

When Hope Seems Impossible

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[0:00] Welcome to this week's message from Faith Bible Church of Lake Charles.! We're excited to share a practical Bible-based teaching that we hope will encourage you and strengthen your faith.

! Thanks for listening. Now, here's today's message. Have you ever been in a situation where the math just didn't work?

You looked at the circumstances and you tried to figure everything out and it just didn't seem like anything was possible no matter how you calculated it. The answer always came back the same. Impossible! Maybe it was a financial situation and you looked at the bills and you looked at income and there's no way that it would seem to work. Maybe it was a relationship that deteriorated so badly that you couldn't ever imagine it being restored. Maybe it was a diagnosis the doctor gave you and the prognosis left very little room for optimism. Or maybe it was a dream that you've carried for years and it just never came true and it's something that in you has died and there was no hope left. I mean, we've all been there where hope has run out in a particular situation. And what makes it worse is we live in a culture that worships certainty. We want data.

[1:29] We want things to work out. We want something that we can verify. We want something that we can measure. And we want to predict outcomes before we step into something.

And that's difficult when we get a promise or get a command from God and it doesn't make sense humanly speaking. Rationally thinking, it just simply doesn't make sense. And the math just doesn't work.

So what do you do when God asks you to believe something that defies everything you can see or it goes against human reasoning? Well, that's exactly where we find Abraham in our text this morning.

And what the Apostle Paul tells us about Abraham's faith in these verses isn't just ancient history. I believe it's a blueprint for how we're supposed to trust God today, especially when something seems impossible.

So here's the main idea that I want us to hold on to this morning. And it's this. Real faith believes God's promise when the evidence says otherwise.

[2:46] And faith and that faith connects us to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And that's it. Real faith believes in God's promises.

No matter what other people say, no matter what our instinct or our inclination, real faith believes whatever God says, God can accomplish it and God can do.

And that kind of faith connects us to the same power that raised Jesus from the dead. Let's read our text this morning. It's in the book of Romans, chapter number 4, verses 18 through 25.

We'll go ahead and read that entire section. Then we'll come back and break it down verse by verse. Romans, chapter 4, beginning with verse 18. Speaking of Abraham, Now, verse 24 says, Now, it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him, but verse 24 says, 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 raised because of our justification.

[4:36] Before we dive in, a little bit of context this morning. We'll recap what's been going on so far in the book of Romans, especially in chapter number 4.

The apostle Paul has shown that no one, Jew or Gentile, can be made right with God by following the law or any religious right.

It's only through faith that we become right with God or that we can be declared righteous before God without any kinds of works.

Also, the law doesn't save anyone. All the law does is it exposes sin and it exposes where we fall short of God's standard of perfection.

And the law, the Old Testament law, shows us our need for a savior. Then Paul brings up exhibit A. He brings up Abraham because in the Jewish mind, Abraham was the father of the Jewish nation.

[5:35] He was the one that they looked to. He was the one that God had given the right of circumcision. And if anyone had credentials before God in the Jewish mind, it would have been Abraham.

And Paul already demonstrated in verses 1 through verse 17 of chapter number 4 that Abraham was declared righteous by faith.

14 years before circumcision and 430 years before the law. So what do we conclude? It's not by religious right and it's not by following the Ten Commandments or following the law that we go to heaven or that we're made right with God.

It's by faith. It's through faith alone by the grace of God. Now in verses 18 through 25 where we're going to be this morning, what the Apostle Paul is going to be doing is he's going to be zooming in on the nature of Abraham's faith.

What did it look like? How did it function? And most importantly, what does it have to do with us? And the answer is everything. So we're going to see what that means.

[6:47] We learned from Abraham, first of all, that we can believe God's promise even when the evidence says otherwise. Let me say that again. We can believe God's promise, whatever it is, even when the evidence says otherwise.

Verse 18 and verse 19. Verse 18 says, Who, contrary to hope, in hope believed, so that he became the father of many nations according to what was spoken, so shall your descendants be.

