

Heirs of the Promise
Romans 4:16-25

Genesis 17:1-22

Genesis 21:1-14

Responsive: Psalm 40:1-8

This morning we are going to be looking at the last half of chapter 4. Paul has been driving home over and over again the faith of Abraham, and the promises he was given in which he believed God to be faithful to complete. In this last half of chapter 4, Paul is looking at the obstacles of that belief. That is the things that are present in his life that should cause doubt, or unbelief yet through it all he believed that God would be faithful, and that God was able to accomplish what he had said he would despite the circumstances surrounding the physical nature of Abraham and his wife Sarah. And though Abraham believed God as Paul has said a few times now, and though Abraham is recorded in the hall of faithful heroes in the book of Hebrews, it isn't as though he wasn't without flaws himself, or experienced moments of doubt as we all do as well. We all know the story, how Sarah in unbelief, recognizing that she was passed the age of child bearing, offered Abraham her maid servant so that he would an offspring and Abraham went through with it and Hagar bore him a son, Ishmael. But God told Abraham, this was not the promised son, in a moment of impatience, weakness and doubt Abraham and Sarah pursued their own way, but God said, no, I promised that your offspring would come from Sarah, and it is through him that I will make you a father of many nations.

I wanted to point out this fact this morning because I think that it is important to remember that Abraham, like us, was a flawed human, sharing like us, in doubts, and fears, and moments of unbelief. But despite all that, God is not a God who turns aside from his promises, he is a faithful, and Holy God who fulfills all that he sets forth to accomplish. Even just looking at the account of Abraham and Hagar through the lens of what Paul is saying here in chapter 4 pointing to the justification of Abraham wasn't by works, which is apparent, for his works was to sleep with a woman not his wife, and just like anyone who seeks to find fulfillment, or righteousness before God through works, that offspring through Hagar as far as being an heir of Abraham availed nothing. But God in his infinite wisdom, and knowledge used even the weakness of Abraham for his purpose. Lets go over to Galatians 4, starting in verse 21 where Paul addresses this very thing, how God in his infinite wisdom, and grace even used the outcome of Abraham and Sarah's moments of doubt to teach and broader and greater lesson. Remember that Abraham was hundreds of years before the Mosaic law was given to Moses, yet here Paul points out the lessons of the law through the 2 sons of Abraham, one by the bond woman Hagar, and one by his wife, the freewoman Sarah.

“Tell me, you who desire to be under the law, do you not hear the law? For it is written that Abraham had two sons; the one by a bond woman, and the other by a freewoman. But he who was born of the bondwoman was born according to the flesh, and he of the free woman through promise. Which things are symbolic, for these are the two covenants: the one from Mount Sinai which gives birth to bondage, which is Hagar- for this Hagar is Mount Sinai in Arabia, and corresponds to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children.”

“But the Jerusalem above is free, which is the mother of us all. For it is written; Rejoice or barren, you who do not bear! Break forth and shout, you who are not in labor! For the desolate has many more children than she who has a husband. Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are children of the promise. But, as he who was born according to the flesh then persecuted him who was born according to the Spirit, even so it is now. Nevertheless what does the scripture say? Cast out the bondwoman and her son, for the son of the bondwoman shall not be the heir with the son of the freewoman. So then brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman but of the free.” Ultimately, though Abraham and Sarah may have attempted to take matters into their own hands, in the end they still believed that God would be faithful to his promise, and as we all know the story, Sarah did indeed have a son, just as God promised that she would. And God used Hagar and Ishmael as a symbol, and picture of those who seek righteousness in the flesh, or those who seek to please God through their own works. Hagar and Ishmael were cast out, away from Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac for he was not to be a part of the inheritance of Abraham's family, so to it is in the spiritual inheritance, any who would seek to be justified in the flesh are like Hagar and Ishmael and shall be cast out, while those who are of faith who have been given justification and righteousness from another are heirs.

