

March 12, 2017 by Steve Brandon



Follow the Faith of Abraham

Romans 4:18-25

- 1. Believe in God's Promises (verse 18-20)**
- 2. Believe in God's Power (verse 21)**
- 3. Believe in the Scriptures (verse 22-24a)**
- 4. Believe in the Resurrection (verses 24a-25)**

The Christian life is a life of following. When Jesus was on the earth, he said, "If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." (Matthew 16:24). Christians are those who follow Christ. Who learn from him. Who follow the example that he set.

But it's not only Christ that we follow. We follow other godly leaders who lead us in the way of Christ. As Paul said, "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ." (1 Corinthians 11:1). In other words, as Paul's life imitated the life of Jesus, we should follow him.

I believe that this also applies today, with local pastors and spiritual leaders that you know and trust. "Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith." (Hebrews 13:7). The Christian life is a life of following. We follow Jesus We follow after others who are following him.

But it's not only the New Testament that gives us worthy examples to follow. We have examples in the Old Testament as well. And one prominent example that the Scriptures put before us is the life of Abraham.

My message this morning is entitled, "Follow the Faith of Abraham." It comes from Romans, chapter 4. This morning, Lord willing, we will finish our exposition of this wonderful chapter.

If you remember anything from my past few messages, you remember that this chapter has been all about Abraham. He is mentioned by name some seven times. Paul uses a pronoun (he/him/you) another 26 times to refer to Abraham. That means that Abraham is mentioned more times than there are verses!

Paul's burden in this chapter is really quite simple. He wants to show us all that the gospel that he is proclaiming is no different than the gospel in the Old Testament. Abraham believed God and it was counted to him as righteousness. We believe God and it is counted to us as righteousness.

Genesis 15:6
Abraham believed the LORD and he counted it to him as righteousness.

And what was true of Abraham is true of us.

Romans 4:5
To the one who ... believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is counted as righteousness.

The only thing that is different is the object of our faith. For Abraham never knew of Jesus by name. And I doubt that he fully understood the need of sacrifice for sins. But what Abraham did know, he believed. He had a direct promise of God to bless him and his offspring. And he believed. And God counted it to him as righteousness.

Now, the object of our faith is not a direct promise from God to bless us and our offspring. The promise that God has given us is to believe in Jesus, the Messiah; to believe that he was crucified for our sins; to believe that he was raised for our justification. And we know that if we believe in Christ, he will count our faith as righteousness.

This comes before any religious work or effort that we do. Paul made the point in Romans 4:10, that Abraham was counted righteous before he was circumcised. Paul made the point in Romans 4:13, that Abraham was counted righteous before the law was given to Israel. Because our justification before the Lord doesn't depend upon circumcision or baptism or keeping the law or following some sorts of rules. No, we are justified by faith alone.

In fact, that's the whole point of Romans, chapter 4. Look at Romans 5:1, where we have a summary of the chapter. Paul writes, ...

Romans 5:1
Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.'

In other words, Paul was saying this, "Therefore, ... this is the conclusion that we must draw from Romans chapter 4 and from the life of Abraham, ... that we are justified by faith." And the call of our verses this morning is to "Follow the Faith of Abraham." Let's read our text.

Romans 4:18-25

In hope [Abraham] believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, "So shall your offspring be." He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised. That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness." But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

Here's my first point:

1. Believe in God's Promises (verse 18-20)

This is exactly what Abraham did. He believed in God's promises. And it wasn't easy. Look at verses 18-20.

Romans 4:18-20

In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, "So shall your offspring be." He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God,

Do you remember the promise that God gave to Abraham? The LORD took him outside at night and told him to look up into the dark sky and try to count the stars. And the LORD said, "So shall your offspring be" (Genesis 15:5; verse 18). Now, that wouldn't be so difficult to believe except that he was a bit on the older side.

In less than a month, I'm turning 50 years old. I'm the father of five children. And I can hardly think of being a father again. But, Abraham was nearly twice my age when God told him that he would be "the father of a multitude of nations" (Genesis 17:5). He was childless at 99 years old! And his wife, Sarah, was 90 years old.