And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body already dead since he was about 100 years old and the deadness of Sarah's womb. I want you to notice that phrase at the beginning, contrary to hope, in hope believed.

Some translations say, against all hope, in hope believed. The Greek literally translated here is, beyond hope upon hope. And what it is, it's a paradox.

Excuse me. From a human standpoint, there was zero reason for Abraham to hope. And Paul gave some reasons why. When Abraham looked at all the figures and he did the math, it was impossible for God to follow through on that promise.

[8:00] But Abraham chose to anchor his hope, not in what he could see, but in what God could do. Because he believed in a God that had the power to do what he says, even if the math didn't work.

So Abraham believed, and we know that it was not just an intellectual ascent. It wasn't just in his mind, in his brain, that he believed the word that Paul used was a personal trust.

That trust that casts yourself upon something based upon someone else's word. He had the faith. He trusted God. And he put, in effect, all his eggs in that one basket.

Abraham didn't just think that God's promise was theoretically possible. Well, Abraham staged his life on it. And then when God says, I want you to leave. I want you to leave your family.

I want you to leave these people. I'm not going to tell you where to go, but I'll tell you when you get there. Now, that's kind of something that would be difficult for us to do.

[9:08] So if somebody came along and if God told you, you know, I want you to become a missionary, but I just want you to leave Lake Charles. I want you to leave Sulphur. I want you to leave. Okay, where do I go?

Don't worry. I'll lead you. I'll let you know when you get there. And that's the faith that Abraham had. He picked up stakes and he just went.

God said, you're going to become the father of many nations. You're going to have a child and it'll be your own. So what was he believing? He was believing that he would become the father of many nations.

What Paul does is he quotes Genesis chapter 15, verse 5. He will be the father of many nations. And there will be as the stars in the sky. There'll be as the sands of the sea.

Now, let's be honest about the situation. Look at verse 19. And not being weak in faith, he did not consider his own body already dead since he was about a hundred years old and the deadness of Sarah's womb.

[10:06] Paul doesn't sugarcoat it. Abraham was nearly a hundred years old. Sarah was 90. And from a reproductive standpoint, they were both dead. The Greek word for dead here means having been made dead or as good as dead.

And we get the English word necrosis from the word Paul used. So there was no way humanly possible that Abraham and Sarah could naturally have children.

But Abraham believed even though everything pointed to that, it would not work. So there was no life left in their bodies for producing children.

And what about Sarah's womb? Paul says, Abraham's body was dead reproductively because he was nearly a hundred years old. What does it say about Sarah?

Well, it said she was 90 and the deadness of Sarah's womb. He uses the same root word as he used for Abraham.

[11:12] Her womb wasn't just inactive. It was dead. She had been barren her entire life. So it wasn't a temporary problem. It was a permanent condition. So it would have taken a miracle for God's promises, for God's promise to be put into effect and for it to come true.

So here's the picture. God makes a promise to a man whose body can't deliver and a wife whose womb can't conceive.

And God says, I'm going to make you the father of many nations. Everything Abraham could see said, it's impossible.

There's no way at all. But here's the key. What does Paul say about Abraham's faith? If you look, it says he was not weak in faith when he considered the facts. His faith wasn't weak.

But I don't think Abraham ignored the reality. I think he faced it squarely. He looked and he said, I'm 100 years old.

[12:20] Sarah's 90. And she's been barren her entire life. We've never been able to have kids. And yet, I believe the promise of God. Abraham carefully observed the facts.

He wasn't in denial. He knew exactly how bleak the situation was. But, and I believe this is critical, he didn't let the evidence overrule the promise.

He still believed God. This is where so many of us get stuck sometimes, I believe. We think that faith sometimes means pretending the problem doesn't exist.

Or, like the proverbial ostrich sticking our head in the sand, it'll go away. And that is not real faith.

