

Romans (4:17-25)

Faithing the Facts

Part 15 – October 17, 2004

THE STARS ABOVE

Paul has been using the example of Abraham to demonstrate how God declares all believers righteous by faith alone. Now Paul tells us just what type of faith Abraham had.

Abraham waited years and years for God to fulfill His promise. One night, while sleeping in his tent with Sarah, the Lord woke them with a booming voice: "Abraham, look up into the night sky and tell me what you see." Abraham said, "I see millions of stars; too many to count!" "What does that tell you?" asked the Lord. "That you have not forgotten your promise to me." The Lord said, "Yes, and what else?" "You alone are capable of creating something out of nothing." The Lord said, "Yes, *and?*" "Um, that you are still going to make me a great nation?" The Lord said, "Yes, yes, but what else does it mean?" Abraham laid there, baffled: "Hmm ... stars ... stars ..." Sarah rolled over, sighed, and said, "For Heaven's sake, Abe, it means someone has stolen the tent!"

Abraham was 75 years old (*Gen 12:4*) when God told him: "I will make you into a great nation ..." – Genesis 12:2 NIV

He was 85 years old (*Gen 16:16*) when the Lord promised: "... a son coming from your own body ..." – Genesis 15:4 NIV

And then he turned 86, and then 87, 88, 89, 90 – and he believed God – 91, 92, 93, 94 – and still he trusted – 95, 96, 97, 98, and then *finally* (fourteen years later) at 99, his son Isaac was born.

Q: How did Abraham keep his faith in spite of that delay?

As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed – the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were. 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. – Romans 4:17-25 NIV

Paul quotes Genesis 17:5; just after God changed Abraham's name.

As it is written: "I have made you a father of many nations." – Romans 4:17a NIV

What's striking is that the Lord uses past-tense to talk about what will be a future event for Abraham.

- "I have *made* you a father of many nations."

The beginning of the verse in Genesis says:

No longer will you be called Abram; your name will be Abraham ... – Genesis 17:5 NIV

- The name "Abraham" means: "Father of a Multitude"
- God calls things that are not as though they are.

By taking this name *before* the fact, Abraham was expressing his trust in God's willingness and ability to fulfill His promise.

[Abraham] is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed – the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were. – Romans 4:17b NIV

There are two major categories for the promises God gives us:

1. To create life where there is death

"[He] gives life to the dead"

To Abraham this referred to Isaac coming from Abraham's 99 year-old body, and Sarah's 90 year-old womb! For you and me, it could be a lifeless marriage, failing health, broken career, strained finances, or hopeless relationships.

- He offers hope when death and demise are impending.

2. To create something where there is nothing

"[He] calls things that are not as though they were"

He gave Abraham an incredible expectation. Perhaps He's given you a goal, a vision, or a passion that waits to be fulfilled.

- He offers hope when dreams and desires are impossible.

One of the greatest promises of hope comes from Romans:

And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him ...
- Romans 8:28 NIV

He doesn't promise to grant wishes; it's not *magic* (we don't control God). But, to those who abide by His word, *everything* will ultimately be worked to the good! Frustratingly, this often requires an Abraham-like *delay*. The Lord isn't passive; the delay brings about some of His best work ... usually in teaching us how to get out of His way.

Q: But how do we hold onto the hope that God is working things out, that He has things under control, when He delays?

Paul tells us two things that Abraham did.

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.
- Romans 4:18-19 NIV

The first thing we see is that:

A. Abraham faced the facts

- He didn't *make believe* that he was young and virile.

This is important because there's a misguided fear that by acknowledging truth, believers somehow "claim" it. I'm not sick (cough, cough), I'm not *claiming* it.

Abraham knew the difference between faith and fantasy. Faith doesn't ignore reality or pretend bad is good and sick is well. He faced the facts but he didn't "weaken in his faith" that God would make good on His promises.

- *Make believe* will actually *weaken* our faith, because
- It requires belief in a fantasy rather than a Father

We don't have to know *how* He's going to work things out, in order to trust that He's able, willing, and working to do it.

There's something else that's *vital*, that Abraham did:

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. - Romans 4:20-21 NIV

B. Abraham gave glory to God.

All the time while Abraham was waiting for the promise to be fulfilled, he was thanking God, praising God, and trusting God. When we trust someone we honor them at the deepest level. Praising and thanking God in advance for working all things to our good (though circumstances look otherwise) strengthens our faith and glorifies God.

Q: Do you know how faith brings glory to God?

Picture a five year old at the edge of a pool; his dad is in the water coaxing him to jump into his arms: "I'll catch you." If he shakes his head and runs, the dad looks bad. But if the kid jumps, we see a *trustworthy* father.

Q: And how does the father himself feel if his boy jumps?

A: Honored, trusted, and loved.

- Our faith brings God glory by declaring His dependability

Now, notice something strange:

- A. He didn't waver through unbelief regarding the promise
- B. Yet, his *faith* needed to be strengthened

Q: If he didn't waver, why did his faith need to be strengthened?

A: Because faith is not the same as 100% certainty.

The reason the kid brings honor to his dad is because his trust (in his father's promise) outweighs his uncertainty of the water. We must choose to thank and praise God in *spite* of our uncertain circumstances and situations.

- Faith is uncertainty plus trust

And though Abraham faced the facts, he chose to glorify God by trusting Him, and acting according to his faith.

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. - Romans 4:22-25 NIV

Christ's death and resurrection (for *our* benefit) verifies: The power behind God's promises. And His willingness to fulfill them. However, we are not called to simply believe in the historical fact that Christ rose from the dead.

- We're called to "believe in *him* who raised Jesus."

A loving, trustworthy, Heavenly Father who: Gives life to the dead. And calls things that are not as though they were. And holds out his arms and says, "I'll catch you."