter to the Romans - righteousness. Having believed the promises of God, promises which were contrary to all that Abraham knew by nature, this faith "***was accounted to him for righteousness.***" Abraham was a sinner just like each of us. When he was in Egypt he lied to Pharaoh and said Sarah was his sister and not his wife. When the LORD said he and Sarah were going to have a child in his old age, he laughed to himself. Though Abraham had sinned against God, Abraham had faith in the promises of God. He believed God at His Word And God credited that faith to Abraham as righteousness. Abraham did not earn this righteousness. It was not a wage that Abraham received for his good works. Instead it was a gift of grace. Abraham is the recipient of that righteousness which God credits to his spiritual account.

Now, what does this “back in the day” account have to do with you or I? I do not expect that our oldest couple are going to be with child any time soon. God certainly could do it - He proved that with Abraham and Sarah, as well as Zacharias and Elizabeth - but we have no reason to think such things will happen, because God has made no promise to such and effect.

However God has made big promises to each one of us. Promises that go contrary to what we see with our eyes. God in His Word declares, **“For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.”** (Gal 3:26) But what do I see as I look out at you today? And what do you see as you look at me? Do we see someone who looks like a child of God? I heard you with my own ears this morning and you heard me join in with you in saying that we are *“poor, miserable sinners”* who *“justly deserve the temporal and eternal punishment”* of God. Does that sound like something a child of God would say? If we judge by our senses it seems just as likely that we are sons of God as a 90 year old woman having her first child.

Yet Paul says that what was written of Abraham, was written for us today - here - now. The last two verses of our text resound with the glorious Gospel news for sinners like us. ***It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offenses and was raised because of our justification.*** Have you offended God by the things you have done? Well this is the promise of forgiveness that God made for you - His Son Jesus was delivered up on the cross because of them. The only reason Jesus was nailed to the cross, bled, and died was because of our sins. He was there to pay the price of every last sin we have ever committed in thought, word, and deed.

And why did Jesus rise from the dead? Paul continues that it was because of our justification. The word justification is a courtroom word. When someone is accused of a crime he goes to court. There the charges are read, witnesses give their testimony, and then the judge or jury give the verdict. If the person on trial is found guilty, then he is condemned for his crimes. If however the judge or jury declares the defendant “not guilty,” then it is said that he is justified. Justified means to declare not guilty. When Jesus rose from the dead God was rendering His verdict. God’s Easter verdict about you was a resounding “not guilty.”

This is the promise in spite of what we see. The LORD God who gave Abraham and Sarah a child in their old age, has given us forgiveness, life, and salvation in Christ Jesus. His death means that our sins died with Him. His resurrection means that our Judgment Day verdict has already been rendered. For those who believe in God who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead, that faith is accounted as righteousness - just as it was for Abraham. Though we are spiritually bankrupt by nature, through faith in God and His promises, God credits our spiritual account with His righteousness.

So you see why Abraham is not just another “back in the day” story? Do you see why the faith of our father Abraham is so relevant to us today? Just as the Holy Spirit worked faith in the heart of Abraham, faith in spite of sight, faith in the faithfulness of God, and faith that was accounted as righteousness - the same Holy Spirit is at work in you. You have heard the promises of God. Promises in spite of sight. God is faithful. He kept that big, seemingly impossible promise to Abraham - He will keep every last promise of mercy, grace, and protection to you. And that faith which the Holy Spirit has worked in your heart, God has accounted to you as righteousness. May God be praised for His great promises. May God keep us steadfast in these promises unto life everlasting. Amen.