

All Roads Lead Here: Father Abraham
By Jason Huff
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Psalm 117; Luke 18:9-14; Romans 4:13-25

Friends, our final Scripture reading today is Romans 4:13-25. May God speak to our hearts through the reading of His holy Word. “It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless, because law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression. Therefore, the promise comes by faith, so that it may be by grace and may be guaranteed to all Abraham's offspring -- not only to those who are of the law but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham. He is the father of us all. 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. 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, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. This is why "it was credited to him as righteousness." The words "it was credited to him" were written not for him alone, but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness -- for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification.”

When I was young, we learned a camp song called “Father Abraham” that went something like this – “Father Abraham had many sons, many sons had Father Abraham, I am one of them and so are you, so let’s all praise the Lord.” Then you did motions with your right arm, then your left arm, then your feet – it was like the biblical “Hokey Pokey.” Did you ever learn that song? It was really silly, but with a simple tune, I can sing it thirty plus years later.

In our study of Romans last week, Paul referenced David and Abraham from Jewish history. Through them, we know salvation in the Old Testament era was through faith, not by works. They are saved by Jesus in the same way we are. We also learned we can live joyfully knowing we are the spiritual children of Abraham. We inherit the promises God made to Abraham because believers in Jesus Christ follow in Abraham’s footsteps. Today, Paul takes us deeper into the story of Abraham – how he wasn’t saved by God’s law but by his faith in God.

As Paul puts it, “It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith. For if those who live by law are heirs, faith has no value and the promise is worthless, because law brings wrath. And where there is no law there is no transgression.” Now we know that works can’t save you. But Paul says it differently this week. The promise of God to Abraham was not conditional; Abraham didn’t work to get the promise. God didn’t say, “Obey and I will bless you.” Instead, God said, “I will bless you; believe me.” See the difference? Abraham’s faith is credited to him as righteousness because he trusted God would do what He said.

Why is the law not our means of salvation? Remember that God didn't give Abraham the law. It didn't exist at that point. Abraham couldn't keep it, and he couldn't break it. Long before the Law came, Abraham had faith and God called him righteous. So here's the point to think about today: *we aren't rewarded for keeping any law – we are only punished for breaking it.* Paul has already established in Romans that no one can keep every provision of the Old Testament law. But what if you could? Let's just say for a minute that you were able to keep every law given to the Israelites, both the letter and the spirit of the law. We believe that Jesus did this, so let's apply it to ourselves. Let's say it were possible. What then?

Here's the best way to put it: we are expected to keep the law. They aren't suggestions. How often do you get citations from a police officer for keeping the law? Has an officer ever pulled you over and said, "Hey, Mrs. Cascio, I want to give you a gold medal for driving. You stayed in your lane, you used your turn signal when you wanted to merge, you stayed two miles under the speed limit – here's your reward!" It's never happened, right?

It's never going to happen, either. Why not? Because you're expected to keep the law! Nobody's ever going to say, "You didn't murder anyone today? Good job!" Nobody's ever going to say, "I'm so proud of you not shoplifting on our shopping trip." Now if you're a kleptomaniac and you're trying not to steal stuff, your mom might say it; your therapist might say it. But no law enforcement officer is going to reward you for not breaking the law! The law only brings wrath. The law brings punishment on lawbreakers. The law is the standard we are expected to keep. And unlike human law, with God, we never get away with breaking the speed limit because there's no officers on our road. Every time we break God's law, we get caught.

You might think, "I got a perfect attendance award once for keeping the law of my school, right?" Well, why do people get perfect attendance awards? It's because we know people get sick; they oversleep, run late, get into car wrecks, go on vacation, all sorts of things. The law is not that you have to be there every day. The law your school or work establishes says you're in trouble if you miss a certain number of days – you'll get fired or sent to detention or whatever. Perfect attendance is above and beyond expectations.

That's what Jesus did on the cross; He went above and beyond the expectations of the Law. Jesus perfectly fulfilled the Old Testament law; He never sinned; He never displeased His Father. But Jesus could be our sacrifice because He not only never broke the law, He also completely fulfilled the Father's will for His life. Because Jesus lived a perfect life, He didn't have to die. He died for our sins, not His own. He obeyed His Father beyond the law. He obeyed His Father even to becoming the sacrifice for us. That's why He saves all believers from their sins – because He went beyond the Law's requirements. If He had obeyed the Law and nothing more, He could have saved just Himself. Obeying the Law is expected. But doing the Father's will beyond the Law made Jesus our perfect sacrifice and our Redeemer.

