

Sonoraville Baptist Church
Sunday, May 22, 2011 – 11:00 AM
Rev. Steve Skates, Pastor

Faith Beyond Sight - Romans: 4:16-25

Introduction: We live in an age of skeptics. If you don't believe it, just tell someone something they haven't heard, and you'll hear a response like "Really?" "I don't believe it!" "You're kidding me!" or "Get outta town!"

From where does that skepticism come? I believe it's from all the negative experiences people have. This weekend was one of those. Mr. Camping's prediction of the world's demise was met with a lot of skepticism because we've all heard it before and it didn't come true then, so why would we want to believe him this time?

No, to be sure, everyone goes through a certain amount of negativity in their lives, but some seem to have more than others. Some are constantly pushed down, held down, and kept down by them. And not helping things is the fact that the world has trained us to look at things in a cynical way. Because we've been disappointed so many times, we're tempted to believe in nothing. It's a trained response.

The fact that a lot of people don't have faith, I believe, is a result of the negative experiences Satan throws at us. Satan would like nothing better than to keep God's people locked in an attitude of negativity. He wants us to believe in lies. And we'll believe in lies more than we believe the truth. One man put it this way. He said "*Most people would rather climb a hundred-foot pole and believe a lie than stand on the ground and believe the truth.*" That's about the size of it. We tend to believe what we want to believe and not believe what we don't want to believe. And far too often that's based on both our limited knowledge and what we're personally experiencing and how we feel about it.

But the Bible teaches us that faith is the key to everything. So, how do we develop faith? How do we have faith to believe when the situation looks impossible? How do we learn to walk by faith and not by sight? Let's talk about that kind of faith this morning – a faith that goes beyond sight. Our text is taken from Romans 4:vs. 16-25. First, let's read vs. 16 & 17 and notice:

1. The Basis for Faith (16-17)

*16 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. 17 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. **Romans 4:16-17 (NIV)***

Vs. 17 says, in talking about Abraham's faith, says that He believed in God. So our faith has a solid foundation. Some people may try to teach you to just have faith in faith itself, but listen - faith has to have a basis founded in truth. Faith is not convincing ourselves of something that is **not** true. Faith is believing in something that **is** true. Faith is not faith in faith alone. The only true basis for faith is God because God is truth!

Let me illustrate: The many plane crashes that have occurred over the past few years, has caused some to either quit flying altogether or to fly with more fear and less faith in the reliability of airplanes. But it is not what you feel or fear that determines whether you crash. The people in those planes that eventually crashed could have boarded those planes with no doubts in their minds about the reliability of the airplane. Every person on that flight could have had absolute faith that they would arrive safely at their destination. But the reliability of the airplane **did not** depend upon their faith in it. It depended upon the plane itself and other factors.

On the other hand, you could board a plane with a pounding heart and queasy stomach, believing in your mind that it was going to crash, and still arrive safely at your destination. Again, the reliability of the plane does not depend upon your lack of faith. It depends upon the plane itself. Faith must have a reliable basis upon which it is founded.

When Abraham believed, he did not simply believe in the promise that God had given to him. Abraham's basis for faith was in God Himself. God must be the object of our faith. He is the foundation and the basis for faith. Our faith rests upon the reliability of God, not upon our feelings. **III:** How do you feel about the Bible – Trustworthy or not?

We only put our faith in God's Word because of God. Faith in God's Word is having faith in God, who stands

behind His Word. Our words are unreliable because we are so are unreliable. But God's Word is reliable because God stands behind it. It is His Word. It has authority because He is the ultimate authority in the Universe. So, when we choose to believe God's Word, we are choosing to believe in the God who stands behind His Word. This is what Abraham did. So, we've established the basis of faith, next, I want to point out:

2. The **Barriers to Faith (18-20a)**

18 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." 19 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. 20 Yet he did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God... **Romans 4:18-20a (NIV)**

There are always barriers to faith. Abraham faced them and so will we. Our text mentions two: Circumstances and Possibilities.

The first barrier that we all face is our **circumstances**. Sometimes, we can look at our lives and wonder how anything can be done about our situation. This is what Abraham did.

God had made a promise to Abraham that he would become the father of many nations. But Abraham was 99 years old when God reaffirmed His promise to him. Sarah, was about 90 years old. How could any person have a child that late in life?

In the *Guinness Book of World Records*. It lists the world's record for the oldest woman giving birth at the age of 57. But the *Guinness Book of World Records* is wrong! Sarah would beat that record by a comfortable margin.

