

June 1, 2008  
Pentecost 3

*"Standing on the Promises"*

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### ROMANS 4:18-25

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**A**gainst 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." <sup>19</sup> 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. <sup>20</sup> Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, <sup>21</sup> being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. <sup>22</sup> This is why "it was credited to him as righteousness." <sup>23</sup> The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, <sup>24</sup> but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness-- for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. <sup>25</sup> He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.

This past week a high school graduate received a new car from his parents, not just for graduating, but having perfect attendance for thirteen years from kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Can you imagine that? Perfect attendance!

We expect to be rewarded or receive some kind of recognition if we get good grades in school or do well at our job. You expect members of your family, even your pets, to love you if you show them kindness, love and respect. All of us are born believing that we can earn God's respect and love in this life and for all eternity if we just try our best to be a better person every day.

The book of Romans tells us the truth about our human condition. It reveals to us a God who demands perfection before he can call us his dear children and bless us with eternal life. The book of Romans reveals the truth that sin is not just being lazy and missing one day of class or failing to show up at work, but falling short of God's glory or perfection. Romans also reveals to us the truth that our God in his love has found a way in which he can declare us perfect, not by anything we do, but by what Jesus has done for us.

Imagine for a moment that we take this piece of chalk and draw two circles on the parking lot of our church. In one circle there is a stick person symbolizing trust in yourself. The other circle has a cross that symbolizes trust in Jesus. There are only two circles in life where we can place our trust. Either we stand trusting in ourselves or we take our stand on God's promises and what he has done for us. This morning we want to listen to what Romans tells us about a man named Abraham to realize how important it is to take our stand on God's promises for everything in life instead of trusting in ourselves.

#### **That's where Abraham stood**

The Lord God led Abraham from the circle of trusting in himself to the circle of standing on the promises of God. Here is how the book of Romans describes this trust. "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.' God promised Abraham that he would have a son in his old age, and many descendants would come from him. The Lord even showed him the stars in the sky and said, "Look up at the heavens and count the stars-if indeed you can count them." Then he said to Abraham, "So shall your descendants." Abraham believed the Lord would come through.

This belief in God's promises did not come naturally to Abraham just as it does not come naturally to us. The Lord had to take him from having a weak faith to having a strong faith. Abraham's faith was not strong when he listened to his wife Sarah who told him to have a child with Hagar her servant girl. But then Lord came through and took this man of weak faith and turned him into a man of strong faith in God's promises. Romans tells us, "Without weakening in his faith, he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead-since was about a hundred years old-and that Sarah's womb was also dead."

When we see what God did for Abraham we think of the man who came to Jesus seeking help for his son who was possessed with an evil spirit. Jesus told him, "Anything is possible if you believe." Then the man responded with these well known words, "Lord, I believe, help my unbelief." How many times has the Lord had to lead you to believe more strongly that he hears your prayers and helps you through times of crisis? He invites you, "Call upon me in the day of trouble, I will answer you and you will glorify me." You know the promises that nothing will ever separate you from his love, yet you need the Lord to help you believe this promise more fully in your life. You know that the Lord has a home of glory waiting for you, yet you need the Lord to make this more real for you and help you stand on these promises.

How strong was the faith that the Lord worked in Abraham? Listen to this powerful testimony to the Lord's power, a power that still works in your life today. "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." There is no better place to be standing in your life than this very special place where you are convinced that every promise found in the Bible is not just true, but true also just for you.

We are accustomed to trusting people for our basic needs in life. We put our trust in the mechanic to keep our cars safe to drive. We trust the water we drink from plastic bottles will not poison us or give us cancer. We trust the food we eat does not contain dangerous chemicals. We trust that people we love will be there for us when we really need, but what if they get sick and die? You have heard it said that there is nothing certain in life except death and taxes. That's not true! There is something you can trust in completely that will not fail you. You have the promises God makes to you in the Bible. Here is a promised that will never fail you. "God so love that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life." It is the Lord who takes us from a circle of doubt and unbelief and leads us to not stagger at his promises for us.