Do we have any 90 year-olds here this morning? Shirley, can you imagine having a child? Children simply aren't born to 90 year-olds! In fact, the "Guinness Book of World Records" holds the oldest mother who gave birth without artificial fertilization to be 59 years of age. Dawn Brooke was her name. She lives in the UK. [\[1\]](#) With artificial fertilization, the record is 66 years old! [\[2\]](#)

Both of those records are amazing! But they are still a long way off from 90 years old! And, from what we know from the Bible, these statistics are wrong.

Abraham had every reason in the world to doubt the promises of God. And yet, we read in verse 18 that "he believed." "In hope he believed against hope." That is, when all natural hope seemed lost, Abraham continued to believe. Now, it's not that Abraham refused to think about things. On the contrary, he thought about them very hard. Look at verse 19.

Romans 4:19

He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb.

He considered the reality of his situation. He thought about his own body. He thought about how old he was. He thought about the possibility of being a father. His conclusion? His body was as good as dead. That means that there was no way that he was able to father a child at his age.

Verse 19 speaks of how accurately he evaluated things. It's like he took out pen and paper and tried hard to assess the situation. He wasn't like the 50 year-old, who thought that he could go out and compete with the 20 year-olds. He wasn't Michael Jordan playing for the Washington Wizards. No, he knew full well that he was washed up. His fathering days were over.

And when he considered Sarah's body, he came to the same conclusion. She was barren. She was 90! If she hadn't given birth in the first 90 years of her life, there was little hope that she would give birth in her 90th year! And yet, in light of insurmountable difficulties, Abraham believed!

He didn't weaken in his faith. He didn't waver in his faith. Instead, he grew strong in faith. And in so doing in the Lord, he gave glory to God! That's what verses 19 and 20 say, ...

Romans 4:19-20

He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb. No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise

of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God,

The very things that could have pulled him down into unbelief--the facts of his life that were working against the promise of God, like his age and his wife's age--had no effect upon his faith. In fact, if anything, he grew stronger (verse 20). And in so doing, God was greatly glorified. And Paul is calling us this morning to "Follow the Faith of Abraham."

Now, in the life of all of us, there are seasons of blessing. And there are seasons of trial. I know that some of you are facing some very difficult trials in your life right now. I know because I have talked with you. Yvonne has talked with you. And we are praying for you. Last night before we went to sleep, Yvonne and I prayed together about you and about your faith in the Lord.

Some of you are experiencing difficulties with your children. Some of you are facing challenges in your marriage. And I certainly know, that there are problems and difficulties in your life that I know nothing about, but are heavy upon your heart. Perhaps there are financial difficulties. Perhaps there are some major life decisions that are stirring in your mind. Perhaps there are some relational conflicts you are facing.

I'm simply asking you if you are going to follow the faith of Abraham. Are you going to trust in the promises of God?

Now, unlike Abraham, you haven't received any direct revelation from God about your situation. But, you do have promises in the word of God. You have promises in Romans that you can turn to. How about the promise of Romans 8:28, one of the most famous, most well-loved promises in all of the Bible.

Romans 8:28

And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

Are you going to trust in this promise? Are you going to trust that God has promised to work these trials in your life for good?

Now, you may not understand how in the world this might be the case. You could sit down with pen and paper in hand and try to figure it out, and you may figure that there is no way out. That's right where Abraham was. There was no conceivable way that he saw God fulfilling his promise to him. And he didn't weaken in his faith (verse 19). And he didn't waver in his faith (verse 20). He became strong in his faith (verse 20). He gave glory to God.

How many of us pray for God to be glorified in our lives? Do you realize that the answer to that prayer might just mean trusting God through the most difficult of times. See, it's one thing to trust God when all is well! When he is blessing you with health. When he is blessing you with wealth. When he is blessing your family. But it is when you trust God when things aren't so well that God is particularly glorified. Because God is shown to be trustworthy, even through the trials of life.

So, you say, "How can I grow strong in faith?" I think that verse 21 holds the key. It speaks about the power of God. It speaks about the power of God to fulfill his promises, which leads nicely into my second point. Not only should we Believe in God's Promises (verse 18-20) But we should also, ...

