

## **A Portrait of Faith (Part 2)**

**Romans 4:17-22**

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Well, as we begin this morning, I invite you to turn with me to Hebrews, we're going to be studying Romans, but I want to start in Hebrews 11. And I want to begin by looking at a verse that is foundational to faith. We're studying Romans 4 and Abraham's faith. Here is a verse that gives us really a foundational insight into the importance of faith. Look at verse 6 of Hebrews 11, "without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him." Notice what the Scripture says, without faith, you cannot please God. It's impossible. If you don't exercise true biblical faith, then it's impossible for you to please God.

So, what does true faith look like? Well notice, the one who wants to come to God is how it's put in verse 6, the one who wants to approach the true God, "must," first of all, "believe that He is." That doesn't mean merely admitting that there is some higher power, that there is a deity that exists somewhere. No, this is much more than that. In the context of Hebrews 11 this is believing, acknowledging, the existence of the one true God. The God who has declared Himself in creation, Romans 1, and the God who has declared Himself within the Scripture, Romans 2 and 3. It's not good enough to believe that there's a God somewhere, that's not faith. True faith, the kind of faith that pleases God, must be in the only true and living God. In fact, in Deuteronomy 4:39 Moses writes this, "Know therefore today, and take it to your heart, that Yahweh, He is God in heaven above and on the earth below; there is no other." There's only one true God.

And to come to God, you must come to the one who is, the one who exists, the one who is the only true God, the one who declares Himself by name to be Yahweh, the I am, and who eternally exists, as our Lord taught us, in three persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. You must believe that He is. And the one who wants to approach the true God must not only believe that He is all that He has declared Himself to be, but also, notice secondly in verse 6, "that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him." You must believe in the goodness of God, in the

trustworthiness of God, that God makes promises, He makes statements to us, and those are true, and He keeps his word, and He does good to those who seek Him.

This is how faith, real faith, acts, and nothing is more important to you than this. Because without this it is impossible for you to please God. You must take the true God at His bare word, and to do anything less is not to please Him. Why? Because think of the opposite. First John 5:10 puts it this way, John writes, “The one who does not believe God has made Him a liar.” In other words, either you take God at His bare word and you believe what He has said to be true, or, if you refuse to do that, in God’s mind you are calling Him a liar. Those are the options.

So if you lack faith, clearly, it is impossible for you to please God. In fact, look back at chapter 10 verse 38. The writer of Hebrews quotes that famous verse from Habakkuk 2 when he writes in verse 38 here, “BUT MY RIGHTEOUS ONE SHALL LIVE BY FAITH.” Those who are right with Me, by grace, walk, live, by faith. And so, this is absolutely crucial. This is why we are in Romans 4 and why we’re so carefully examining Abraham’s faith, because “without faith it’s impossible to please God.” And it is through faith we come to know God, and it is by faith that we walk once we come to know Him. So we’re carefully examining the faith of Abraham.

As I mentioned to you last week, art books often enlarge portions of a painting in order to show the brush strokes, so you can really understand the mastery of the artist. That’s really what we’re doing as we examine the portrait of Abraham’s faith found here in Romans 4. Paul paints a portrait of the faith by which Abraham was justified before God, and we’re putting that masterful portrait under a sort of magnifying glass and examining its brush strokes in detail. Why? Because this is absolutely foundational, this is a key passage and an absolutely foundational concept to the Christian faith. Why? Because this passage teaches us about justifying faith, saving faith. We can examine our own faith against Abraham’s and see if ours is truly saving, justifying faith. But in addition to that, this passage also teaches us about the nature of the faith we must continue to exercise as believers every day of our Christian lives and experience. So no passage could be more important. No concepts could be more crucial to your spiritual growth and development than this. It is at the bedrock of the Christian faith.

