

Trusting in the promises of God

Romans 4:18-21 - Center Church - 9/6/20

One of the most famous lines in all of sports history is Al Michael's rhetorical question towards the end of the 1980 Olympic hockey match between the USA and the USSR: "Do you believe in miracles?"

The 1980 winter Olympics were held in Lake Placid, New York, and the United States was hosting the Soviet Union during the medal round of the men's hockey tournament. The Soviet Union had won the gold medal in five of the six previous Winter Olympic Games, and 4 straight (16 years), and they were the heavy favorites to win once more. The Russian team consisted primarily of veteran players with significant experience in international play. By contrast, none of the players on the United States' team, led by head coach Herb Brooks, had any National Hockey League experience, and largely came from college hockey ranks.

The United States was the youngest team in the tournament and in U.S. national team history. Though the Soviet Union was a four-time defending gold medalist and heavily favored, the United States upset them and won 4–3, and went on to win the gold medal. This game was called 'The Miracle on Ice'.

They called it a miracle because it went against all odds. It was expected to go the other way. Everything that you could see told you that it was next to impossible for the USA to win. The entire world believed that, everyone did but Herb Brooks and those young players in the US locker room. But the so called 'impossible' happened on the ice that day in 1980.

Was it a miracle? No not at all. It was completely unpredicted, and totally unexpected. But a miracle is when the truly impossible happens. We are going to look at a miracle in our text today. We are going to see a man who was promised that the impossible, the truly impossible, was going to happen. However, his miracle was in the future. His miracle was promised to Him years before it came to pass. That man was Abraham, and that miracle was a son.

We are going to focus on how Abraham held onto this promise for decades before it came to pass. And how he trusted God who promised this miracle. Why this topic this morning? We all have what feel like impossible situations to deal with in our everyday lives. We need what feels like miracles. We need to see God move. We are living in a time that is full of trials, and challenges, and overall change in our lives coming in an unprecedented way, at an unprecedented pace. How do we trust God? How to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus in the midst of these storms. I believe that seeing how Abraham trusted God and the promise from God, is a good place to start.

Romans 4:18-21

18 In hope he believed against hope, that he should become the father of many nations, as he had been told, "So shall your offspring be." **19** He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness² of Sarah's womb. **20** No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, **21** fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.

Prop: God is trustworthy, He keeps His promises

1. Trusting the promise

2. Trusting the promise maker

I. Trusting the promise

- A. What was the promise God made with Abraham?
- B. The promise to Abraham was given in Genesis 17:5 and in is then repeated in it again in Romans 4:17 - *'I will make you the father of many nations.'* God was promising Abraham that he would have a biological son, his heir, and Abraham will become 'the father of many nations'.
- C. God had given Abraham other promises. God had called Abraham in Genesis 12 to leave his homeland and move to a new land that God would give to him. God promised that Abraham's descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the heavens. He was 75 years old when he began to respond to the call of God, leaving his homeland. Fulfillment of the promise would not begin until almost 25 years after the promise was made.
- D. Then we see in Genesis 17:17 that Abraham was told by God that the promise he had been waiting on for over two decades, was to be fulfilled in the coming year. Abraham was given a promise from God in Genesis 17, that he and Sarah would have a son. Both are in their old age and well past the child-bearing years. In verse 17 we see that Abraham will be 100 years old and Sarah 90 when the child is born. Their ages clearly make bearing a child together, not just unlikely, but a distinct impossibility.
- E. Sarah's had always been barren, she never conceived a child with Abraham, and now God is telling them that he will fulfill the promise given to Abram when he was 75 years old, about 25 years ago. In fact, the passage describes 'barrenness' of Sarah's womb, or a more accurate translation would be the 'deadness' of Sarah's womb.

