

Sunday, Aug.30, 2009

Living Hope EFC

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"Faith in God's Promises – Sees the Invisible, Believers the Incredible and Receives the Impossible: Heaven!" Rom.4:17-25

ILLUS: Moody (1837-99) and woman (Moody spoke to 100 million people)

After delivering a message, a woman who was a busy church worker, came to talk to Moody. She was upset! "Do you mean to tell me that I, an educated woman, taught from childhood in good ways, and all my life interested in the church and doing good, must enter heaven the same way as the worst criminals of our day?"

"No Madam," Moody said. "I don't meant to tell you that at all. God does! He says everyone who would enter heaven, no matter how good they think they are, or how well educated, or zealous in good works, must be born again!" -Lee Tan, 5283

We will never be righteous enough by our own good works to be considered as a moral equal – with God. **Gal.3:10**. It is impossible.

But God will give us righteousness as a free gift, by faith in Jesus Christ.

This is the remarkable declaration of the book of Romans!

- In Rom.1:18-3:20 Paul has shown that man is absolutely incapable of entering heaven on the basis of personal achievements that he can offer God, so God can say – "You are righteous, come in." -**3:19-20**
- God's method of making man righteous is "**by faith, freely,**" **3:22,24**.
- "**Freely:**" **V.24**. As a GIFT! This is the **ONLY** alternative to "works."

POINT: What God gives "freely" can be given to us as a gift, only because the cost has already been paid through Jesus Christ's death.

- Sin is a capital offense!

Definition: Justification is a legal declaration, a public acknowledgement on the part of God, that the believer stands credited with Christ's righteousness.

1- All our sins are forgiven, removed, gone! Psalm 103.

2- God puts Christ's r'ness on our record in place of our sinfulness.

3- The Result: We have eternal life. Rom.6:23

In 4:1-8: Paul then presents two great examples, proving that God has **always** counted people righteous-by faith.

- The reason Abraham is so important to Paul's argument – is that he is the greatest man in all Jewish (and perhaps Gentile) history – and he is declared righteous by God, by faith, **not** on the basis of his works!
- Abraham is the one man specifically called r'ous, & it was **by faith**.

Key Concept: Logizomai. God actually *transfers* to our spiritual account divinely valued righteousness when we trust what He says about Christ.

- **2 Cor.5:21** –Our sins were credited to Christ, though He was r'ous.
 - His righteousness is credited to us, though we are sinners.
- As really as He bore our sins, we now have His righteousness.
- Man has sin and he is never treated (credited) as having it.
- Man has no righteousness of his own, and is treated as righteous.

ILLUS: If someone puts \$1000 in my bank account, the bank doesn't care "who," just that it is legitimate currency. Christ gives us *His* right'ness!

1 – God makes men righteous exactly opposite our natural thinking 4:5.

- Rom.4:5 "God justifies the **UNGODLY**."

2 – Grace is not dispensed on the basis of divine ordinance: **4:9-12**

3 – Grace operates on the basis of what God does for man, not what man does for God: **4:13-17**. – **FAITH** is our only condition.

- ***This sets Christianity apart from all other religions!***

IF our FAITH is so important, what kind of faith does God credit r'ness?

1- Faith Believes God's promises against all human odds! 4:17-18

4:17 Abraham believed in God – the God of the incredible/ impossible.

4:18 – He believed God's *specific* promise... "against all human hope!"

- **Faith is always grounded in God's objective Word/ Promises.**
- What were the promises Abraham believed?

A look at the quality of faith in Abraham's life:

1- Gen.12:1-3. At age 75 God made colossal promises to Abraham.

- **Q:** How many people make up "a great nation?" ***How many kids did Abram have?*** In fact- he faced a real dilemma:**11:30** "**barren**, sterile"
- **God is promising** (1) Life from dead. (2) Calling what is not, as if it is.
- God is making a promise to a man 75 years old – that he will be the father of a great nation. In other words, he was going to bring Sara's dead womb back to life.

2- Gen.13:14-17. God restates & confirms his original promise.

3- Gen.15:1-6. God tells him a third time, even more emphatically!

- Why do you think God keeps telling him this?

Q: How many times does God have to tell you something, before you'll believe Him? Especially when it seems too good to be true & is impossible

- **CONTEXT:** Abraham is now about **85 years old!** 15 years have passed since God's original promise. How many kids does he have?
- Abraham thinks one of his servants will be his heir, 15:3.
- **Humanly speaking** – it is absurd to think he & Sara will have a son.
- What "hope" is there?

ILLUS: It is cruel to keep telling a sterile couple they will have kids!

- Yet God does just this! And Abraham believes Him – **15:6.**

4- Gen.17:1- Abraham is 99 years old, Sara 89 – and still barren!

- God intensifies His promises – **vs.2-8:** *nations, kings, land, forever!*

Vs.15-16: "And about Sara..." "Sara? She is hopeless!"

THINK ABOUT IT!

- Sara gave up. She tried other ways to fulfill God's promise, **ch.16.**
- What did Abraham have to go on? What hope? What evidence?
- With the passing of 25 years, tremendous changes have taken place. More wrinkles. Weakness. Less & less able to make anything happen

Q: How would you like to wait 25 years... to go to the mission field? To graduate from college? To have a child? To marry? To plant a church?

- Would we not give up – along the way. "God has forgotten me."

Q: Had God forgotten Abraham, Sara? **Why did He wait till impossible?**

Vs.17-19. "You will name him **laughter!**" **18:14**

- What do you think Abr & Sara did every time they looked at Isaac?

POINT: Abraham's faith believed the promise of God, against all hope!