The promise we have in Jesus comes by faith in Him. And we can rely on the promise because the promise comes from God's grace. That's the beauty of it. Because if something depends on me, it's pretty much guaranteed to fail. If salvation is based on works, I won't get it. My works aren't good enough. I break the spirit of God's law every day in my thoughts, somehow. But the promise is not because of my goodness but God's goodness – His grace.

And I love that word – “guaranteed.” Because God is God, because He has infinite power and mercy and love and might, what He says *will happen*. Our guarantees are conditional, aren’t they? Return within 30 days. Satisfaction guaranteed or your money back – except the money you spent on shipping and handling and then a restock fee. A year and a day? It’s out of warranty. That part? Oh, that’s not covered. Fixing THAT will be extra. Ever check your warranty and find out it’s cheaper to buy another one new than to get the one you have fixed? People don’t stand by their word or their products. Earthly guarantees rarely mean anything.

With God, the guarantee matters. Maybe you wonder if you really are saved. Well, do you believe in Jesus, the real Jesus who challenges you and calls you to be His follower, who pokes you in hard places and makes you change? Do you want to be more like Him each day? Do you have any genuine affection for Him? Then guess what – God is guaranteed to fulfill His promise! He’s given you faith, and He will give you heaven; He will resurrect you and bring you into His Kingdom. He is reliable. It is a guarantee.

Our God, Abraham’s God, is unique that way. He’s unique in other ways, too. Paul calls Him “the God who gives life to the dead and calls things that are not as though they were.” As the song we sometimes sing says, Jesus makes the impossible possible. Our God is not limited by space and time. He’s not limited by death. He’s not limited by what supposedly cannot be. He made our natural world. When He says so, the rules that we think of as set in stone in nature are no longer so firm. He has control over every atom of the universe, so why should we think that issues like raising someone from the dead is such a big deal for Him? He has that power.

Now, Abraham became the father of all believers through his faith in God. Abraham had an incredibly audacious faith, but also a reasonable faith. We want to follow in his example, which means both parts of his faith need to be a part of our faith.

First, audacious faith. There is no doubt that Abraham’s faith was a bold faith, a brave faith. Paul tells us why. When God made the promise to Abraham that he would become the father of a great nation, that his descendants would be given the land of Canaan, he was 75 years old, and Sarah was 65. Both of them are well past the age to typically have children.

Think about it. With the miracles of modern medicine, we know of women in their late 40s, even maybe 50, who have had children with in-vitro fertilization and things like that. But they spend hundreds of hours and thousands upon thousands of dollars on it, and there are no guarantees. Sarah has no special fertility treatments; she’s 65, at least twenty years past the latest childbearing age in the era. But that’s not the kicker. For twenty-five years, Abraham holds onto this promise. They don’t have Isaac until he is 100 and Sarah is 90.

He’s as good as dead. A literal translation is that Abraham was at that moment “bodily dying death.” And Sarah’s womb is dead. There are two deaths to overcome here for them to have a child. But God credited righteousness to Abraham because, as Paul says, “Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.”

So here's a takehome thought for today: *if you have faith in Jesus Christ, Abraham's audacious faith is your birthright.* He is your father in faith, and you can have the same kind of faith. That means that you can trust in the Lord for things the world thinks are impossible. Abraham's faith is faith in the miraculous, astonishing, extraordinary power of God to do what we absolutely cannot do.

God made promises to believers – He will redeem you, restore you, and make you whole. Believe in those promises. If there is a sin or addiction in your life that you struggle with and it seems God hasn't done anything about it, check what your faith is about it. God has promised us that we are dead to sin and alive to Christ; the chains of sin have been broken; we are free to live obedient lives. But that requires both the ongoing work of God and the trust that God really has done it. We have no way to kill sin without Christ; we have no way to overcome addictions without Him. But you can be free. God has promised it has happened; believe the promise.

What are the things you've told God you could never do for Him? Never tell your friend about your faith? Never go on a mission trip? Never move? Never step out of your comfort zone? Why not? The audacious faith of Abraham is a part of your spiritual DNA now. You can do these things and far more if God wills it. God makes what seemed impossible possible. We wouldn't have started CrossWay if we didn't believe in a God who could do amazing things, who could raise a live church out of a dying one.