That's delusion. Real faith looks the impossible situation straight in the eye and says, I see you, but I trust the God who spoke. I know it's impossible, but I trust the God who does the impossible.

[13:20] And that's real faith. Now, that's the faith that the Apostle Paul says Abraham had. Warren Wiersbe puts it this way. He says, Abraham did not walk by sight. He walked by faith.

What God promises, He performs. So, if you haven't already, this is what I believe we can learn to do. Face your situation or your situation that looks impossible.

Look at it honestly, but don't let it define your faith. So, the question is, what's dead in your life right now? It could be a situation financially.

It could be a situation physically. It could be relationally. What is it? And then what we can do is not pretend it isn't real.

I'm not asking you to let the evidence. I'm asking you to not let the evidence have the final word.

The evidence matters, but don't let it overrule God's promise.

[14:25] Believe God's promise even when the evidence says otherwise.

That's real faith. And here's the next thing I believe we can learn from Abraham. Strengthen your faith by focusing on God's power, not on your problem.

If we focus our eyes on the one who can solve our problem. Do you remember Peter in the New Testament when they were in the boat and Jesus comes out walking on the water?

And Peter, usually the one, the first one to open his mouth, he says, Jesus, can I come to you? And Jesus said, sure. And for those of you who know the account of Peter and Jesus walking on the water, as when is, when does Peter have the problem?

Because he walks on the water for a period of time. Humanly impossible. But he believed Jesus. I mean, think about it. You're in the middle of the ocean, of a huge, huge lake.

Couldn't see land, probably. And Jesus comes walking to you. And he says, can I get on the boat and do the same thing, Jesus?

[15:37] That would be awesome. That would be cool. And Jesus says, come on. Now, what, in humanly speaking, in Peter's mind would have led him to believe that he wouldn't just sink the moment he jumped over the side of the boat?

He believed Jesus. And he was literally walking on the water. Can you imagine what it felt like to see the waves all around you?

And you know you were walking on liquid. But what happened? What happened to Peter eventually? He took his eyes off of Jesus. He took his eyes off of Jesus.

And the moment he stopped focusing on Jesus and started focusing on his situation, what happened? He began to sink in the water.

And then he had to swim. And I think the same thing is true with us. When we take our eyes off of God, when we take our eyes off of Jesus and start focusing on what's wrong with life, or what's wrong with that relationship, or what the situation says is it's impossible, then our faith begins to weaken.

[16:46] So strengthen your faith by focusing on God's power, not your problem. Look at verses 20 and 21 with me. He, Abraham, 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.

Paul says Abraham's faith didn't waver. The word Paul used here means to judge, judge between, to be divided in one mind. It's the idea of being in a mental courtroom, and you're weighing the evidence, and you're going back and forth.

Paul says Abraham didn't do that. He didn't let unbelief cause him to waver in his faith. He didn't put God's promise on trial, like so many of us do sometimes.

God says, do this. God says, don't do that. But yet we want to weigh the evidence before we really place all of our weight on that promise and believe and obey.

That's where many of us, that's where many people get it wrong. We want to have the confidence that it can be done before we step out in faith. Paul says Abraham didn't do that.

[18:00] Paul, he didn't put God's promise on trial. He just simply believed. He didn't say, well, you know, this looks impossible, and I'll weigh the evidence.

No, he didn't deny the problem, but he believed in the God who is greater than the problem. So what it says, Paul says Abraham was strengthened in faith.

That word empowered means to make strong. The word Paul used is related to the Greek word *dunamis*. And we get our English word dynamite from that. That's powerful.

And so he says his faith was strengthened. Now watch the connection. Verse 21 says, Abraham was fully convinced that what he had promised, that what God had promised, he was also able to perform.

Do you see what Paul's doing? Abraham's faith was empowered because he focused on God's power. Abraham's faith was empowered because he focused on God's power.