- NOTE – His was not a perfect faith, flawless, without it's doubts...
- Abraham was not some superhuman man, different from the rest.
- But it was a faith that believed God's promise!

What has God promised you? That humanly seems impossible?

- John 3:16. Rom.8:28. Matt.11:28-29. Matt.28:19-20.
- **Is anything too hard for God?**

2- Faith faces human inability but trusts in God's ability! 4:19-21.

- Faith does not pretend or deny human inability or impossibility.
- It faces human weakness but *chooses* to focus on God's capacity!

4:19 - Abraham faced the facts of Sara's dead womb, but ultimately saw this as irrelevant in the context of God's promises!

- What would have happened if each year Abraham would have taken inventory of the possibilities of this thing happening?
- More lines. Fewer possibilities.= I give up. It's not going to happen.

Q: Isn't this our natural tendency?

- God makes us a promise... We find ourselves in a difficult marriage. We try to plant a church. Want to go the mission field??
- Years pass – and little to nothing happens. Things look impossible.
- We get discouraged. "Lord, I'm getting tired." We check out our brains, bodies, resources... "I quit." = "Lord, you can't do it."
- **THIS IS WHAT ABRAHAM DID NOT DO!**

4:20 - He faced the human impossibilities in the context of God's promises, and didn't waiver in unbelief! =He wasn't double-minded.

- He didn't use a "probability index" to determine whether God could be trusted or whether they would have a baby!
- FAITH – is not the rating of probabilities! Q is: "Has God said it?"
 - God purposefully let human possibility flicker and die.
- **FAITH IS – my total inability in the presence of God's total ability.**
- FAITH does not require perfect understanding – how God will do it.
 - Abraham had very little info, few encounters with God.
 - The essence of faith is not seeing! -**Heb.11:6**
- FAITH leaves the time schedule up to God. It *RESTS* in God.

ILLUS: Cameron Townsend, founder of Wycliffe Bible Translators.

In the early days of Wycliffe Bible Translators in Mexico, Cameron Townsend tried to get permission from the Mexican gov't to translate the Bible into the languages of the Indian tribes. But the gov't was adamantly opposed to it. The official with whom he had to deal told him, 'As long as I am in this office the Bible will never be translated into the Indian languages-it would only upset them.'

Townsend did everything he could think of, went to every official he could, and had all his Christian friends praying that God would open the door. But it seemed totally closed.

Finally, he decided to give up pressing the issue. He and his wife went to live in a little, obscure Indian village, learned the language, ministered to the people as best they could and waited for God to do something.

As they lived in the village Townsend noticed that the fountain in the center of the plaza produced beautiful, clear spring water but it ran off down the hill and was wasted. He suggested that the Indians plant crops where the water could easily be diverted and used to irrigate them. Soon they were growing twice as much food as before and their economy blossomed. The Indians were grateful. Townsend wrote this up in a little article and sent it to a Mexican paper he thought might be interested.

Unknown to him the article found its way into the hands of the President of Mexico, Lazaro Cardenas. The President was amazed that a **gringo** would come to live in and help a poor Indian village where he couldn't even get many of his own people to live. He wanted to meet Townsend, so he had his limo driver take him to the village.

Cameron Townsend saw the car and went over to introduce himself. To his amazement he heard the President say, 'You're the man I came to meet. *Tell me more about your work.*' When he heard what Townsend wanted to do he said, "Of course you can translate the Bible into the Indian languages" That began a friendship that continued throughout the lifetime of President Cardenas. His power & authority were used of God all those years to open doors to Wycliffe Translators in Mexico."

- Green, 247

- *When we reach our inability, we must trust God's ability!*

3 – Faith sees the invisible, believes the incredible, and receives the impossible! 4:20-21.

- Heb.11:8,10-12, 13-14,16. - Matt.8:11.
- When all was said and done, how much to Abraham & Sara have to contribute to the fulfillment of God's promises to them?

- How much will we have to do with fulfilling God's promises?
- Do you think God makes promises He is not able to fulfill?
- **Are we focused on our circumstances or on God's promises?**

PAUL'S PURPOSE IN ABRAHAM'S EXAMPLE OF FAITH: 4:23-25

God has made promises to you and me that are way beyond our control.

- Romans 3:22-25. 5:1. 6:14. 8:28. John 14:6.
- Jesus died – as the means of making these promises possible.
- He was raised – and lives with the Father – to give us His righteousness, resurrection life, welcome into heaven.

We can look at our human potential and say: "No way!"

- I am sinful. I can't change. I struggle with...

1- Faith Believes God's promises against all human odds!

We can say "I'm too weak. I don't understand enough."

2- Faith faces human inability but trusts in God's ability!

We can say, "It can't apply to me. God can't really know and love me. It would be...impossible!"

3 – Faith sees the invisible, believes the incredible, and receives the impossible!

God wants you to go to heaven and spend eternity with Him.

- **Heb.11:6. YOU must believe Him**, and put your faith in Christ.
- Without faith – it is impossible to please Him.
- If you will believe, He promises you forgiveness & eternal life.

Abraham believed God could give life to the dead, and received Isaac.

Do you believe God can/ will do the same for you?

Ray Pritchard: *In the Shadow of the Cross*. **Trusting Christ for Salvation.**

"It's more than just believing facts about Jesus. Lots of people do that... **To trust in Christ means to rely completely upon him.** To put your life completely in His hands. Trust is what you do when you fly in a plane. You trust the **pilot** to get you back down on the ground safely. You trust a **doctor** when you take the medicine he prescribes. You trust a **lawyer** when you let him represent you in court. God says that when you trust Jesus Christ in that same way you are saved from your sins. **It means to trust Jesus so completely that if he can't take you to heaven you aren't going to go there,**" 158.