- F. How did Abraham respond? We see in verse 18 that Abraham trusted God. He did not look to his own understanding of life, but he placed his hope and his trust in God. Not based on what he saw about himself, but based on what he knew about God. Not based on the situation or the circumstances, but on the one true circumstance, the power of God.
- G. *(18) In hope he believed against hope, that he would become the father of many nations, as he had been told.*
- H. *In hope* - looking to all that God has spoken to him. *He believed against hope* - all that he could see in considering his whole situation. Therefore, He did not base his hope on what he saw, but on what he did not see. He trusted the very word of God, expressed in His promise to Abraham.
- I. *In hope he believed against hope...* He placed his hope in the words that God told him... *'that he would become the Father of many nations,* rather than hope in what he knew to be true about himself and Sarah. For Abraham, nothing had yet connected to this promise, it was all yet to happen, he was yet to see the promise even begin with his first child. God made Abraham a promise. Therefore, Abraham heard the promise of God, and placed His hope in the promise of God, not in the review of his circumstances.
- a. "Faith is based on God's Word, not on the evidence of our senses. Abraham fully confronted the physical impossibility that he and Sarah would have children, but this did not keep him from believing that God would do exactly as he had promised." Moo
- J. In fact, Tim Keller in his commentary on Romans describes what could be the thinking behind Abraham's example:
- a. "This shows us that faith is not the absence of thinking, but rather a profound insistence on acting out of measured reflection instead of just reacting to circumstances.... We can imagine him reasoning it out: If there is a Creator God at all (and I know there is), he must have all power - there can be no limit to it. God knows Sarah and I are both old, but he's the one who hung the sun and moon and scattered the stars like sand with both hands! It is ridiculous to think that our age presents such a being with an obstacle! Faith is thinking about God, focusing on facts about him. Tim Keller
- K. Faith is focusing upon the facts about God, it is found by looking to God. Our faith must always have an object. The object of Abraham's faith was God. *In hope he believed against hope.* The passage goes on to give us more insight into Abraham's response to God.

- L. *(19) He did not weaken in faith when he considered his own body, which was as good as dead (since he was about a hundred years old), or when he considered the barrenness of Sarah's womb.*
- M. For Abraham, faith was not found in simply not processing the challenges he saw, in looking the other way. No, Abraham openly considered everything around him, and he still placed his hope on God, and therefore on the promise of God. He considered his own body and declared it *...as good as dead* (19), in regards to child bearing. But *he did not weaken in his faith.*
- N. He clearly considered the barrenness, or deadness, of Sarah's womb. They had never had children over their long marriage, and now Sarah was well past the age for women to bear children. Abraham was acknowledging these real difficulties, but choosing to trust the promise God had given to he and Sarah. God was promising the impossible, and Abraham was continuing to trust God. Paul, the Roman author then continues to cement this truth in verse 20...
- O. *(20a) No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God...*
- P. His hope against hope, even looking at their physical conditions, in comparison to the promise of God, unbelief did not make him waver, or second guess, or question, the promise he received from God. He was trusting God. Abraham believed, and looked beyond the circumstances to have a settled hoped on the promise and the ability of God.

II. The promise maker

- A. My Father was a hero to me. I never remember him making a promise to me as a boy growing up, or as an adult later in life, that he did not fulfill. If my Dad made a promise, to me or to anyone, I knew him, I could trust him, and so could you.
- B. Abraham knew God, the promise maker, and knew God was able to keep his promise. Therefore, Abraham could put his hope in this promise, because his faith was in the one making the promise, God, the promise maker. Abraham knew that God was able to do what he had promised.
- C. *(20,21) No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, **21** fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.*
- D. Even after 25 years of waiting for the fulfillment of the promise...*He did not waiver in unbelief.... but he grew strong in his faith.* How did he not waver? How did he

instead grow in his faith through this waiting and trusting? Because he wasn't looking to the circumstances, he was looking to the promise!