Now, just to remind you of the context here, in Romans 4 Paul is presenting his biblical defense of justification by faith alone. Having explained it in chapter 3 and chapter 4, he defends it from the Scripture. He uses one Old Testament text as his text, and that is Genesis 15:6, “Abraham believed God and it was credited to him as righteousness.” Now, we’re looking at the final section of this fourth chapter in his defense and in this section, beginning in verse 13 and running down through verse 25, Paul answers the question, by what means are we made right with God? And again, using Abraham’s example, his answer is, by faith alone. What happened to Abraham proves that the only means through which we can be justified before God is by faith alone.

Now, as we’ve seen this final section of this fourth chapter unfold, first of all, we’ve seen just justification by faith alone stated, in verse 13, he simply sets it forth as a declaration. And then in verses 14 through 16, we’ve seen justification by faith alone argued. In those verses, Paul lays out a series of arguments, both negative and positive, for why the only means to be justified is by faith alone. We’ve moved beyond that section and now we find ourselves in the third part of this section, and we’re looking at justification by faith alone illustrated. Using Abraham, Paul illustrates what saving faith, justifying faith looks like. Let’s read it together.

Now, I want to pick up in verse 16. In verse 16, at the end of the verse, just to give you the flow of the context, notice how it ends,

Abraham is the father of us all, [verse 17] (as it is written, “A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS HAVE I MADE YOU”) in the presence of Him whom he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist. In hope against hope he believed, so that he might become a father of many nations according to that which had been spoken, “SO SHALL YOUR DESCENDANTS BE.” Without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah’s womb; yet, with respect to the promise of God, he did not waver in unbelief but grew strong in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what God had promised, He was able also to perform. Therefore IT WAS ALSO CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Now, the key to this section that we're studying together, this paragraph, comes in verse 22. Notice the word therefore, here's Paul's conclusion, "Therefore IT WAS ALSO CREDITED TO HIM AS RIGHTEOUSNESS." Paul's point is that it was through the kind of faith described in verses 17 to 21, that God justified Abraham. In other words, Paul is using Abraham's faith as an illustration of justifying faith. This is what it looks like. This is the kind of faith based on which God, or through which I should say, God justified Abraham. And it's the same kind of faith through which He will justify us.

Now specifically, Paul here identifies several key qualities of true saving faith, several key qualities. Last week, we examined only the first quality, and that is this, saving faith is biblical faith. It can't be the kind of faith that circulates around the world, that's kind of a cultural, natural faith. No, it has to be the kind of faith Scripture describes. In fact, in this fourth chapter Paul uses the noun faith 10 times and he uses the verb believe six times. And in Greek the noun is *pistus* and the verb is *pisteuo*, *pistus* and *pisteuo*, obviously from the same root. So together these two words describe true biblical faith.

And so last Sunday we stepped away from our text to try to understand the kind of faith that these two related Greek words describe. And we discovered that the New Testament use of these words, *pistus* and *pisteuo*, the use of them points to three elements of true saving faith. First of all, there is knowledge. In true saving faith there must be knowledge. The only foundation for true biblical faith is knowing and understanding the truth, the truth about God, the truth about sin, the truth about Christ, the truth about the gospel. You can't believe what you don't know. Often the New Testament will say, you believe that, and there's content supplied. True faith involves knowledge.

Secondly, it involves assent. This is an emotional response to the facts about Christ and salvation. This is being convinced that the knowledge that you gain from the Scripture about Christ in salvation is factually true. In other words, you assent to its truthfulness. To be genuine saving faith there has to be knowledge of the truth and there has to be an agreement that those facts are true.

But saving faith doesn't stop there. There must be a crucial third element, which is trust. This is the volitional response to Christ and it is the heart of biblical faith. If you weren't here last

week, I strongly encourage you to go back and listen and catch up, because what I'm going to say today really builds on what we looked at last week. But this trust, what is it? Well, it means to trust in Christ and in the declarations of the gospel enough that you entrust yourself to Him. Paul describes it in Romans 10 this way, "you must confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord." You must believe in Him to the extent that you abandon yourself and you follow Him, you become His disciple. Short of this, it's not true saving faith. For faith to be saving justifying faith, it must be this kind of faith, it must include all three of these elements.

