

June 29, 2014
Pentecost 3

"Trusting the Promises of God Like Abraham"

ROMANS 4:18-25

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

This past week at about 9:00 AM the parking lot of our church was a busy place as parents dropped off their children for Star Bible Camp. It was not just parents who dropped off their children, grandparents were also involved in bringing their grand children to dive into the treasures of God's Word.

Imagine for a moment a very old man bringing a six year old child to our camp. The child's name is Isaac which means laughter. The very old man who is almost 110 years old is not the grandfather or the great grandfather, but the father of this six old boy named Isaac. The father's name is Abraham. Isaac is a miracle child who was born to him and his wife Sarah when they were far past the age of people to have children.

The Lord God had promised Abraham that he would have a son in his old age. Abraham believed the promises of God. He believed that his God could do the impossible. What a joy and privilege it was this past week to bring the promises of our God to the children who came to us. One mother told us how thrilled she was to see how her son had grown in his faith this past week. There are thousands of promises in the Bible. Our kind and good and gracious God leads us to believe these promises just as he led Abraham to trust and believe in promises.

God kept his promises to Abraham

Abraham hoped in God's promises even when it seemed as if there was reason to lose all hope. "Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him." Abraham was 75 years old when the Lord spoke to Abraham and told him he would have a son. He was old and his wife was not able to have children, yet the Lord said he would have a son.

Here is a test of your knowledge of the Bible. How long after the promise was it before the Lord blessed Abraham with a son? Was it one year, ten years, or twenty five years? If your answer is twenty five years then you answered correctly. How often haven't you

found yourself waiting for the Lord to fulfill his promises to you, waiting and waiting and waiting, and finally the Lord comes through.

It says here in these words that Abraham did not weaken in his faith even though he was a hundred years old and his wife Sarah's womb was dead. When Abraham had doubts, the Lord took him out and showed him the stars in the sky and said, "Look at the stars and try to count them. That's how many descendants are coming from you." The Lord loves to strengthen your faith in his promises just as he did with Abraham. We think of the man whose son was possessed by an evil spirit. He was desperate as he pleaded to Jesus for help. Jesus told him, "Anything is possible with God if you believe" He responded, "Lord, I believe, help my unbelief."

Do you realize what a challenge it was to have a name like Abraham and have no children? Originally Abraham's name was Abram, but God changed it to Abraham. Abram means the father of people. Abraham means the father of nations. Abraham had tremendous wealth. He invited lots of people to stop by his tent. He was known as a friend of God. Imagine having to introduce yourself with the name "Abraham" which means father of nations but not even having one child to call your son. Not a day went by without Abraham wondering when the Lord would come through. How many years did the nursery they prepared for their son sit empty? The Lord strengthened him to believe as it says he was "strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God." Can't you hear him give glory to God by saying, "The Lord will come through. The Lord will keep his promise."

If you want your faith strengthened in the promises of God, then open up the book of Psalms and begin reading anywhere. It won't take long before you run across a verse of Scripture where the Lord promises to take care of you and help you through your troubles. We did that this past week in the group I had for Bible Camp. We gave each child a Bible and had them open up to the middle of the Bible which is the Psalms. How easy it was to find promises that the Lord gives us. One of my favorite promises in the Bible is from Isaiah 41:10 where the Lord says, "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."

The Lord gave Abraham a cluster of promises in addition to the promise of a son. The Lord promised to make his name great, and richly bless him and give him the land of Canaan where his descendants would become a great nation. Included in this cluster of blessings was the promise that one of his future descendants would bless the whole world. This was Jesus. Abraham believed he would be saved by a future descendant not by the quality of life which he lived.

God keeps his promises to us

It says here in Romans that through this faith in the future Savior Abraham was credited with righteousness. "This is why it says, 'it was credited to him as righteousness.'" This is a quote from Genesis 15:6 where it says, "Abraham believed and it was credited to him as righteousness." This verse clearly defines how we are saved. We are not credited with righteousness because of how well we perform. We are credited with righteousness through Christ.

In one of the worksheet we did in Bible Camp the children were asked to list in a box some of the basic things we need for survival. We think immediately of the need for food, the need for water, and the need for air to breathe. We also need shelter and clothes, and certainly we need people who love us and care about us. What we need the most in life is hope, the hope of knowing that God loves us and we will be with the Lord forever when we die. It has been said that you can survive thirty days without food, and three days without water, and three minutes without air, but only three seconds without hope.

How was Abraham sure that God loved him? He did not put his faith in himself. He put his faith in God's promise to send one of his descendants who would bless the whole world. We learned this past week that Adam and Eve lost their hope when they turned their hearts against God. But then God gave them hope by promising someone would come from the woman who would crush the devil's power. They were credited with the righteousness that Jesus would win for them at the cross and win for them by living a perfect life for them.

It has been said that a picture can speak a thousand words. It is easy to see that this person (show picture of mean child) is allowing his sinful nature to take over his life. When we look honestly at such a picture we begin to recall streaks of meanness in ourselves. Romans 3 says that we sin and fall short of God's glory. Romans 3 also tells us we are justified or declared not guilty on the basis of what Jesus has done for us. In this picture of Jesus growing up in Nazareth and working in his father's carpenter shop we see the perfect life we never lived. In this picture of Jesus on the cross, we are reminded of the pain and suffering and death he endured to make the ransom payment for our sin.

By believing in Jesus as Abraham did we are credited with everything Jesus has done for us. Abraham looked forward to what Jesus would do for him and we look back at what Jesus has done for us. "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 for over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification."

God our heavenly Father did everything necessary to credit us with a righteousness we could never find ourselves. A holy and perfect God who demands that we be perfect to have eternal life with him set up the perfect system whereby we could be perfect in his sight. Our Father sent Jesus into this world to be handed over like a criminal for our sins and offenses. All our sin was placed on him. He became sin for us. He suffered the punishment for sin. God our Father declared his Son guilty. When the full price had been paid Jesus cried out from the cross, "It is finished." The Father proved to the world he accepted what Jesus did by raising him from the dead. Through faith in Jesus, everything Jesus did is not credited to your account.

Think of how richly blessed you are, maybe not with money, but with Christ and his righteousness. God's promise to Abraham has come true. God's promise to you is also true. Jesus told us about this promise in John 3:16 which we learned this week. "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life."

The children who came to our Bible camp this past week went home knowing more about our heavenly Father who kept his promise to send his Son to die for us and richly bless us. A couple of year ago, one of the mothers who helped with my group told my wife, "Your husband sure likes to talk about Jesus." What was said about me can easily be said about Abraham and also about you dear Christians. We sure love to talk about Jesus and the promises we have in him. Amen.