### **That's where we stand today**

Within the cluster of promises the Lord gave Abraham was the very special promised of righteousness in the future Savior who would be descendant of Abraham. That's the

greatest need in the world today. The people in China need more tents after a major earthquake and frightening aftershocks. The people in Myanmar need food after the cyclone. The whole world needs more love, including every family living around this church and the people sitting here listening to this sermon. According to the book of Romans and the life of Abraham there is something even more important than food or shelter of love. It is righteousness, righteousness found only in Jesus.

It says that Abraham believed and "it was credited to him as righteousness." This has been rightly called one of the most important verses in the Bible. There is something I cannot find in myself and that is the pure, perfect, holy righteousness I need to be accepted by God. Oh, to be sure, I can see good things here and there that bring me joy, and bring joy to other people, but always we fall short of God's perfection. As Romans 3:20 tells us, "Therefore no one will be declared righteous in his sight by observing the law; rather through the law we become conscious of sin." The heart and core of the Christian faith is believing that God provides this righteousness for me in Jesus' death and resurrection. He not only provides this righteousness, but he actually credits it or puts it into my account.

Let's unpack more completely this important concept of crediting righteousness by talking about an ATM machine, especially the new ones that now accept your check. They even give you a receipt with a copy of your check on it and the new amount. I actually watched this happen for the first time this past week. It is amazing. You put your card into the machine, then insert your check and deposit slip, and a few seconds later there is a printout of your account with the new amount. How this transaction happens electronically is truly amazing.

Something even more amazing happens when God our heavenly Father gives us his Son, and then takes everything Jesus did and credits it to your account. He even gave us the gift of faith to believe that all of this really happened and that it is true. This faith enables us to say with the prophet Isaiah, "I delight greatly in the Lord, my soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of righteousness." Here you are this morning, standing in this circle, believing with all your heart that God has credited you with the righteousness of Jesus His Son just as Abraham believed in it even before it happened.

There was once a movie with an unattractive 20 year old man with buck teeth, slicked down hair and boorish manners. He asked a beautiful model, "What are the chances of getting a date with you?" She responded, "About one in a million." He jumped for joy because he thought there was at least a one in million chance he could get a date with the beauty queen. What are the odds or chances of being accepted by God on the basis of our own righteousness? It is always zero, because zero of our own unrighteousness multiplied by our best efforts is always zero. What are the chances of being saved by Christ's righteousness? It is always 100% because Jesus righteousness is perfect.

How real is this righteousness that has been credited to your account through Jesus? Can you really put your trust in it? Romans tells us, "These 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 for our offences and raised to life for our justification." Think about it. Jesus was delivered or handed over like a criminal for our offenses. He became sin for us. The punishment for our

peace was upon him. The supreme evidence that every sin was fully paid for lies in the fact that the Father showed he accepted the sacrifice Jesus made by raising him to life again. If one little bad thought I had when I was small child was the only sin that was not paid for completely, then the Father would never have raised Jesus back to life, because the Father can only accept his Son after every sin placed on him was paid in full.

Let's go back to the ATM machine. You have inserted your card, then the deposit slip and the signed check. When the slip comes out it shows that you have over a million dollars in the account. While you were sleeping a rich uncle accessed your ATM machine and deposited a check into your account. What are the chances that would happen? Less than a million to one I am sure. What God did with Jesus death and resurrection is truly amazing. He credited into your account the perfect life of Jesus, not secretly but very much in the open by Jesus' death and resurrection.

Today you standing in this amazing circle believing in what God has promised is yours in Jesus. The perfect attendance, the perfect grades, the perfect death, the perfect life, the perfect resurrection are in your account and the Lord has led you to believe all this is true. Today we go justified which means that in the eyes of our Lord it looks just as if we never sinned. That makes us want to live a whole new life for the Lord and eagerly look forward to the day when he comes to call us home as we stand on the promises of the Lord. Amen.