[19:07] His faith, Abraham's faith grew stronger by understanding how strong God is. That's the secret of faith. Faith isn't strong because of the person exercising it.

Well, let me see if I can conjure up. Let me see if I can whip up enough faith to believe in something. I think what this shows us is faith is not dependent upon us.

Faith is dependent upon the one in whom we place our faith. So God is the one that had the power. And when Abraham focused on God's power, it strengthened Abraham's faith.

Because there are many times we put our faith in the wrong thing. And it doesn't pan out like it should. So faith is strong because of the object of our faith.

When Abraham looked at himself, what did he see? When Abraham looked at his situation, what was evident? The impossibility of the situation, right? But when he looked at God, what did he see? [20:10] Unlimited power. The one who spoke the world, spoke the universe, spoke the galaxies into existence. The one who can take nothing and make something out of it.

That is what increased his faith. The more he looked at God, the stronger his faith became.

Kenneth Boa writes this, There was nothing in Abraham that gave him strong faith.

But there was everything in God that gave him strong faith. So our faith is strengthened by the object of our faith.

And what was the result? Verse 21 says, He was fully convinced. God can do it. My situation looks impossible. But God can do it. So he is fully convinced.

Means to be completely certain to carry full conviction. Abraham reached a place of settled confidence. God said he can do it.

[21:09] Not in himself, but in God's ability to deliver. And notice what Abraham did in all of this. We see that in verse number 20. What did he do?

Go back to verse 20. What did he do? Hmm? I can't hear you. He didn't waver, but what did he do?

He gave glory to God. Even in the midst of this situation, before, thank you, before it happened.

Before he saw the result, he worshiped God.

He gave God the glory. God, you can do it. Matter of fact, we've seen that in other places in Scripture. Where we pray for something.

And we thank God in advance for how he's going to answer. I think that's biblical. I think that is a great way to pray. Father, we pray for this.

[22:10] Fill in the blank. And Father, I thank you in advance for your answering this prayer. What does that say? What is that communicating to God? I trust you. I have complete faith in you.

My faith is not wavering. I'm fully convinced that you're going to answer this prayer. In your way, in your time, and for what is best in my life. And for what you see is the purpose of my life.

So he gave glory to God, even in the midst of all of this. Before the promise was fulfilled, before Isaac was born, before there was any evidence that God would come through, he worshiped God, gave him the glory.

And that's what real faith looks like. To thank God in advance for what he is going to do. It says, God, I don't know how you're going to do it. I just know you will. I don't know how this is going to come out.

I don't know how you're going to work things out. But I'm going to honor you in advance. And then verse 22 brings it home. And therefore, it was accounted to him for righteousness.

[23:15] That word accounted, same word. Paul's been using all the way through that accounting term to credit or to reckon to one's account. God looked at Abraham's faith and he credited God's righteousness to Abraham's account.

So it was Abraham's belief. It was Abraham's faith that allowed him to be made right with God. Not because Abraham was perfect. Not because Abraham never doubted.

Because I believe there were moments when Abraham wavered a little bit. But it was because he trusted the promise. He still said, I don't know how, but God, I'm trusting you to do it.

What does this teach us? Stop meditating on our problems and start meditating on God. Stop meditating on what's wrong with the situation and start focusing and meditating on the fact that God can do it.

See, where we fix our attention determines the strength of our faith. If we spend all of our time focused on the problems in life, and I'll be the first one to admit, I see a problem before I see anything else.

[24:22] Some of you, our kids will say, amen. That's just the way I'm wired. As a matter of fact, there is psychological evidence for that, that many of us are wired that way.

It's called negativity bias. Our brains are wired that way, for the most part, to keep us safe. Because we see things that could be potentially dangerous, and so we want to stay away from it.

But the problem with that is, if all we see are the problems, and we are not able to let those go, then that will affect our faith in God.

So we need to stop focusing on the problem and focusing on how God can be the solution. So this week, try something. Every time you catch yourself spiraling into worry, every time you see what's negative about something in your life, stop and redirect, and say out loud, God, I know this looks impossible, but I know you're able, and I'll trust you.