Now today I want us to return to our text here in Romans 4 where we're going to discover several other qualities of justifying faith. Let's look at them together. First of all, a second quality of justifying faith is that saving faith is rooted in God's character. Again, let me start at the end of verse 16, "Abraham is the father of us all," skip the parenthesis at the beginning of verse 17 for now, we'll come back to it, "He is the father of us all, in the presence of Him whom he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist." Now, what is this saying? In God's sight Abraham was the spiritual father of believers even way back when God made these gospel promises to Abraham. Think of it like this, 4,000 years ago when God called Abraham to Himself and made these promises, part of which included the gospel, according to Galatians 3, God already saw Abraham surrounded by nations of spiritual children, those who would believe in God as Abraham had believed in God.

Now, how could God do that? Well, notice how Paul describes God in verse 17, "Him whom he believed, even God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist." Now, that is so important. Because Paul here reminds us that because of the person and character of God, Abraham's faith in God's promises was completely reasonable. It made sense because of the person who made the promise. Now, that's crucial because the same is true for us. Our faith is also ultimately justified because of the person and character of the one whose promises we have believed.

Now, this is true in everyday life. Imagine with me for a moment, and I hope, of course, this is never true, but for the sake of illustration, imagine with me for a moment that you are soon to be diagnosed with stage four cancer. And on learning of that one of your well intentioned friends, someone who loves you deeply, comes to you and with full intensity of feeling says to you, I

know you are going to survive this cancer and assures you, promises you, that you're going to survive this stage four cancer. And you believe this person. What is that? That's not faith. That is unfounded, irrational confidence. It is a leap of faith that doesn't even come close to resembling biblical faith.

But what if, you obviously need to seek medical help, and so you do the research and you discover the world's leading specialist in the type of cancer that you have contracted. And you go and you find that surgeon or that oncologist, you meet with them, and as you sit in this person's office, this doctor, who is the world's leading specialist in the kind of cancer you have, says to you that he assures you that you will survive this cancer. Now understand that believing your friend is irrational. But believing the world's leading specialist on your kind of cancer is not. Why? What makes the difference? The qualifications of the one making the promise.

The same is true spiritually. To believe God is not an irrational leap of faith. It is profoundly reasonable and rational, because of who He is. Notice the two ways here that Paul describes the God in whom Abraham placed his confidence. First of all, in verse 17, he says, "he believed God, who gives life to the dead." He gives life to the dead. One of the 18 benedictions of Judaism, one of those ancient benedictions says this, "Blessed art thou, O Lord, who quickens the dead." This is one of the basic affirmations of Judaism. Why? Because this is the consistent assertion of the Hebrew Scriptures.

Let me just give you a couple of examples. Deuteronomy 32:39. If this isn't a verse you know, it's a verse you should know, because God declares Himself in all of His greatness in this verse. Let me just read part of it to you. Deuteronomy 32:39, ""there is no god besides Me; it is I who put to death and it is I who give life."" God takes complete responsibility for the control of life and death. And then He adds, ""I have wounded,"" that is, I am the one who brings sickness or brings physical injury, ""and it is I who heal."" God says, I am the one who kills and I'm the one who makes alive.

First Samuel 2:6, in Hannah's prayer we read, ""The LORD kills and the LORD makes alive; He brings down to the grave and He raises up."" God and God alone controls the power over life and death. It's not some impersonal process. It's a very personal decision by a very personal God. In fact, I love the way Christ puts it in Revelation 1:18, He says, ""I have the keys of

death and the grave.” In other words, it’s under My authority. Nothing happens in these areas except by My authority and permission and direction.