Why are there less than 30 of us here? Maybe it's because God wanted to do things through us that would be easy for 300 people but impossible for 30. Back before kings ruled Israel, the nation was oppressed, and God called judges to lead His people to victory over their enemies. One of them was Gideon. He had Gideon send home nearly 32,000 men, and with 300 Israelites God routed the enemy forces. God did it to show that He gave them the victory – their military might and leadership didn't win the battle. God made the impossible possible.

A church our size shouldn't be able to collect 100 Christmas Child boxes...but we did. A church our size shouldn't have a youth group and serve inner-city Detroit regularly and send folks on mission trips and fund Compassion children, but we do. How? I don't know. I don't know how we've done it except through God's hand. So don't be discouraged.

We're sending out 5,000 postcards inviting people for Easter; we're handing out 400 Easter eggs and brochures and pens next weekend. We are inviting people to know the love of Jesus through CrossWay. Are those things going to bring anyone else in? I don't know. But we have the faith to put ourselves out there and say, "We are here to serve you and love you in Jesus' name." If no one comes, will it have been a waste? No, because putting our faith in God into action is never a waste. Who knows what will come of it? We plant the seeds; God provides the growth. So we trust Him in faith.

Let's not have a faith that uses God as a backup plan or a second thought. So often we pray for people's health as a kind of insurance, a hope that God is listening and in case the doctors don't get it right, He might intervene. That's not audacious faith. Audacious faith brings the sick before God knowing that any healing that happens ultimately comes from His hand.

But audacious faith goes beyond that and prays for people to come to faith in Jesus and become disciples. Audacious faith prays that CrossWay would bless this community in amazing ways we can't yet see. Audacious faith prays that God grant us continual victory over sin. It's standing on the promises God has given us...promises impossible for us to accomplish ourselves.

But here's the thing – you are not taking a leap in the dark in faith. It is not a blind faith. Our Scripture says, “Against all hope, Abraham *in hope* believed.” He believed in the hope of God. And He won't fail us. So here's our final take-home thought: *if you have faith in Jesus Christ, Abraham's reasonable faith is your birthright.*

It might be weird to say that Abraham hoped against hope for the impossible, and yet it was reasonable. But that's absolutely the case. Why? Because what is impossible for God? If God says something will happen, it will happen. If the creator of all things is involved, impossible is no longer in our vocabulary. Just because something has not yet happened does not mean it cannot happen. And if God says it will happen, which is more trustworthy? Something that hasn't happened yet, or the God who says it will?

Just this week, I read an article about the perfect alignment of our planets. The planets in our solar system shield us from meteors. If the other planets didn't exist and move in the precise ways they do around the sun, the Earth would get bombarded with 2000 times more meteors than it does now. All life would have been destroyed long before our time. How is it that everything in the universe works in such a way to support life here? Even with the incredible size of the universe, the chances of life happening anywhere in the universe by chance are so small as to be zero? Everything in creation points to a creator.

And that Creator has a name. That Creator revealed Himself to us. He revealed Himself to Abraham. It is not blind faith to believe in the God who has time and again showed Himself and His ways to us. The world doesn't believe in Him because the world loves its pleasures that have blinded them. But He has not only made Himself known, the Son came to Earth so we might always know Him. Our audacious faith is reasonable; it makes sense. It is reasonable to believe and trust in a God who has shown up again and again in human history. If God has revealed Himself to so many people over so much time, if He has shown us the truths of our sin and His forgiveness that make complete sense of our situation, if God's fingerprints are all over creation, it's reasonable to believe. Trusting in God makes a lot of sense.

Our special music today talks about the edge of reason in our faith. If you don't believe, all this seems like madness. To think we have something to do with long-dead Abraham is crazy. But for those who God has granted faith, for those who know His forgiveness, God is the one thing that makes sense of a sensesless world. Believe the impossible can happen because you trust in God, for whom nothing is impossible.

Father Abraham had many sons – and I am one of them, and so are you. Let's rejoice in the faith God has given us. We are not saved by following the Law, our good deeds, or our wise thoughts. We are saved by faith alone in Christ alone – a faith that is reasonable because our God is extraordinary, and a faith that is audacious because it knows to trust in God who can make a way through every circumstance.