You're powerful. I know you keep your promises. I trust you. So strengthen your faith by focusing on God's power, not on your problems.

[25:38] Now comes the application. Let's look at verses 23 and 24. Now, it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him.

What is Paul saying here? I'm telling you this not just as a history lesson. It's not just a cool fact that you can use on trivia nights.

This is something. He says, now it was not written for his sake alone that it was imputed to him. But what does verse 24 say? But also for us.

I'm not telling you this just to give you a history lesson. I'm not telling you this just so that you know that it was Abraham's faith that allowed him to be made right with God.

He's saying the same holds true for you and me. But also for us. It shall be imputed. What? The righteousness of God. It shall be imputed to us who believe in him who raised our Lord from the dead.

[26:39] So let's connect our faith to the resurrection. Paul makes it crystal clear. Abraham's story wasn't just written for Abraham. It was written for the rest of us. The same principle that worked for Abraham works for us as well when it comes to faith, how to be right with God, and how to spend eternity in heaven.

But here's where it gets even better. Abraham believed in a God who could bring life from his body, which was dead reproductively.

Sarah's womb, which was dead reproductively, always had been. And the thing is, Abraham didn't have a Bible to go to. Abraham couldn't look back and say, you know, it says in Genesis, whatever, whatever, whatever, that God, you did this and you did that.

And so I'm trusting you because of this. Abraham didn't have what we have today to go to, to bolster his faith. See, he believed that God could do something in the future that would bring life to death.

But what we have is we can look backward and we can see the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We know that it's possible because God has already done it.

[27:56] We get to believe in a God who already raised Jesus from the dead. And this is resurrection language. It's the same word used throughout the New Testament to describe the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Now think about what it means. Abraham looked forward to something that hadn't happened yet. He believed God could bring life from death without ever seeing it. We get to look back at something that's already happened.

The resurrection of Jesus is a historical fact. It was verified by eyewitnesses, confirmed by centuries of testimony. There's more evidence from Scripture and from historical writers.

There's more evidence that Jesus lived and there's more evidence that Jesus was raised from the dead than evidence that some of other historical factors, historical people have ever lived.

So this is not something that we just take by faith that Jesus was raised from the dead. Abraham had to believe in the dark. We get to believe in the light of the empty tomb. And that's where our faith can come.

[29:00] And when we believe in God who raised Jesus, verse 24 says, righteousness shall be imputed to us. The same word, *logizomai*, that accounting term.

Righteousness will be credited to our account. Not because we earned it, not because we deserve it, but because we've trusted Christ. Now verse 25, who was delivered up because of our offenses

and was raised because of our justification.

I want us to see this is an important verse. Paul summarizes the gospel in one sentence. The word delivered up means to hand over, to deliver.

This echoes Isaiah 53, verse number 12, where the servant of the Lord is delivered for the transgressions of the people. Jesus was handed over to death by the Father's plan for our sins. The word offenses means trespasses, transgressions. Think about it. Every sin that you've ever committed, every way you've fallen short, every offense against God's holiness, Jesus was delivered up to death because of it.

[30:11] Him who knew no sin became sin for us. But that's only half the story. Paul adds, and was raised because of our justification.

The resurrection wasn't just proof that Jesus was alive. It was God's declaration that Jesus' payment for sin had been accepted.

He had provided what the Bible calls propitiation. It satisfied God's wrath against sin. Jesus Christ, an everlasting being in human form, paid an eternal payment for your sin and for mine.

So therefore, we're let off the hook. And all we must do is believe and trust what Jesus Christ did as being the full payment for our sin and follow Him. So we believe in His resurrection.

The debt was paid. Justice was satisfied. Jesus Christ's death dealt with our sin. Christ's resurrection secured our standing with God.