Now, obviously that’s an important truth, God gives life to the dead. But the question is, why does Paul mention this truth here? I think he intends for us to apply it at a couple of different levels. The God who gives life to the dead reminds us and assures us that He can produce a child from the physical deadness of Abraham and Sarah’s bodies. Look at verse 19, “Without becoming weak in faith Abraham contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old,” in other words, reproductively, his body might as well be dead, there was no physical hope, “and the deadness of Sarah’s womb.” And yet Abraham believed the promise of God that he would have a child. Why? Because God is the one who gives life to the dead. This is not a problem for God.

But I don’t think that’s all that Paul means here when he says, “the God who gives life to the dead.” Not only can God produce a child from the physical deadness of Abraham and Sarah’s bodies, but I think he also wants us to understand that God can bring spiritual life out of spiritual death. I think he’s anticipating what he will say over in chapter 5. Turn over to Romans 5:12, “Therefore, just as through one man,” Adam, “sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all have sinned.”

As we’ll discover when we get there, death was the result of sin, and specifically three expressions of death. There is physical death that resulted. All men die physically. There is spiritual death. All men are born spiritually dead. And there is eternal death, for those who don’t repent and believe. It is the second death, as John calls it in Revelation. So I think Paul here wants us to see that God can bring spiritual life out of a state of spiritual death. He did that with Abraham, remember? Abraham, when God found him, was in Ur of the Chaldees worshiping idols. He was falling down in front of stones and images. And God brought him out of spiritual death into spiritual life.

I think he also intends for us to see this expression, “the God who gives life to the dead,” not only as God’s ability to produce a child from the deadness of Abraham and Sarah’s bodies. Not only His ability to bring spiritual life out of spiritual death. But I think He fully intends for us to

understand that the God who gives life to the dead is also more than able to raise Jesus our Lord from the dead. Look down in verse 25. In fact, let's go to verse 24. He says,

for our sake, righteousness will be credited, as those who believe in Him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over because of our transgressions, He was raised because of our justification.

Listen, if you understand who God is, then God enabling a child to be born to Abraham and Sarah is nothing. He is the God who gives life to the dead. If you understand who God is, you understand that for God to bring spiritual life where there is spiritual death, that's nothing to God. And if you understand who God is, then you understand that it was nothing for God to raise Jesus our Lord from the dead. He is the God who gives life to the dead. You see, Abraham could believe the promises, the gospel promises, God made to him because he understood that God gives life to the dead. And let me say to you, you can believe the promises of the gospel because the God who made them to you is able to bring life from the dead.

A second way that Paul describes God here in verse 17 is equally interesting. In fact, it's a little more difficult to understand what he means. Notice verse 17, "he believed God, who gives life to the dead and who calls into being that which does not exist." What does Paul mean? Well, there's some disagreement about this. The most common response to this, among the commentators, is it means this, God called the entire universe into being from nothing. God simply spoke and where there was nothing, there was something. He called it into being, creation *ex nihilo*, that is, out of nothing. And that's true, by the way, absolutely that's how God created everything around us. You see this alluded to in passages like Isaiah 48:13, God says, "Surely My hand founded the earth, and My right hand spread out the heavens; when I call to them, they stand together." God says, I called, I simply spoke, and it all was created, it was all done out of nothing.

Now, it's possible this is what Paul means. And if this is what Paul means, then here's what he's saying. He's saying that Abraham believed God's promises because he understood that the God who can create all things out of nothing is more than able to produce a child in the womb of Sarah. And that's absolutely true. And I think that's a legitimate implication of this passage. But I don't think, in light of the context, that's Paul's main point.



So what is Paul's main point in this second description of God? I think it's this, God calls His people who do not yet exist as His people as though they were already His people. Long before we became His, He was calling us His people. Now, why do I say that? Well, look back at the parenthesis we skipped at the beginning of verse 17. He's just said that Abraham is the spiritual father of all who believe, believing Jews and believing Gentiles. Verse 17, "(as it is written," notice this, "A FATHER OF MANY NATIONS HAVE I MADE YOU)". Now, that's from the Septuagint translation of Genesis 17:5.