2. Believe in God's Power (verse 21)

We see this in verse 21. But we can't just read verse 21. We need to begin in verse 20, ...

Romans 4:20-21

No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.

In other words, the sustaining power and fuel of Abraham's faith was his trust in the power of God. Abraham was fully convinced that God could fulfill his promises. Look back at verse 17. Speaking of Abraham, ...

Romans 4:17

as it is written, "I have made you the father of many nations"--in the presence of the God in whom he believed, who gives life to the dead and calls into existence the things that do not exist.

Abraham knew full well that God is the one who gives life to the dead. Abraham knew full well that God is the one who created the world out of nothing by the sheer power of his spoken word! And if God can do all of this, then certainly, he can give life through a dead womb of an old woman. And in that, Abraham believed.

See, when you believe in an all-powerful God, all things are possible. Perhaps you remember the story in Genesis 18 when the LORD appeared to Abraham by the oaks of Mamre (Gen. 18:1). He lifted his eyes and three men were standing in front of him (Gen. 18:2). As it turns out, these were no ordinary men. In fact, one of them is identified as "the LORD" (Genesis 18:10) who said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife shall have a son" (Genesis 18:10).

Now, upon hearing that, Sarah laughed. She couldn't believe it. She said, "After I am worn out, and my lord is old, shall I have pleasure?"

(Genesis 18:12). In other words, "I'm old! My husband is old! Shall I have a child?"

And listen to what the LORD said to Abraham, "Is anything too hard for the LORD? At the appointed time I will return to you, about this time next year, and Sarah shall have a son." (Genesis 18:14). And those words ought to echo deep into our hearts and minds. "Is anything too hard for the LORD? Is anything too hard for the LORD? Is anything too hard for the LORD?"

This is the very thing that Gabriel, the angel, said to Mary, the mother of Jesus, ...

Luke 1:35-37

... "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy--the Son of God. And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son, and this is the sixth month with her who was called barren. For nothing will be impossible with God."

And Mary believed, ...

Luke 1:38

... "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word."

Now, what is encouraging about Sarah is this: that though she initially laughed in unbelief. She came around to believe and trust in the promise of God. Hebrews tells us, "By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised." (Hebrews 11:11). Sarah looked at the character of God. What God promises, he brings to pass. He is a faithful God who is able to fulfill his promises.

And so, church family, I encourage you to Believe in God's Promises (verse 18-20). I encourage you to Believe in God's Power (verse 21). And it's when you put both of these things together that faith can grow strong in your life

I love what Kent Hughes says here about the interaction of faith and reason. He writes, ..

"Some people are under the impression that when a person has 'faith' he inwardly agrees to ignore the facts. They see faith and facts as mutually exclusive. Faith without reason is fideism; reason without faith is rationalism. In practice there must be no reduction of faith to reason. Likewise, there must be no reduction of reason to faith. Biblical faith is a composite of the two. Abraham did not take an unreasonable leap of faith."

Abraham knew full well of the difficulties that faced him. But he also knew full well of the power of the one making the promises. And he believed in the Lord.

Romans 4:21

[being] fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.

Now, what is so encouraging about these words before us this morning is that the faith of Abraham and Sarah was far from perfect. When Sarah heard the prophecy of a child being born to her within the year, she laughed in unbelief. Earlier in their pilgrimage, Abraham and Sarah demonstrated their unbelief in the whole plan with Hagar. And yet, Paul mentions none of these failures in Romans 4. Which should be deeply encouraging to us. Just as Paul wasn't focused upon the failures of Abraham and Sarah to believe, so also God isn't focused upon our failures to believe. Instead, his heart for us is to "grow in faith"

In fact, isn't that what Abraham did?

Romans 4:20

... he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God.

And so, I come back again to this question that ought to be on all of our minds: "How can I grow strong in faith?" Certainly, believing in the power of God. But there's also another key. It has to do with the mood of the verb in verse 20. The verb, "grew strong" is in the passive mood. That is to say a better way to translate this is that Abraham "was strengthened in his faith," which is exactly how the New King James translation puts it.