[31:15] See, that's why faith in the resurrection isn't optional. Romans 10, verse 9 says, If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God did what?

And believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. So belief in the resurrection is a non-negotiable core of our faith. We believe in a resurrected Jesus.

We don't believe in a Jesus that's still hanging on a cross. We believe in a Jesus that has been raised from the dead. And He is the one that's living today at the right hand of God, ever living to make intercession for you and for me.

That's the Christ in whom we believe. Not a dead one, not one in the grave, not one who's still hanging on a cross. There is an empty cross. And because of that, we can have hope.

And we can have hope eternal in Jesus Christ. That's it. Trust the promise. Believe that God raised Him from the dead. If you're already a believer, be reminded today that you're standing with Jesus.

[32:15] You're standing with God. It doesn't depend on your performance. It depends on the performance of Jesus Christ on the cross of Calvary. It depends on His resurrection. You're righteous because, not because we've gotten our act together, not because of anything else that we've done, but because our righteousness of God has been credited to our account because of our faith in Him.

So let's connect our faith to the resurrection and receive God's righteousness. Here's what I want us to see this morning as we conclude. Abraham's faith wasn't strong because Abraham was strong. Abraham's faith was strong because he believed in a strong God. He believed in the power of God. His faith was strong because God was strong. He looked at the one who could give life to the dead and call things to existence.

And he is the one who is trusted. So you and I are invited to that same faith. We have an even greater foundation. We have the completed word of God to look to see what God has done and how God can bring life from death and how God can save us.

So we don't have to look forward to something that hasn't happened. We can look back to the empty tomb. Jesus Christ has risen again. So think about this. What impossible situation are you facing today?

[33:33] God is strong. God is powerful. Believe God's promise even when the evidence says otherwise. Connect your faith to the risen Christ and receive the righteousness that only he can provide.

If you've never yet placed your faith and trust in Jesus Christ and what he did on the cross and that he was raised from the dead for the full payment of your sins, then this morning I encourage you to trust Jesus.

Trust Jesus alone. Not just his fire insurance, but trust him and follow him and obey him. And the Bible says that all who are in Christ are a new creation.

Old things are passed away. Behold, all things are becoming new. When we place our faith and trust in Jesus Christ, the Bible says our sins are separated from us, removed from us as far as the east is from the west.

The Bible also says, Though our sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow. It doesn't matter what we've done. I don't think there's probably anyone here who has a horrible life to look back on to say, you know, I've murdered, I've done this, I've done that.

[34:48] But you know, no matter what we've done, sin is still sin. God is able to take our past, wash it clean, and give us a brand new start.

That's what God offers. And for us who already know Christ as our Savior, we already have one who came to me this morning and said, Pastor, I've trusted Christ, and I'm trusting what Jesus did on the cross of Calvary for the full payment of my sin, but I've never yet been baptized.

I want to make it public that I'm following Jesus. Let's stop focusing on our problems and start focusing on Him.

Because the God who raised Jesus Christ from the dead is more than able to handle anything that you're facing. Let's pray. Our God this morning, our Father, we thank You for being a powerful God, a God who created everything, a God who created and placed the stars into the sky, who made everything out of nothing.

Father, help us strengthen our faith. Lord, help us in our unbelief. Father, we pray that this morning, whatever situation that each one finds themselves in, Lord, help each one of us to look to You and to look our problems square in the eye and say, I know it seems impossible, but I believe in a God who is stronger than You.

[36:22] I believe in a God who does the impossible. So, Father, we thank You for what You're going to do. Be with us today. And Lord, as we come back this evening, we also pray that You'd be with us throughout this week, that we would accomplish Your purpose in everything that we do.

We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. Thanks for joining us today. We hope this message encouraged you and gave you something to apply to your life this week.

If you'd like to learn more about Faith Bible Church or connect with us, visit our website at meetfaith.org. We'd love to hear from you. Have a great week, and we'll see you next time.

Let's go. Let's go.