Now really important that you understand the timing of God's statement here. God said this to Abraham a year before Isaac was born. So he and Sarah have no children together. And God says, notice what He says, "I HAVE MADE YOU THE FATHER OF MANY NATIONS." Now what are you doing if you're Abraham? Kind of looking around, no children, not one by Sarah. And yet God says, "I HAVE MADE YOU." What is God saying? He's saying, it's already a reality in My mind. It's as good as done. What's going to keep God from fulfilling His purpose and plan?

Now remember, He's speaking of Abraham's spiritual descendants here, those who would believe the gospel as Abraham believed the gospel. Think about this, 4,000 years ago, Abraham lived 2,000 years before Christ, 4,000 years ago, God came to Abraham and said to Abraham, I have, through you, brought many people to faith. In other words, He was already calling those who would believe in His Son, His people, even though they didn't yet even exist. God knew His people 4,000 years ago.

Let's make it more personal, believer, God knew you 4,000 years ago. God knew that He was going to call you to Himself. He knew that He was going to call you His son or daughter. He called those His people who were not yet His people, because in His mind it was already done. And then, in time, a different kind of call. He called us, whom He had called His people, He called us to Himself through the gospel. This is the effectual call. This is that time that you were sitting in a service like this one, or you were reading your Bible, or you were talking with a friend, or somehow you were encountering the gospel. Maybe it was recalled to your mind as you lay on your bed at night. But that time something unique happened. God the Father was in that gospel, drawing you to Himself, irresistibly compelling you to come and you believed. That's God's call.

And I think Paul is implying both of these here in this context. Let me show you why. Because later in Romans, he comes back to these ideas. Go to Romans 8. Very familiar, verse 28, “we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God.” Now notice how he describes believers here, “those who love God” and “those who are called according to His purpose.” Here we’re talking about the effectual call. God calls us to Himself through the gospel. “For those whom He foreknew,” that doesn’t mean God just knew about us ahead of time. If you trace that through the Old Testament, if you trace it in passages like chapter 11 verse 2 of Romans, 1 Peter 1, you discover that this word foreknew is to predetermine a relationship, “for those whom God predetermined to have a relationship with, He also predestined,” that is predetermined our destiny,

to become conformed to the image of His Son, so that Christ would be the firstborn among many brethren; and these whom He predestined [*here it is*] He also called; [*that day when you really heard the gospel and the Father drew you to Himself, He called you,*] and these whom He called, He also justified; [*at the moment of salvation declared you just before Him through the work of Christ*] and these whom He justified; [*notice this*] He also [*will glorify? No*] He glorified.

Now wait a minute, wait a minute, we’re not glorified yet. Why would Paul use the same tense? It’s the same thing. We worship a God who calls that which does not yet exist as though it existed, because in His mind it’s as good as done. We are as good as glorified. It will happen.

Go over to chapter 9 verse 23, God wanted “to make known the riches of His glory upon vessels of mercy, which He prepared beforehand for glory,” notice verse 24, “even us, whom He called,” this is the effectual call, when you heard the gospel and came, “not from among Jews only, but also from among Gentiles.” And then he changes to a different kind of call, verse 25,

As He says also in Hosea,

“I WILL CALL THOSE WHO WERE NOT MY PEOPLE, ‘MY PEOPLE.’  
[*He calls the things that don’t yet exist as though they exist*]  
AND HER WHO WAS NOT BELOVED, ‘BELOVED.’”

“AND IT SHALL BE THAT IN THE PLACE WHERE IT WAS SAID TO THEM, ‘YOU ARE NOT MY PEOPLE,’

[these are Gentiles]

THERE THEY SHALL BE CALLED SONS OF THE LIVING GOD.”

God is the one who calls things that don't exist as though they already existed. Because in His mind it's an accomplished plan. Do you understand what this means? It means 4,000 years ago when God made the promise to Abraham that through him there would be spiritual descendants all over this planet, God was giving Abraham a promise about you.