The Bible says that when Sarah learned about her pregnancy, she laughed. She thought that this was the most hilarious thing she had ever heard.

But Abraham didn't deny his circumstances. The Bible says that he faced the fact that his body was as good as dead - and that Sarah's womb was barren. This is an important truth. Faith is acknowledging our circumstances, but believing God anyway! *"OK, this looks bad...maybe impossible. But God, I believe in YOU!"* Sometimes that's hard to do. But believe in God was precisely what God challenged both Abraham and Sarah to do.

The second barrier is the **possibilities**. When our circumstances look bleak, it is hard to believe in the possibility that anything good can happen. In Abraham's case, I'm sure it was hard for him to believe in God's promise. It seemed too good to be true. But in light of the staggering possibilities of the promise it says in verse 19 that, *"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."* In other words, he believed God anyway. Abraham had faith that God was able to do what He said He would.

Robert Wilson was one of the great professors at Princeton Theological Seminary. One of his students had been invited to preach there twelve years after his graduation. Old Dr. Wilson came in and sat down near the front. At the close of the meeting the old professor came up to his former student, extended his hand, and said, *"I am glad that you are a big-godder. When my boys come back, I come to see if they are big-godders or little-godders, and then I know what their ministry will be."* His former student asked him to explain, and he replied, *"Well, some men have a little god and they are always in trouble with him. He can't do any miracles. He can't take care of the inspiration and transmission of the Scripture to us. He doesn't intervene on behalf of his people. They have a little-god and I call them little-godders. Then, there are those who have a great God. He speaks and it is done. He commands and it stands fast. He knows how to show himself strong on behalf of them who fear Him. You have a great God; and He will bless your ministry."*

If we have faith in a big God it makes a big difference. Our circumstances may seem impossible, but the possibilities of God make them possible. You see, the question is not, *"How big is your faith?"* The real question is, *"How big is your God?"*

So, we've established the basis of faith and we've identified some barriers to faith. Next, let's talk about:

3. The **Benefits of Faith (20b-22)**

20 ...but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, 21 being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised. 22 This is why "it was credited to him as righteousness." **Romans 4:20b-22 (NIV)**

There are several benefits of faith for us. Verse 20 says that Abraham's faith *"was strengthened."* A benefit of faith is that grows us toward maturity. It **strengthens** us. As you exercise your muscles, they grow stronger.

This was what I had to do recently as I was given a set of exercises to do in order to get my shoulder in shape following my surgery. The same is true for our faith. Exercise it, and it grows and grows.

Our text also says that in this, Abraham “*gave glory to God.*” Another benefit is that faith **glorifies God’s greatness**. By trusting in God we visibly express our confidence in Him.

Verse 21 also says that Abraham was “*fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised.*” That’s what faith does for us. It **establishes** us. The more we trust Him, the more trust we have in Him because we learn that He is absolutely 100%, iron-clad reliable.

But also, our faith **enables** us. It gives us possession of the promise. Verse 22 says that because of Abraham’s faith, God declared him to be righteous. Had he not exercised his faith in God, he would not have been able to receive God’s righteousness and God’s promise. Otherwise, God would have given the blessing to someone else. Finally, I want you to see that we too can be:

4. The Beneficiaries of Faith (23-25)

23 The words “it was credited to him” were written not for him alone, 24 but also for us, to whom God will credit righteousness --for us who believe in him who raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. 25 He was delivered over to death for our sins and was raised to life for our justification. Romans 4:23-25 (NIV)

The beneficiaries of faith are those who benefit from faith. Abraham benefited, but we can benefit as well. You see, according to vs. 23-24, what was written wasn’t written for Abraham alone, “*but also for us*” – meaning, for all who believe in Him. Those who benefit from faith are those who exercise faith, and we’ll never benefit from faith until we start exercising our faith.

If we are willing to believe in God, we’ll be the beneficiaries. So we must ask ourselves what we’re going to believe and in whom we’re going to believe. If we’re content to look at our circumstances, or our budget, or our community, or our world and say there’s no use, nothing can be done, then we’ll just sit here as a people and waste away.

Of course, the alternative is to believe God, and put our faith in Him. I’m talking about being a big-godder. I’m talking about believing that God can do the impossible. If he can give life back to a dead body, surely, He can cause a church to come alive.

So how about it Church? Are we going to talk the talk or walk the walk? Are we going to be little godders or big-godders? Are we going to live by sight or by faith? Let’s learn to live by faith that goes beyond what we can see! **Prayer**