I personally find such accounts comforting for a few reasons. First and foremost it is shows us God's sovereignty. God took an action of Abraham and Sarah I their moment of doubt and uses it as an example teaching a lesson on inheritance and justification. Second, is the fact that though Abraham and Sarah sought after a means within their control to bring forth the promise of God, God was still faithful to that promise despite Abraham's doubt. God is not contingent upon our abilities, or even out own thoughts about him. Nothing thwarts God's plan, and nothing will get in the way of God fulfilling what he promises. This is a great comfort, for he promises that all those who repent and believe shall be saved. If God was a God who did not keep his promises, there would be no assurance, no hope or guarantee of salvation. And likewise if it rest upon our own ability, again there would be no assurance, nor hope, or guarantee of salvation for we like Abraham fail, yet God in his loving mercy and grace declare us righteous. Abraham is seen as a hero of faith, God declares him as such, and it was God who accomplished all he set out to do, all Abraham had to do was believe God would be faithful to his promise.

Let us now read our passage this morning, Roman's 4, starting in verse 13, to the end of the chapter. (Read 4:13-25) Look at verse 17, the last half “God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did.” This is what God did to Sarah' as Paul continues to explain in the subsequent verses, God did not consider the deadness of Sarah's womb, her inability to give birth though she and Abraham were old and beyond child bearing age. God's promises again are not contingent upon our own ability, but he will set out to accomplish that which he started for he gives life to the dead, and considers the things that don't exist as if they do. This is also true with each and everyone of us who believe in him for salvation, for we were once dead in our trespasses and sins, alienated, separate from God, but he did not consider the deadness of our heart in sin to be an obstacle keeping him from his promise.

No, he took that which was dead, made it alive again in him, and calls those things which do not exist, that is our holiness and righteousness as though they do, for they are found not in ourselves but in him.

Remember Paul is addressing the church in Rome, and in doing so is addressing the issue of law and faith seeking to put aside once and for all this idea that justification before God can be found through the keeping of the law. And here in verse 17 he is using the very scriptures that the Jewish argument comes from Quoting Genesis 17:5 saying that God has promised that he would be a father of many nations, not just the one, but many. Paul is showing here that it really doesn't matter what one believes about Abraham, but rather what God has done. Pointing to it being God who brings life to the dead, and in fact overturns death itself. Paul's argument here, is again no matter what one thinks or believes about Abraham the reality is nothing will thwart God's plans, nor hinder him from keeping his promises. Even the faith and salvation of the Gentiles has always been a part of his purpose and plan, and their inclusion in the faith is nothing new for him. If you are a true child of Abraham, one born of faith not of blood, then the fact of the matter is, that God is always achieving what man considers to be impossible. Your own salvation was Gods work of bringing you who were dead in sin, to life in faith. And in doing so, as verse 18 says, “against all hope, just as Abraham believed in hope and so became the father of many nations, just as God had promised. So to it is with your own salvation, in hope, believing and trusting in God the one who has promised to bring salvation and righteousness through his son.

Abraham accepted that God would do as he had promised in giving him an heir, and that he would be a father of many nations. Another aspect of this, may not have even been about doubt at all, in the physical human aspect was considered he knew, and Sarah knew that she was passed the child bearing age, so rather instead of being out of doubt it could have very well been the path that Abraham had seen was before him. But as we know, God had other plans and by Abraham taking matters into his own hands it laid the seeds of conflict for generations. The Jews were very much doing the same thing, they were acting out of the same logic that drove Abraham to Hagar, trying to manage the promises of God as well as providing their own heir, that is Judaism as the inheritor of those promises. Nevertheless, just as Abraham's doubt that an heir would come from his own wife, it does not thwart God from fulfilling his promises that the Gentiles will likewise be heirs of these promises, for God is the God who calls those things which are not as though they are, and who gives life to the dead. He gave life to the deadness of Sarah's womb, and he gives life to the deadness of sinful man. What a great encouragement this is to use who believe, for we know that God is faithful to do that which by human standards is impossible, for his truly is the sovereign Lord over all.

Verse 20, “He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what he had promised he was also able to perform and therefore it was accounted to him for righteousness.” Abraham was fully convinced that God would keep his promise, though he may have doubted how it would be accomplished, he believed without doubt that it would, for he saw God as God, the one who was able to accomplish what he had said.

Abraham took God at his word, and considered the promise as certain, he had confidence in faith knowing that God would not go back on the covenant he had made with him and promised to fulfill.