Now, come back to chapter 4, because I don't want you to miss the larger point Paul is making. What's his point in verse 17? What could persuade a 99 year old man to believe that he and his 90 year old wife would have a son? And what would convince him that through this yet to be born son he would have many physical descendants, but also many spiritual descendants, as many as the sand? And how could he ever believe the promise that through one of his descendants, the seed, would come salvation? That one descendant would be the redeemer, as Galatians 3 talks about it, the seed which is the Messiah. How in the world did Abraham who had no children come to believe such an outlandish promise? And Paul's answer is because of the character and nature of the God in whom he believed. Notice verse 17, “he believed God, who gives life to the dead and calls into being that which does not exist.”

Now let me apply this to you. When it comes to God's promises to you in the gospel, the promise of justification, the promise that you, as an ungodly sinner, if you will repent and believe in the work of Jesus Christ, in His perfect life, lived in your place, in His death, died to satisfy the justice of God for you; if you will believe in Him, the only reason you will ever do that is because your faith is rooted and grounded in God's character. You will only believe if you understand that the God that you're believing never lies, and that He never changes His mind, and that He has the power to do whatever He decides to do. Notice verse 21, “being fully persuaded that what God had promised, He was able also to perform.”

Listen, if you understand those things about God, then it's not irrational and unreasonable to believe God's promises in the gospel. In fact, it's His power and ability to act that throughout the Scripture is used as the foundation of faith. Abraham, in Genesis 18, you remember the

story, in Genesis 18, three men show up at Abraham's tent. One of them turns out to be the second person of the trinity and the other two, angels. And this is what the Son of God says to Abraham in Genesis 18:14, "Is anything too difficult for Yahweh?" That's a rhetorical question by the way. "At the appointed time I will return to you, at this time next year, and Sarah will have a son." Listen, if you understand who God is, then this is not a problem.

By the way, the same is true with the gospel, the fuller expression of the gospel that comes in the New Testament. What happens in Luke 1:37 when the angel Gabriel shows up at Mary's home and tells her she's going to have the Messiah, the one who will accomplish salvation and redemption for His people? You know what Gabriel says to her, Luke 1:37, "nothing will be impossible with God." Listen, this is no problem for God. God enabling His Son to become fully human is not a problem if you're God. Nothing is too hard for God. Having Jesus live a perfect life as a human being and live truly as one of us, this is not a problem for God. Virgin birth, not a problem for God. Dying as our substitute to satisfy the justice of God, not a problem if you're God. Nothing is impossible with God.

You see, God's character makes your confidence in the gospel reasonable, because He gives life to the dead, to Christ in the resurrection, to our dead souls in regeneration. He calls into being that which does not exist. He calls those who are not yet His people, His people, because He knew them from eternity past and He set His love upon them, and He will call them to Himself and justify them and glorify them. Our faith in the gospel is, like Abraham's, rooted in God's character.

There's also a lesson here, though, for our walk of faith as believers. This is really important. Like Abraham, our faith grows stronger the more we understand about the one who promised. If you're sitting here this morning and you have to admit to yourself, you know, my faith is kind of weak. I just struggle and I'm not what I want to be, I know I'm not what God wants me to be. I'm a true believer, but I just struggle along. Understand that the only way your faith will ever grow stronger is by learning more about the God whom you believe. And how do you do that? Through learning about Him in Scripture. That's it. That's the only way.

So when you read your Bible daily, and you ought to read your Bible daily, don't just be checking the box, don't be saying, got that over with, put it back in the drawer and walk away.

No, as you read the Bible, be looking for your God. Who is He? What is He like? What does He do? What is He capable of? And the more you understand about the God you claim to believe in, the stronger your faith will grow in His word.

