

IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF ABRAHAM

Romans 4:1-25

Lesson 4

Key Verse: 4:17 Summary

"As it is written: 'I have made you a father of many nations.' He is our father in the sight of God, in whom he believed--the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.'

Some people think that the story of Abraham in Genesis is just an old story, without any relevance to people today. But through the study of chapter 4 of Romans, we can see that Abraham's faith is the New Testament standard of faith. Abraham is the example of faith, and when we follow in his footsteps of faith, all of the blessings which God promised Abraham are ours. I want to know the Lord, who called Abraham, walked with him and blessed him.

The one thing God requires of all men is faith. This is not anything new. It has always been impossible to please God without faith. The Jews thought that being physical descendants of Abraham made them special--and they were proud of this. Paul affirmed the fact that God chose Abraham, and that Abraham's descendants receive God's special blessing. But the descendants of Abraham whom God blesses are not the physical descendants of Abraham--they are those who walk in the footsteps of the faith that Abraham had. This chapter describes Abraham's faith.

1. God who justifies the wicked (1-8)

Abraham's faith was credited to him as righteousness. This means that his sins were forgiven and he had a right relationship with God. The blessed or happy man is the man who knows that his sins are forgiven. Abraham and David shared a common faith. They both knew that they were sinners and each one believed in God who justifies the wicked (God who forgives sinners). When Abraham was full of doubt and despair and fear (Gen. 15), God's word of promise came to him. He believed that God would give him descendants as numerous as the stars of the sky, just as he promised, and he believed that God would give him one son of his own. God credited this faith to him as righteousness. Abraham was no longer full of doubt and despair. He had God's peace in his heart. He trusted God who justifies the wicked.

2. The sufficiency of faith alone (9-12)

Abraham did not depend on his own goodness, or on some ritual like circumcision or baptism. He simply believed God's word of promise. Paul says that those who walk in the footsteps of the faith that Abraham had before he was circumcised are the true children of Abraham, and the ones who are qualified to receive God's blessings. Paul

emphasizes the sufficiency of faith alone. The true people of God are those who have the faith of Abraham. Those who have no faith, even if they are circumcised (or baptized) cannot receive forgiveness and salvation. They cannot be children of God. The Gentiles who only have faith--nothing else--can be forgiven and can become God's holy people.

The Jews thought that it was circumcision that made them a special people. They despised the Gentiles. But Paul says that circumcision is only a sign of the work that God has already done in Abraham's heart by his grace, because of Abraham's faith. Abraham is the father of all who walk in his footsteps of faith--whether they are circumcised or not. Neither circumcision or baptism or any other ritual can take the place of faith. No good work can take the place of faith. We are saved only through faith, by God's grace.

3. God who wants to redeem the world (13-15)

God chose Abraham so that through him, he might bless the whole world. So God promised Abraham that he and his offspring would be heirs of the world. He didn't call Abraham because he felt sorry for him and wanted to solve his small "no son" problem. He called him to make him the father of many nations. God planned to send the Savior of the world through Abraham, and he kept that promise by sending Jesus. God is still working out his world redemptive purpose. He calls and blesses the descendants of Abraham so that they can take the gospel of God's love and salvation to all the people of the world. God did not save us just so that we might enjoy his peace and forgiveness and be happy in our own self-centered or family-centered lives. He saved us so that he might use us in his world mission purpose.

God is also a God of history. He works out his redemptive purpose in the context of history. So the promise is to Abraham and his offspring. God works through his promises. A promise must be believed in order to be claimed. Abraham believed that God would make him the father of many nations. He accepted God's world mission purpose. Then God himself solved Abraham's own personal problem. Those who want to first solve their personal problems, then do God's work will never do either. But those who accept God's great purpose and give their lives to God for his use will find that God solves their personal problems in his own wonderful way.

4. God who raises the dead (16-25)

Biblical faith is resurrection faith. God's children must believe that God is the Creator of the heavens and the earth, and the giver of life; and that God raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Abraham had this kind of faith. How could an old man with no children believe that he would be the father of many nations and that his descendants would inherit the world? He could not believe it if he only looked at himself and his own circumstances. But God promised him a son. That is a beginning. "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.' 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. Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God...(18-20) This faith was credited to him as righteousness. We who believe that Jesus died for our sins and that God raised him from the dead share in Abraham's faith. This is the faith which God "credits as righteousness."

what does it mean for me to have resurrection faith? It means that I believe that nothing is impossible for God who raised Jesus from the dead. He can raise up 561 sacrificial American shepherds who can love and serve with the word of God the young people of the "me" generation. He can use our loaves-and-fish-like one-to-one Bible studies to change the course of history and help directionless men and women find direction in Jesus.

Faith in the God of Abraham also means believing the God of history. I live and work believing God's promises, knowing that they most likely will not be fulfilled in my lifetime, but that God is faithful, and that he will fulfill them in his own right time. That is enough.

One Word: Praise the God of Abraham