Verse 22 is the theme that Paul has truly been focusing on, the faith of Abraham being accounted as justification. This idea that man is made righteous before God through faith is necessary in understanding the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Paul highlights here the nature of true saving faith, it is a faith that believes and trusts in God during the very darkest of trials, not considering the impossible, but believing that God is willing and able to accomplish all he sets out to do. The greatest and ultimate act of crediting any of mankind with righteousness was the sacrificial death of Christ on the cross. By this sacrifice, God fulfilled the promise that he made to Abraham, he himself bore the responsibility of the sinfulness of man in that his Son was treated as one guilty though himself not being so, and put to death to suffer the wrath and penalty though himself having done nothing to deserve such punishment, bore that wrath and punishment himself so that we may be reconciled to God. Dealing with the sin that causes separation, so that we who were once dead can be made alive. Through this sacrifice, he accomplished his promise to Abraham, that he would be a father of many nations, through faith in believing of the one who would come and take away the sins of his people, so that all of those who are of the faith of Abraham can likewise be accounted as righteous.

Verse 23, “Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead, who was delivered up because of our offenses, and was raised because of our justification.” Abraham's story of being found right and just before God is the same story of everyone who believes. That covenant that God carried out with Abraham is the same covenant carried out with his people, with us who believe today. Any who believe in the God who promised, if they call to him he will answer in saving grace. The significance of faith in the believer is the same today, as it was with Abraham. Faith itself gains no merit, it has no value in itself, it is merely a belief that God is the redeemer of his people. One can not work up enough faith sort a speak to gain righteousness, faith is merely the sign, and seal of that covenant between God and his people. The story of Abraham and his promised Son Isaac, who was to be given as a sacrifice is the story of each of us who believe as well, we were likewise considered dead, as Isaac, but we are worthy of that punishment and death, but God in his grace and mercy sent another lamb, to take our place so that we may be found alive because of him.

We see this reoccurring theme here, of God providing a sacrificial lamb, there is the account of Isaac, bound, laying on the alter and Abraham with knife in hand about to slay his own son, knowing and believing in the promises that God gave that through Isaac he would be a father of many nations, knowing full well that God if he was so pleased, could raise him from the dead. But God provided a lamb in Isaac's place. Likewise we get this picture of the sacrificial lamb in the Passover supper, celebrating the night of redemption of Israel bought by the blood of a lamb sprinkled on the door post and lintel. And now, the one to whom these all pointed, as come and shed his blood upon the cross for the redemption of his people.

The covenant people of Christ, are those bound in faith, paid for by his blood, and these people of God are from all nations, creeds, and walks of life, all who believe both Jew and Gentile are the offspring of Abraham

There is no greater assurance, no greater hope, then to be sealed in the covenant of promise. Not having your justification be hinged upon your ability to be righteous and holy, but upon Christ's. And having his righteousness, and justification imputed to our account, apart from anything that we have done, making our salvation sure, and secure in him. And having this faith, which is a gift of God given to us, is a sign and seal of that promise, that we will one day be raised with him to the very presence of God. Sometimes I wonder, what it is we are doing here...any one of us could have stood up here this morning and given this message from Roman's, none of this is anything new to any of us. The answer to that question is simple, we gather together to rejoice and praise God for this work that he has done, we read his word, fellowship together, and worship together as a constant reminder of his grace and mercy toward us. We who were dead, have been made alive, and that is why we gather here each week to celebrate, to remember, to rejoice and praise God for what he has done for each of us who believe. This is the family reunion of the children of Abraham, that is why we are here this morning, that is why we read God's word and review over and over again his promises to us. We are a weak and forgetful people, and God has caused this reunion so that we may be reminded constantly of what he has done. The author of Hebrews wrote,, do not forsake the gathering of yourselves together, for we need this time together to strengthen and exhort one another in the faith. So that is why we are here, to worship and praise God, who generations passed promised Abraham that he would be the father of many nations, and here we are today, both Jews and Gentiles, from all backgrounds, each with our own story, but each story has a common theme, they all have Christ as the center point. We here this morning, are but a small gathering of the millions of Abraham's promised children, living together in the faith given to us by God, praising and worshiping him.