Romans 4:20

... [Abraham] was strengthened in faith. {NKJV}

In other words, it's not that Abraham dug deep into his soul, and somehow discovered his faith muscle within him that he exercised so that it would grow strong. No, God strengthened his faith. And the best way to do this is simply to ask the Lord for faith.

The best way is to be like the man who came to Jesus with his son, who had an evil spirit that caused him to fall on the ground and roll about and foam at the mouth (Mark 9:20). There were times when this spirit cast him into fire and into water. This man said to Jesus, ...

Mark 9:22-24

... "if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." And Jesus said to him, "'If you can!' All things are possible for one who believes." Immediately the father of the child cried out and said, 'I believe; help my unbelief!'"

What a great prayer to pray, "I believe; help my unbelief!" And so, when you are facing situations in your life when God's promises are telling you one thing, but everything in your life seems to be going against it, pray to the Lord, "I believe; help my unbelief!"

Well, let's move on. "Follow the Faith of Abraham." Third, ...

3. Believe in the Scriptures (verse 22-24a)

Romans 4:22-24

That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness." But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also.

In other words, when God told Abraham that he was justified by faith, it wasn't only that God wanted Abraham to know that his faith was counted as righteousness. It's that God wants us to know that this is the way to obtain righteousness, by faith alone. This is the thought continued in verse 24, ...

Romans 4:24-25

... It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

Paul will say much the same thing in Romans 15:4.

Romans 15:4

Whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that through endurance and through the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.

It's why God has given to us a Bible, the Old Testament and the New Testament. It's all given to us "for our instruction." And one of the prominent things that we learn from Abraham is the way of justification. It doesn't come through righteous acts or merit of any kind. It comes to us through faith. It comes to us as we believe in the promises of the gospel. It comes to us as we believe verses like Romans 5:6-10, ...

Romans 5:6-11

For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly. For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God. For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, now that we are reconciled, shall we be saved by his life. More than that, we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received reconciliation.

Here it is: God justified us when we were weak [... and in need of help]; when we were sinners [... and in need of cleansing]; when we were enemies of God [... and in need of reconciliation]. It was then that, through his blood, he reconciled us to himself! And it all comes by faith in Christ.

Now, getting back to verses 23 and 24, we see how the Bible works. People can often mistake this. People can often think that the Bible was written to them. And that can cause you some problems in interpretation. News Flash: The Bible was not written to us. The Old Testament was written primarily to the ancient Jewish people. The New Testament was written to people and churches and pastors who lived in the first century.

But, here's the important thing: Though the Bible is not written to us, it is written for us.

Romans 4:22-24

That is why his faith was "counted to him as righteousness." But the words "it was counted to him" were not written for his sake alone, but for ours also.

The Old Testament was written for us to learn the ways of God, how he deals with men, and how he teaches them to live. The Old Testament was written for us to learn that nobody, not even the greatest of saints, will ever keep God's commandments perfectly. It was written to teach us that sin needs a sacrifice. The Old Testament was written for us to learn that we need a savior.

The New Testament was written for us to learn about our Savior, how he lived and died and rose again for our sins. The New Testament was written for us to learn how to live a godly life. And when it comes to this morning, we learn from Abraham that our faith will be counted to us as righteousness as well.

This is the point of verses 24 and 25.

Romans 4:24-25

but for ours also. It will be counted to us who believe in him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord, who was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification.

4. Believe in the Resurrection (verses 24a-25)

I thought about entitling this point, "Believe in the Cross." But the emphasis of these verses weighs strongly on the resurrection. We see it in verse 24: "...him who raised from the dead Jesus our Lord." And again in verse 25: "...raised for our justification."

This is an allusion to Abraham's deadness. Verse 19 talked about Abraham considering himself "as good as dead." And considering the "barrenness (or deadness) of Sarah's womb."

And if God is able to raise the dead, he is able to fulfill the promise to Abraham. And if God is able to raise the dead, he is able to fulfill the promise to us!

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on March 12, 2017 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] <http://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/oldest-mother-to-conceive-naturally->

[2] <http://www.guinnessworldrecords.com/world-records/oldest-person-to-give-birth>