There's a third quality of saving faith and that is, that saving faith is a certain hope in God's promise. Not only is saving faith a biblical faith and rooted in God's character, but thirdly, it is a certain hope in God's promise. Verse 18, "In hope he believed." Now hope and faith are often companions in the New Testament. I won't belabor this, let me just show you a couple of examples right here in Romans. Look at chapter 5 verse 2, "through whom also we have obtained our introduction by faith," there it is, "into this grace in which we stand; and we exult," therefore, "in hope of the glory of God." Look at chapter 15, Romans 15:13, "Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you will abound in hope," so you've got believing, and "hope by the power of the Holy Spirit." Often they're united in Scripture.

Now, I think the first thing we have to do is clean our minds of a misconception of hope. You see, New Testament hope is not like the English word hope. When we use the English word we mean to speak of something that we wish would happen, but is extremely unlikely. Let's assume for a moment, and I think this is possible this year, that the Cowboys make it to the Super Bowl. That's probably not an unfounded hope, it's possible, but they make it to the Super Bowl and you're watching the game, of course you recorded it on your DVR so you can be at church that evening, and then you're watching it with friends after, I just want to get that plug in. That's why God created DVR's.

But you're watching the Super Bowl and there are five seconds left and the Cowboys are one point behind, with five seconds left, and they have scratched and clawed their way into what would amount to be the longest field goal that the kicker has ever made in his career. He's never made this field goal in his career. And on top of the impossible length of the field goal and the pressure of that moment in the Super Bowl, the other team's coach calls a time out just to ice him. So you with your family are sitting there on the couch and you're anticipating the end of the commercial break and then the television comes back on, they're lining up for the kick, and you're all sitting on the edge of your sofa, and just as he's prepared to kick the ball,

what do you say? I hope he makes it. There's a lot of desire, but there is a high degree of uncertainty.

When you read the Bible, that is never what the word hope means. Get that idea out of your mind. Biblical hope refers to something that is absolutely certain, but not yet realized. It is the joyful, confident expectation of what you are assured you will receive. So, faith then is believing God and acting on it. Hope is living in the certain anticipation that you will receive what God has promised, even though you have not yet received it.

Let me illustrate it this way, if you had an elderly uncle who were to send you a letter promising you a huge inheritance, at first, you may not believe the letter. Maybe because you know the man not to have any money or maybe you know that he's struggling with sanity or maybe you know him to be a chronic liar. But, if based on what you know about this uncle and his circumstances and his own personal wealth, if based on his trustworthiness, you come to believe him, you believe the letter that you're going to inherit his fortune, from that moment on you will live in biblical hope that you will receive that inheritance. It's a certainty. You believe it and therefore you live in hope, in eager expectation of receiving that inheritance. That's the relationship of faith and hope. Hebrews 11:1 says, "faith is the assurance of things hoped for."

Now think about Abraham. For 99 years this man was called Abram. You know what Abram means? It means father of many. Ninety-nine years, he and Sarah had no children. But for 99 years, every time somebody called his name, it came out the father of many. And so when he's 99, God shows up and says, Abram, We're going to change your name. To which I'm sure Abraham breathed a huge sigh of relief. Finally, because you can imagine how many times people laughed when he was introduced as the father of many and he has no children between him and Sarah. And so, God says, We're going to change your name. And so it's not going to be Abram anymore, it's going to be Abraham. You're no longer going to be called the father of many. You're going to be called the father of many nations. You know what Abraham did? He changed his name and he announced it to all of his friends and family. That's hope. He believed God. And he was hoping in the biblical sense, eagerly expecting that reality. And he lived in light of it. And yet, he didn't receive every promise that he was promised in this life.

In fact, Hebrews 11 says he died without receiving all the promises. In other words, there were certain promises that he lived his whole life in hope.

And that's so encouraging because you and I live our whole lives in hope as well. Turn over to chapter 8, Romans 8, and notice verse 23, "not only this, but we also ourselves, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons." Now, we were adopted at the moment of salvation, God adopted us as sons. He's talking here about the culmination, the finalization of that adoption, that entails what? The redemption of our bodies. Our adoption is fully complete when we are like Jesus Christ, body and soul, and we're waiting for that.