- E. *(20,21) He gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.*
- a. "This is what faith is: it is the strong assurance that God's promises are good and that he can and will perform them. And the harder the promises seem to fulfill, the more our faith gives glory to God." John Piper
- F. Here is an example of how Abraham's faith gives glory to God.
- a. In years past, Charlotte and I had responsibility to oversee and teach in Children's ministry. In one particular Sunday school class I was teaching the children about faith. I would have one of the children stand with eyes closed, and with me behind them, I would ask them to fall backwards. It took faith on their part to do fall backwards. Faith that I would truly catch them. Many of the children were having a hard time of it. Then I asked my own children, who were young at the time. They did not have a hesitation at all. They trusted me. Then with my daughter, I quietly placed one of my boys behind her and I went in front of her. Then I asked her to fall back. That was harder! But she did it, showing even a greater level of trust. Showing that she believed that I was trustworthy to my promise. They believed that I would do what I said. That is what is meant here where says that Abraham being fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised, gave glory to God.
- G. We are called to give glory to God with our lives. We do that as we take him at his word, as we trust him, we give him glory. Abraham began with God. He looked to the promise of God, and not his circumstances.
- H. Abraham trusted God, and we have so many more acts of God to go on than Abraham had, that give us even more reasons to trust God and give him glory. How many more acts of God have we read in the bible beyond Abraham's lifetime? What more do we have that allows us to know God, and therefore to trust God?
- a. The faithfulness of God to his promise in the Exodus, culminating in the parting of the Red Sea, God with Daniel and the Lion's Den; Shadrack, Meshack and Abednego and the fiery furnace, God with David fighting Goliath, saving Jonah with a whale, etc.
 - b. But the greatest demonstration of God being faithful to his promises was seen in the incarnation, the fulfillment of the promised messiah. This great promise was realized by mankind when Jesus came to earth.

- I. As we look to the promises has God made to his children, found in his word, do we trust each and every promise is true for us? Through Jesus, the offspring of Abraham, we have access to the promises of God. We can look to the '*precious and very great promises*' (2Peter 1:3) that has God given to us, because we are in Christ. Through knowing and believing the promises of God, they are a way to help us to look to Him, and trust him, rather than being overwhelmed by our circumstances.
 - a. Wearing by all that is being asked of you? Look to the promise of power - Phil 4:13 - *I can do all things through him who strengthens me.*
 - b. Feeling alone? Look to the promise of his active presence with you - Matt 28:20b - *And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.*
 - c. Fearful because you don't see enough change happening? Look to the promise of His power at work - Romans 8:28 - *And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.*
 - d. Fearful that you see too much change happening? Look to the promise that Jesus is in control of your life: John 16:33 - *"I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world."*
 - e. Unsure what to do with your growing fear of the future? Look to the promise of His care: 1Peter 5:7 - *... casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.*
 - f. Feeling weak and that your trouble is too becoming too great for you? Look to the promise of his strength - Psalm 46:1,2 - *God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.*
 - g. Concerned for the growing worldliness pressing in from the culture? Look to the promise of Christ in you - 1John 4:4 - *Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.*

- J. "Do not judge Christ's love by providences (circumstances) but by his promises" Thomas Wilcox
 - a. Illustration - no radio disclaimer for those who are Christians.

- K. Hymn by Kelso Carter in 1886 - Vs2. - "Standing on the promises that cannot fail, when the howling winds of doubt and fear assail, By the living word of God I shall prevail, standing on the promises of God.

III. Conclusion

- A. Are we like Abraham and Sarah?
 - a. *Romans 4:20,21 - 20 No unbelief made him waver concerning the promise of God, but he grew strong in his faith as he gave glory to God, fully convinced that God was able to do what he had promised.*
 - b. *Hebrews 11:11 - By faith Sarah herself received power to conceive, even when she was past the age, since she considered him faithful who had promised.*
 - c. Do we consider him faithful who had promised?
- B. *2Corinthians 1:20 - 20 For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory.*
- C. Church, let us live in the good of the promises of God given to each and every believer, remembering that we have a final promise coming. Jesus is coming back for us to take us home. Let us live looking forward to this promise, and let the reality of this coming promise shape how we live out our lives, even during these times.