And we live in hope of that. Verse 24, "For in hope we have been saved," we live in hope of that reality, "but hope that is seen is not hope; for who hopes for what he already sees?" Once what you hope for arrives you don't have hope anymore because you have it. "But if we hope for what we do not see," here's how we live, "with perseverance we wait eagerly for it." It's certain, we know it's coming. We just eagerly anticipate it, like that inheritance. That's how true faith functions. It perseveres in hope, joyful certain confidence that we will receive what God promised. That's hope. And that's the response of faith.

There's a fourth quality of faith here, very briefly, saving faith is contrary to human expectations. It's contrary to human expectations. Look again at verse 18, "In hope," and then you notice I skipped this, "In hope against hope he believed." The leading Greek lexicon defines that expression, "against hope," as, "contrary to all human expectations." John Calvin says, "The meaning is that when he had no grounds for hope, Abraham still relied in hope on the promise of God." In other words, Abraham had every reason humanly to give up on having a child through Sarah, but he clung to the promise.

Look at chapter 4 verse 18, "that which was spoken to him, 'SO SHALL YOUR DESCENDANTS BE.'" That quotation in verse 18 comes from Genesis 15:5, the promise made when Abraham was 85 and Sarah was 75 and they had no children. It was against human hope. His faith flew in the face of all normal human expectations and calculations. In other words, he believed God, because faith always demonstrates its humility by believing God's word instead of relying on human logic.

Now don't misunderstand, that doesn't mean that Abraham's faith was irrational or a blind leap of faith. It certainly wasn't that. Faith in God's word is never irrational or in conflict with reason. But, after all, what could be more rational than believing your creator? At the same time, let's admit that God's word often runs contrary to man's sinful, fallen, flawed logic. There are so many examples of this in the culture. Let's just take one, disciplining children. Human logic today says that physically disciplining your child even with control and with care and with love, physically disciplining your child is an act of violence that will cause the child to in turn be violent. Now obviously, if you're out of control, if you're doing it in anger, if you're abusing the child, if you're beating a child, then clearly that may be true. But if there is a kind, controlled, measured, physical discipline of a child, God says, Proverbs 13:24, "He who withholds his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him diligently." Who are you going to believe? Here what God says is out of step with flawed human logic. Faith believes God.

Now in this passage, the stress is not on disciplining children, the stress is on justification. And what does flawed human logic say about justification? Flawed human logic says, I have to try to earn my standing before God by my own effort, my own righteousness. God says, no, you're going to be made right with Me through the work of another, My Son, Jesus Christ. Flawed human logic looks at my own sin and my own wretchedness and my own failings and says it's impossible for me ever to be right with God. But God says, I am the one who justifies the ungodly. Who are you going to believe?

You see, on the surface, what seems more unlikely, promising a 99 year old man and his 90 year old wife that they're going to have a son or promising a life long sinner and rebel against God that he or she can be declared right with God in a moment by believing in the finished work, the life and death of Jesus the Messiah? True saving faith believes God, even when it's contrary to human expectation and to flawed human logic. True faith takes God at His bare word. Is that your faith? Do you read what God says? And do you believe it? Or do you rationalize and argue with God? Faith understands and accepts the bare word of God against all flawed human logic, even its own. That's faith. The question is, is that your kind of faith? Let's pray together.



Father, we are amazed at Your wisdom and grace. Thank You for the gift of faith. Lord, we desperately need to know You better. And in knowing You better our confidence in Your word will grow, just as it did with Abraham. Lord, help us to be in Your word, help us to see Your self-revelation and to grow in our confidence in Your bare word.

Father, I pray for those here this morning who have not yet exercised faith at all. I pray that You would open their eyes, that they would see You for who You are, and that the promises You've made in the gospel can be believed because of who You are. And may they believe You today and come in saving faith to Christ. We pray in Jesus' name, amen.